Academic Reading
and Writing

A Short Composition Text
for students in First Year Writing

Steve Ersinghaus
Professor of English
Tunxis Community College
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The Concept of This Text

The focus of this text is on Composition and Composition II, a first year set of writing courses with several goals, mainly pointed toward reading complex texts and practicing writing and analysis of those texts according to a set of broad standards. The first part of this text is a course on the subject of Composition, composing, revision, and critical reading. The second part of the text moves from reading and writing in the modern College context to a focus on research and more independent inquiry and information literacy for the student of college reading and writing.

The texts for study in this course may look a lot like a classic western civilization history or a civics course or a selection of readings on the legacy of a version of western heritage, focusing only partly on the North American and European experience. The list of readings are not meant to replace other courses or to force any one particular set of ideas on students, for example those whose purpose is to expose college students to the variety of historical, religious, political voices and ideas. This text’s focus is on making certain foundational texts available to students for purposes of the practice of writing and to encourage writing as a means of engagement with those texts and the culture out which they developed and influenced.

Several pedagogical options are available to teachers of writing. One method is to provide students a list of subjects to write about, such as gun control or climate change, and then the lessons begin from there, covering news and analysis in classroom discussion and debate or in online fora. Lists of subject matter and their associated backgrounders can be found in a host of databases, such as *Issues and Controversies*.

A teacher may also assign a textbook with readings and an accompanying rhetoric with guides or apparatus. The available texts are numerous. Pearson, Norton, and any number of publishers make these books available with serious
scholarship as support for their own approaches.

Another Composition approach the teacher of writing may take to is to engage a theme or subject as the sole matter for the course with readings built around the theme, such as race or gender. The general theme of this book or course is to concentrate on the idea or theme of civic virtue or the idea of virtue in general and what this concept has meant in other times and places and what it may mean now in a modern context. A significant question in this regard is “why this definition” or “why these many examples of civic virtue.” In this course, students cannot cover the number of text that throughout time have built on the concept and examples of virtue writ in general, and so limitations are required, and improvements can always be made.

Why this theme?

The explanation is fairly straight-forward. All college students are engaged in the practice of civic virtue simply by attending college, no matter their reason for attending. People who choose not to attend college or pursue a college degree are also engaged in some form of civic virtue. A student may be attending college to pursue a degree in Business Administration. They may be attending college to seek out a means of employment whose skills are presumptively instructed by a higher education program. If so, these students are choosing to involve themselves in an institution and a culture with a deep history. In Wikipedia’s Scholasticism entry, an image made available is the depiction of a college lecture, by Laurentius de Voltolina¹, which follows.

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One of the students in the rows is apparently asleep. Others demonstrate a lack of engagement, talking away and having a good old time of it. Others are listening intently, typically those at the front of their area of the lecture space. In other words, the college lecture hasn’t necessarily changed all that much over the course of time. All of these students, even the sleepy ones, are participants in their civic life.

Regardless of the change and continuity of history and its ideas, students are involved whether they consider it or don’t consider it in the expectations, practices, customs, and ideas that point to involvement in the life of their community. Even learning for the sake of learning demonstrates engagement to a high or whatever degree. The student is using infrastructure; they add to spaces made available by
what Socrates might call the State\textsuperscript{2}; they have a position in the culture that places them directly in the large interconnected networks of civic life merely by attending, including industry, philosophy, math, engineering, and literature. If successful, they will eventually contribute not just to a local community but to the massive interface of national life in the United States in all of its complexity.

Therefore, the focus of this first part of the text will be on making available a small portion of critical arguments that provide a foundation for the modern practice of civic thinking and virtue in a few areas. The choice of texts are not meant to be inclusive of all voices; they are merely this professor’s choices at the moment, given the limitations of a first year writing program. The text is made available as an open source text as this meant in the open source computer software sense. The text can be revised, improved, added to, as other people see fit to meet their needs, if they choose to involve themselves in this approach.

\textsuperscript{2} See Plato, \textit{Crito}.
A Note on The Teaching Concept

The teaching concept for this text is as follows. The chapters of the text are divided into sections covering certain authors or groups of authors. This is where the hard choices are made. Complete texts, selections, or chapters have been fed into the text via Project Gutenberg or where other open texts are made available, and are cited as such. I like the Gutenberg texts because they are made available in a variety of formats.

Each of the readings are preceded by a set of essays that serve as background or as reading and analysis assistance to students who may find the texts, their styles and contexts difficult, which, of course, they will be. Part of the apparatus therefore is to give students examples of how one might approach the text without giving too much away or asserting any one “best” reading. My use of Scrivener, an example of publishing software which transcodes the printing press, makes writing footnotes and structuring the texts relatively easy with some study. All good software has a fairly steep learning curve.

The grammatical method is to avoid the use of contractions. The use of the third person is a standard, referring directly to the student thinker or some variant or the inclusive pronouns We or Us (Let’s), or where the modification of an object is required concerning Us, where stylistically appropriate. In some cases an epicene will be used when a pronoun is required because this assists with general academic formality, unless that formality is broken momentary to personalize an address or promote an action or to tell a joke.
Chapter One

The Persuasive Framework
1.1: Analysis and Writing

All good writing requires some amount of struggle (unless it does not, depending on the reader or the reader’s experience). Learning to write with competence is a long study, like learning to play a musical instrument, work a complex tool, or explain complex ideas to others verbally or via written language. Some people enjoy the study. Others will have to apply patience to the learning and to the practice. Most people reluctantly agree that good writing is a skill that attracts and continues to be a sought after measure even by those who would rather avoid the thing themselves.

The term “critical thinking” is a generalization of a complex body of skills. These skill sets range across the academic and professional disciplines. The problem with writing as a subset of critical thought is that writing tends to be both a carrier of skill, for example, the ability to describe and evaluate, and yet a skill in its own right. By carrier of skill I mean one that also involves in its processes, like writing a sentence that makes sense, other skills, typically reading or observing actions or events or both.

Reading itself is not an ability that people are born being able to do; no one is born knowing how to maneuver a forklift. I write the phrase “born being able to do” not as an accident of bad grammar (it requires the joining of two verbs where one might do) but as a necessary choice in my own writing of this paragraph. Because the student in an academic context must think about learning and practicing as an ability that is always changing or progressing.

People don’t just read text messages and respond to them. They have to understand the literal message—its intent, goal, underside, references, background, tricks, comedy, images, secrets, inside jokes, puns—and then respond in kind with what they possess at any given time or moment. Whether a Snap or a text message, there’s more going on than just something anyone can do. In electronic communication, most people have read something poorly or cursorily, responded,
then tried to fix the mistake with another message back. In one sense, this is one way to think about critical thought in its general sense. One must interpret and work through a problem.

The Idea of Context

Student thinkers will hear this term a lot. What’s the context? Context according to one definition is the position of an object or idea or its position in a sequence. In other words, where is it? Where is it placed or where should it be placed? Point and say “over there” and the thinker has the idea. What is its position in time and space? A chair, a number, and a paragraph, has a context, but so does an idea. Freedom, for example. Or edibles. Or a firearm.

In terms of freedom, the first contextual question may be its definition. This is called the denotation, but where the does the dictionary definition come from? Who came up with “the first” definition of “freedom”? This isn’t hard to figure out because other people have studied what’s called the “etymology” of the word. Regardless of the “etymology,” the denotation may be meaningless unless the idea is associated or related to something else. Like firearms or edibles or insurance. Thus, the idea of freedom may only have meaning in “context” to something else. People can react to the word and inform someone about what they feel or think about it. They might make this argument, introducing first a position (the context) then a set or arguments for analysis:

Freedom is good. Freedom is good because, well, just because . . .

The word has two parts: free + dom. “Free”’s history comes from another, historal language. Old English freo. Freo is an adjective: “to be able to apply one’s own will.” Dom is a suffix that in Old English implied “judgement” or “law.” So, the denotation of “freedom” goes to the ability to makes one’s own law or makes one’s

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3 Like the sequence of the alphabet, where b follows a and so forth. In this case, this is an arbitrary sequence, unlike 1, 2, 3 . . . whose sequence is “contextual.”

4 The dictionary definition.

5 Remember that class you took where the teacher explained the difference between a prefix and suffix?
own judgement. But does everyone agree that this is what freedom means? Some people would go back to the idea: what’s the context?

**On Law and Freedom**

It would be an interesting way to live where every individual the thinker knew could make up their own rules and call them laws. The thinker may be a person who likes to play soccer or poker. In soccer there is this odd rule called the offsides rule. The offsides rules regulates where a player can be in regards to the opposite team’s goal as the ball is in play.

According to FIFA, this is an explanation of the offside rule:

**Offside position**

It is not an offence in itself to be in an offside position.

A player is in an offside position if:

- he is nearer to his opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second-last opponent

A player is not in an offside position if:

- he is in his own half of the field of play or
- he is level with the second-last opponent or
- he is level with the last two opponents

**Offence**

A player in an offside position is only penalised if, at the moment the ball touches or is played by one of his team, he is, in the opinion of the referee, involved in active play by:

- interfering with play or
- interfering with an opponent or
- gaining an advantage by being in that position

**No offence**

There is no offside offence if a player receives the ball directly from:
• a goal kick
• a throw-in
• a corner kick

It is a complex rule and drives players and referees crazy. It comes with a few complexities. A player can be offside but they are only penalized “if” some agreement has been broken: “not to interfere.” From a school yard perspective, this is easy to understand: You shouldn’t be able to crowd the opponent’s goal to prevent the other teams offensive “freedom.” Apparently, a player cannot make one’s “own law” in regards to where they’re playing on the field. The player did not make this rule but must abide by it to encourage success in winning. The soccer player is free to attempt goals, as this is the objective, but to crowd the goal to prevent goals, hinders the reason for the game. It would mean a lot of standing around and very little offense. This is why some people don’t the defensive shift if baseball.

The relationship between freedom and law here is made pretty clear. Freedom has its limits and its limits are defined by rules that disrupt the definition of the very word: freedom.

If we make the case that laws are rules written down and turned into a system we have to ask another question: who makes the rules that are thereby converted to a system? Significantly, who has to follow them and what are the punishments for breaking those rules? Thomas Paine’s essay *Common Sense* in some senses takes on this question.

The American *Declaration of Independence* is not a systematization of rules or laws. This is the job of the American Constitution with its accompanying bills of rights, for example, the Second Amendment which states:

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

The composition of the amendment is broken by two comma separated phrases —“being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms”—while the subject and verb relationship of the whole goes like this: “A well regulated Militia . . . shall not be infringed.” Explicitly, an “and”
might have been included before “the right,” but this was not written into the amendment. In rules and laws, there’s always either an implied or explicit “shall not” part. This means that there is also going to be a “shall” part. Conclusion: laws permit what can be done and enforce or should make plain what “can’t be done.”

In the American system, it is Congress who treats the making of the law; the Executive branch executes (thus the word “executive”) the law; the Judicial branch evaluates the law against the framework of the Constitution.

The composition of the Second Amendment is important to consider, given that this a course on language and writing. The explicit writing claims that “A well regulated Militia . . . shall not be infringed.” The two phrases in between “modify” in grammatical terms the specific limitations, called qualifications, of the “shall not” part because the noun of the sentence cannot be separated from the verb. But, grammatically speaking, it’s hard to know what the Framers of the constitution meant by tacking on the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” because there is no conjunction, like “and” linking the first subject with the next potential subject. What the phrase lacks is “context.”

It could be rephrased like this: “A well regulated Militia, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed [because this is necessary for a free State].” Does this mean that anyone can “keep” a firearm or only those in a “regulated Militia,” and regulated by whom? In this reading, the meaning is still a mystery, thus the continued controversy around gun rights and gun control. Did the Framers mean: “a well-regulated militia . . . and the right of . . .?” What constitutes a Militia? What did the Framers mean by “people”? What constitutes a “regulated” Militia, and who’s going to regulate it? What is the meaning of “Arms”? Can a citizen of the United States own a bazooka, which is a kind of “Arm”? Does the meaning of “State” mean a “state,” as in the state of Connecticut or Texas, or does the State indicate the “Nation” in its federal sense? The books and articles written about all of this, including litigation, could constitute an entire library. Indeed, a person could apply their career to batting all this about. Regardless of the amount

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6 A person who puts laws or plans into effect. Someone who has the authority to execute.

7 The United States is a Federal Republic, a nation constituted of numerous coequal states.

8 See, for example, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/07pdf/07-290.pdf
of study and public comment on the issue, the arguments will never really go away, although the *DC. Vs Heller* case has brought some judicial finality.

**The Notion of Argumentation**

To summarize what has come before, good composition may be something to think about in a critical sense, given that how we organize language can lead to meaning, whatever meaning might *mean* in the context of composition. In this course, we will be concentrating on texts that make arguments by taking positions on ideas, events, and methods other people have found of value. In addition, we will be breaking down the notion of argumentation to mean a systematic way of composing meaningful discourse.
1.2: The Basics of Argumentation

In this Composition text, we will be learning to observe, describe, and evaluate the ideas of others and relate them to experience and express that experience in written form. This section will present a sort of cheat sheet for college thinkers, presenting a set of compositional elements readers might look for as they read in order to learn how to present ideas to an audience in the form of summary and then analysis and then finally to presenting arguments of their own.

With this plan in mind, the text presents what we might define as the Persuasive Framework, a framework being a supportive structure on which to manage our studies. We will begin with a significant element called The Problem.

The Problem

A significant element in the Persuasive Framework could be called The Problem. This element should become an important part of the college thinker’s vocabulary no matter their area of study, including mathematics, where “problems” are treated as a matter of course. As we will see later, writers and thinkers like James Madison, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Mary Wollstonecraft are dealing with what they perceive as problems. It is not that hard to understand, but it can be difficult to explain. For example, one problem that people write about today is privacy and its relationship to what have become common interactions with people, institutions, like banks, and technology. Problems always come in relation to The Solution or Solutions. It is our job in an academic context to identify through observation (reading is a form of purposeful observation) whatever problem a

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9 But it’s important to note here that this kind of problem is meant to be “resolvable.” All problems in mathematics are considered solvable, even those that have yet to be solved. For example, the Riemann Hypothesis.

10 These problems, however, will be defined as “complex,” meaning not so easy to resolve.
person may be trying to prove exists or solve or both.

For some people, college tuition may be viewed as a problem that requires either a solution or proofs that it is indeed a problem. Proving that something is a problem can be difficult because some people might disagree that the problem is either real or worth their energy to consider. College tuition might be high because of the cost to maintain all the people and material required for a learning institution. The person who takes an order at a restaurant should be paid, unless one want to take the position that they should not be paid and should labor for no money.

In many cases, people may take the position that the “value” of a college degree does not match the cost, which signals a different problem than merely claiming that tuition is too high. Some might make the case that playing video games or other types of games after a certain age is a problem, and so forth. Problems depend on context, and both the problem and its context requires description and perhaps even some amount of critical analysis in an academic situation because, just to repeat this idea, not everyone is going to agree that a problem exists. This also goes to the problem of defining terms.

In terms of The Problem, we also have to treat two significant issues with it: its universality and its complexity.

Universality goes to the idea that a problem or set of related problems have significance to more than one person or more than one context. A problem like drought may affect one region of the United States in its physical manifestation. If the drought affects another region, because it affects the price of food in other parts of the country, then its universality grows by order of degree. The other side of the coin can also be seen in relation to this kind of reach: that a problem may only affect a local region or a small set of people. For example, is the loss of a kind of species of frog an issue of universality or locality? In the subject of science or ethics or naturalism, species loss is judged as a universal problem because loss and life of a species can be related to the total life of the planet, if one can perceive the problem this way.

Complexity in dealing with problems is also important if we make the case that problems can be simple or easily resolved, such as a dispute over ownership, or a
dispute over something subjective, like whether a film is judged as good or bad. In the case of drought that may have extensive reach across regions where people live, we might have to make the case that this problem will take more than just a judge’s decision or a list of aesthetic responses or standards to resolve (as far as these kinds of disputes can be or should be resolved).

Certainly $1 + 2$ is an easy enough problem to resolve. A limit in calculus is an entirely different matter. Neither of these, however, are complex problems because they can be resolved, though an individual human being may perceive the problem as complex, meaning difficult. But the difficulty of a problem does not have to be judged against the complexity standard. The complexity issue in relation to a problem goes to its reach, significance, impact, resolvability, and, yes, its describable context or set of contexts. In this sense, the importance or significance of a problem is unrelated to universality or complexity. The importance of a problem may be subjective. The importance of a problem may, indeed, be obvious. Others may make the case that the value or cost of college tuition is simply not something that needs a significant amount of mental effort. In another example, containing the Chernobyl nuclear plant’s future destructive power can be argued as both universal and complex.

**The Position**

The Position in the Persuasive Framework is another important element. I am not going to make the case that this is the second element; it’s just one element. But its significance is important enough for students to attempt mastery of it not just in being able to identify it in an argument but to evaluate it. In academic reading, the student will want to identify and describe by whatever means the problem an author treats; they will also want to identify, describe, and evaluate The Position that an author takes on The Problem, in whatever form that may take. It is often the case that the writing instructor will ask for a student to write a thesis. In terms of the Persuasive Framework, The Position is either made plain in the thesis or is implied, as in Nuclear energy is a good\textsuperscript{11} thing because it is relatively clean and

\textsuperscript{11} Here “good” is meant as an abstraction of a position.
**renewable.** In this case, the position is that “nuclear energy is a good thing.” The thesis, however, could just as easily be written: Nuclear energy is relatively clean and **renewable.** In this case, the Position is implied.

The position is the stand that an author may take on a problem. The position is the conclusion about what an author wants an audience to be convinced. If nuclear power is clean and **renewable,** then a reasonable conclusion should be: it’s good. In this sense “good” is an abstraction\(^\text{12}\). An abstraction is another concept with which the academic thinker should be conversant. A circle is an abstraction. A plate is a physical manifestation of the idea of a circle, assuming that the plate is not a square. This is yet another relationship to mathematics, where abstractions are important, say, in geometry.

But positions can also be more explicit\(^\text{13}\). We could take the position that nuclear energy is **renewable** and leave the abstraction “good” for someone else to conclude. In this case, we want to make the case that **renewability** is the conclusion about which we want to convince an audience.

The discerning academic reader will have probably already asked why the author of this text places **renewable** and **renewability** in italics. There is a reason. The reason\(^\text{14}\) is that the term **renewable** in arguments that concern energy is disputed by experts in the field: meaning, it is a problem that requires analysis to solve. However, this problem may not be significant to people who are unconcerned with the distinction and may be concerned about other problems. This dispute has to do with definition. In this case, the dispute has to do with the

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\(^{12}\) The opposite of abstraction is concretion.

\(^{13}\) Stated outright, as in: “This essay is about rats” or “My position is that racism is a persistent problem.”

\(^{14}\) In terms of sentence composition, the word *reason* is repeated to carry from the second sentence to the third sentence of this paragraph. In terms of composition, this will often be referred to as “paragraphing” as a compositional aesthetic. From a writer’s perspective, this repetition of the noun forms a linkage from one sentence to the next so that the reader knows exactly what the subject of concern is.
definition of *renewable*.15

**Why?**
Before moving to another element of the Persuasive Framework, we have to deal with a more fundamental issue, one that exists behind *The Problem* and *The Position*, that is this question: why? At its most basic level of reasoning or critical inquiry, the question “why” is a foundational objective, which is an action of asking or probing, typically in the form of a question. We can go after this with a list of questions that the college thinker may recognize:

1. Let’s go here. Why?
2. Put your hand in this hole. Why?
3. Pay this amount. Why?
4. 9 + 8 is 17. Why?
5. Nuclear energy is *renewable*. Why?
6. Wow, the price of eggs went up. Why?
7. We should legalize cocaine. Why?
8. We should put liars in prison. Why?
9. After 18 years of age, young people should stop playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. Why?
10. People should learn about why the 14th Amendment to the Constitution was written. Why?
11. People should be paid 15 dollars an hour. Why?
12. Swiping across a screen is better than pressing an icon/button. Why?
13. Swiping a neighbor’s christmas lights is better than buying them. Why?
14. Good people will go to heaven. Why?
15. We should dismantle all border check crossings. Why?
16. Chick-fil-a is da bomb. Why?

15 See section on arguments of definition for more details concerning not just the definition of *renewable* but the problem of definitions as a type of argument. See also: http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2012/ph241/chowdhury2/

16 Note the difference between its and it is here.
The thinker will commonly claim that all these questions are related by the question or word “why.” This author would follow this response by claiming that this may be incorrect. It is not obvious why. The reason is that the response could be entirely different. For example, take number one, which is “Assertion: Let’s go here. Response: Why?” The assertion/response pattern could be changed: Assertion: Let’s go here. Response: No. And so forth. In other words, the originator of the assertion—let’s go here—is left with a secondary question: why not? The respondee says: No. The originator either has to say okay, forget it, or say, well, why not? Who’s creating the problem here?

In this sense, the “No” is a response that makes the assertion stop in its tracks. This stops the potential inquiry. In other words, in the response there is no expressed question for why a person should go “here.” In a perfect world this would mean that no action is taken and may leave a problem unresolved, unrecognized, or ignored. We often over-inflate the process of problem solving and neglect another significant aspect: seeking out problems or what the psychologist Kyung Her Kim of William and Mary College has called “problem finding.” Often, we are presented with a problem that we ourselves did not discover and are then asked to solve it. It might be a good habit for the college thinker to get into: the next time a problem is presented for solving, they might ask Why? This question may matter more than simply running out for a solution at the corner tech store. Probing in this way is a skill that can be or perhaps should be developed in the college student, especially in a world or in contexts where everything seems obvious or where everything appears standardized.

The Arguments
The Persuasive Framework also incorporates arguments as elements that provide proofs or reasons for The Position. In our running position, that nuclear energy is good or renewable, the college thinker will have to develop arguments to support the position, whether the position is implied or explicitly stated. A keyword here is

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the word because, which can get us into a lot of trouble. Why? Because then a person will have to actually do some thinking on the matter. Why is nuclear energy renewable, and if it is, why does this make nuclear energy good or better than other forms of energy generation, such as solar power.

We do not want to fall back on formulaic thinking when we consider the arguments in the context of a position’s proofs or reasons, but considering why arguments matter in relation to positions is important. For example, we could make the case that a plant-based diet promotes better health and is less destructive to agricultural environments. Or, we could make the case that if sea-levels continue to rise, municipalities will have to divert a lot of resources to and/or develop technological solutions in order to prevent future destruction.

In the first case, promotion of better health and less destructive are the arguments that should serve to prove that a plant-based diet is “better” than other forms or just good, if those other diets can be shown as negative or if we simply want to assert that plant-based diets are a good idea. The second case requires a little more thought. We have a position but there are really no clear arguments set down to support the position. Part of the Composition process is to try to clarify, through drafting or additional questions, what should be set down in a kind of thesis.

Let’s revise the second case. It would be a very good thing if more money was diverted to technological solutions to sea level rise in order to prevent future destruction. More funding diverted to technological solutions to sea level rise will prevent future destruction and save money in the long run. The last appears a little clearer and more open for proofs. In the process of clarification, the student thinker could keep going, perhaps looking for more concrete solutions to sea level rise. This is why the relationship between The Position and The Arguments demands a great deal of compositional and critical thought.

The student thinker also wants to treat reality when approaching these levels of the Persuasive Framework for purposes of clarification, especially when writing about political, social, and policy issue. Imagination matters to this. For example, if sea level rise can be proven to be a destructive phenomenon in reality, then we could simply write it up, like so: Sea level rise will prove destructive to
But what does destructive mean in this context? This question is important and demands specifics and presumably some reasonable guess work. What specific areas of life might be affected by sea level rise? Tourism? The local environment, like beaches and aquifers and wetlands? Human and animal habitats? Infrastructure, like bridges, roads, buildings, electrical and communication systems? What about flooding or erosion? It is a pretty long list.

In some cases a problem requires a specific form of Framework application, such as simply making the case that an event or action will cause specific problems, and, therefore, solutions might be presented. Sometimes the student thinker will want to restrict an approach so that the only case that matters has to do with determining scales, universality, or complexity. One of the most difficult applications of the Persuasive Framework is to make a case for solutions, which demands multiple layers of compositional effort, such as proving that a problem does exist, then providing the solutions, then making the case for the advantages of those solutions. Pretty heady and laborious stuff.

**The Evidence**

Arguments require more than just their statement on paper or on a digital screen. They require evidence for their own proofs. But this is also where academic writing can get tricky, formulaic, over-complicated, or overly complex and, importantly, unimaginative.

The development of competent and flexible ability in academic writing or writing in general may require what Montaigne saw as important: following one’s own mind into a subject given what one might know at that moment, without recourse necessarily to research or outside influence, other than those powers that the writer brings to the subject, and then, through this process, discovering something new or previously unknown. Montaigne was a significant figure in history as a popularizer of the modern essay form.

It is often the case that academic writing requires research; indeed, one of the purposes of the modern University or College is to develop new ideas with the assistance of research. Research as a subject of study and application will be
treated in the second half of this text, but not so much on this side of the book where the student writer will be expected to engage with the ideas of other thinkers and to explore their own ideas from that beginning point.

But even without the assistance of research, evidence is a significant part of reasoning through to a conclusion or position. In this section, the kinds of evidence will be treated with some dipping back into the other elements of the Persuasive Framework. What follows is a generic list of types of evidence:

1. Examples or illustrations
2. Numerical information or data
3. References to expert opinion or conclusions, typically with quotation and sourcing
4. Personal experience or anecdotal evidence or testimony (law)
5. Definitions, as in what does renewable mean, and who gets to determine this

**Breaking Evidence Down**

Academic and professional disciples break evidence down into a long list of types necessary for making conclusions or following hypothesis to some reasonable explanation so that conclusions can be duplicated in other or similar contexts. In the legal field, for example, trace evidence is an important form in determining what might have occurred outside of observation. Trace evidence can also be defined as scientific evidence. In science, empirical evidence, the kind drawn from observation or inference, is a significant issue or form of study. In logic, evidence can be broken into formal and informal types, which tend to develop into conclusions of their own. For the purposes of this text, the generic forms listed above will be used. It might be useful to consider evidence as another kind of list but this is merely for informational purposes:

1. Historical evidence
2. Scientific evidence
3. Formal and informal evidence
4. Legal evidence (as in the forms that would be admitted into the record in a court of legal inquiry)

In a way, defining a kind of evidence is like defining a poem: it is a poem if the
poet claims it to be one.

**Examples and Illustration**

Examples as evidence are significant to reasoning through an argument. They can be used for comparison or to show commonality. They can be used to represent a truth, a set of facts, or to illustrate a problem, typically signaled with the prepositional phrase: For example or To illustrate.

Let’s say we want to claim that playing video games leads to better hand eye coordination for surgeons or soldiers. We might provide examples where this has shown to be the case. The more examples we have, the more a truth may be shown to exist.

Let’s say that the local legislature is trying to determine whether legalizing marijuana would lead to more vehicular problems on the road. This legislature might try to find as many examples as possible where marijuana was legalized and how this affected road travel.

**Numerical information or data**

The examples that the legislature found might be easily turned into statistics or numerical data. It might even be collected and made more interesting in its presentation by composing the examples into a visual chart of some sort. For purposes of illustration, the legislature might have found that in the state Oregon and other states in the Union, there was a significant rise in people stopping their vehicles numerous yards before the stop sign and that this strange behavior resulted in slow downs on the road. Police investigation might have shown that the drivers had been under the influence.

In this hypothetical example I’m using to illustrate how examples can become data, the legislature might be able to determine whether their decision would result in the same phenomenon in their own state.

Data can be used in many ways. The show the size of a problem or the scale of an event. It can be used to compare phenomena over time or to show change. It can be used to show the actuality of a phenomenon: that something is or isn’t
happening. People who have been involved in a statistics course or in any other course that relies on numbers to make meaning might already know all about this.

**Expert Opinion**

In terms of the Persuasive Framework, experts are important. In order to understand why, story or anecdote is a good method of illustrating the concept. Let’s build another hypothetical example in the form of a story.

The very legislature that is trying to deal with the pot question, might also be in the business of building a bridge over a river. There are many examples of bridges. There are many examples that will show why bridges might be important. However, it’s not just anyone who can build a bridge that will sustain the weight of millions of transports per year and over a lifetime. It probably would not be a wise idea for the legislature to hire just anyone to build the bridge.

Likewise, over time, people and groups build expertise on subjects of concern and then apply that expertise to problems or routines. We often draw from these experts to use their knowledge for other purposes. The legislature, for example, instead of seeking out statistics on their own concerning pot, they might seek out people who have already studied the matter and have proven that they know more than individuals in the state house and can apply their expertise to the problem under consideration. Experts exert what in the Persuasive Framework is called authority, whose etymology suggests a “promoter” or “actor” or “originator.”

**Personal experience or anecdotal evidence or testimony (law)**

A person’s life experience is important to making assertions and coming to conclusions and even becoming involved in contexts where persuasion is a significant activity. We have all experienced life to fullest extent we can given the present moment “in time.” We can use what we have learned to make assertions or to support arguments about the things we are interested in or in which we may become interested. It is difficult to express authority on subjects we have limited experience, such as in the bridge-building example above.

In the Persuasive Framework, anecdotal evidence, that kind of evidence drawn
from personal observation, often referred to as subjective\textsuperscript{18} experience, is judged as limited, unless the observations are extensive or have been observed and duplicated by others. This requires examples. For example, in my own personal experience, screws are a better fastener than nails when building objects that might require disassembly in the future or require firmer fastening over time. Most carpenters use screws to build decks and benches these days. Is this a true assertion? One can go to Youtube and find many examples. If the example’s are numerous, we could claim that the assertion approaches universality. It is not a fact in dispute that nails hold more firmly than nails. Indeed, some wood workers have a bias against nails and will not have them in their basement shops.

In Mary Wollstonecraft’s essay, \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Women}, the author makes the case that the educational and cultural experience of women requires expansion outside the limited traditional sphere of late 18\textsuperscript{th} Century English life. As a man, I have absolutely no experience being a woman. I can only draw on my experience as a man in matters of gender. Therefore, my experience is extremely limited in this regard. All women have more authority regarding their own experience than I do.

Many people in our hypothetical legislature treated in earlier parts of this text may have experience with drugs. But their experience with drugs may not be proof enough of how to determine legislative action regarding the complicated effects of drugs on civic life. One of our senators may claim: “When I smoked weed, I would get so paranoid that I’d stop one hundred yards before a stop sign.” They might, therefore, conclude that all people will experience this level of intense paranoia. This is what we call the false generalization fallacy. It is a valid argument to claim that all personal experience may be subject to the same criticism.

\textbf{Definitions as Evidence and as Arguments}

Definitions are so important they would require a long series of books describing and evaluating this aspect of critical thought and language. One reason why definitions are so important in the Persuasive Framework is that they form a basis

\footnote{18 Subjective because the person making the observation is the “subject” doing the action.}
or starting point for discussion. Just to illustrate the significance, drawing from the first element of evidence, example, the history of Philosophy has always been concerned with definitions as a beginning point in rhetorical disputation. Philosophers have developed long lists of types of definitions, moving from dictionary, nominal, stipulative, descriptive, and ostensive. A definition is a means of referring to something that someone else can also understand. In ostensive definition, a friend may introduce their cat by the name Manuel. “That’s Manuel,” a friend might say. The guest will know exactly what the friend is expressing. It’s a kind of definition.

Let us finally treat the word *renewable*. In academic and professional circles, calling a source of energy renewable can mean a lot of things. In the first place, renewable may mean renewable over a great deal of time, a limited amount of time, or not at all. It is perpetually replaceable if it is perfectly renewable. Coal, in this form of definition, is not, therefore, a renewable form. This can be shown anecdotally.

In a grill, charcoal, a form of coal, will turn to ash, and it will never not be coal again once it is heated to its kindling or autoignition temperature. Once coal is made and then removed from the ground, it will not just magically reappear next day. Solar power, on the other hand, if the proper technology is applied, will do just that. It doesn’t reappear; however, it is made by the sun and the sun is not going anywhere at least for at least 500 millions years, according to the most recent science on the issue. Strictly speaking, therefore, we might make the argument that solar power is more renewable than coal.

Nuclear power lives according to the same rules because this problem is universal across energy types: all fuel types, like wind, can be defined against a standard of non renewability or renewability. Some experts argue that since uranium is a finite resource, it should not be classified as renewable. Others argue that since the fission process happens over a great deal of time, rather than the one-time use of coal or gas, it can reasonably considered as renewable. It is the result of the process that matters, the later argue, not that the material used is, strictly speaking, a finite resource.
Summary
The summary of this section of the text goes like this. The Persuasive Framework has been introduced and defined. Four elements of the Framework have been covered:

1. The Problem
2. The Position
3. The Arguments
4. The Evidence and Appeals

These elements are not meant to be considered in their enumerated order. For example, in a composition, the writer does not need to first evoke the problem, then present the thesis, then do the arguments, then develop the evidence. Writers compose their works using whatever order they think suits them. In some way, compositional shape, or form, the writer might compose the elements in all manner of treatments. One other significant area of study needs to be introduced next before we enter into the nutrients of our studies: the idea of reasoning and logic.
1.3: Reasoning and Logic

People attending the College or University these days may come to the spaces of the institution with a whole host of concerns of their own. They may not enjoy or agree with the plan of study with which they’ve chosen to involve themselves, for example having to take a writing or math class as a requirement to complete a degree. Or, they might indeed enjoy all aspects of it. Their concerns are their concerns.

I usually make the case that students who do not want to take a writing course may certainly choose not to do so. Their plan of study may typically list a writing course or several in the degree requirements for graduation. A student might avoid a writing course for as long as possible, taking those courses that do not require such a course as a prerequisite. Prerequisite is a term that college students learn very quickly as they maneuver through registration.

As a faculty member at an institution of higher learning, I have met with students who will declare: “I don’t want to take a writing course. I hate writing.” I typically respond like so: “Okay.” Then I ask them if I can help them with anything else. They typically respond with a look of concern that means: what do I do now?

My response is: “Whatever you want. It’s a whole world out there.”
Their response is: “Well, I want a degree in Business Administration.”
My response is: “Let’s do it.”
They observe that a writing course is required.
My response is: “Yes, indeed, it is.”
And so they reluctantly sign up even though they have already declared that they do not want to do this.

During the course of these conversations, I often ask students: “Why subject yourself to this torture? If you don’t want to take a writing course, then don’t take it.”

“But I can’t get the degree without one,” they say.
“This is true,” I say. “But so what.” They always appear perplexed by this unassailable logic.

Here is a variant. Often in class I ask students if they want to be in attendance at this particular moment and most students will raise their hands and respond, “No way! I’d rather be at the beach.”

“You should go to the beach, then,” I say, pointing to the door, which I like to keep open. “There are all kinds of other things you could be doing,” I add.

In the older days I used to bring drop slips to class and offer them to students in attendance. They’ve never once taken the chum.

In a sentence: No one has ever left. I would commend those who might, however.

One way of describing the above conversations is by appealing to what is called boolean logic. In boolean logic, two possible outcomes are possible in a proposal or “something” can be in a state of this or that, say closed or open, on or off.

Given X, therefore A or B. But not both.

In its simplest form, this kind of reasoning requires two possible outcomes but not both simultaneously. Student thinkers who mull over the problem of taking a writing course are in a more complicated situation than in a boolean problem. If they’re presented with whether to take a writing course or a math course in the current term because of a scheduling problem, then this is loosely close to boolean.

Logic and reasoning are not synonymous. Reasoning is a method of thinking that takes logic as an adjective. We usually think about this in terms of the language of reasoning to a conclusion, typically concerning problems, and in formulating positions and their arguments.

We could make this case:

A position can fall into several abstract categories attached to something: it can be true or false, good or bad, right or wrong. In addition, “it” can be better than some other it or equal to it. In other senses things, ideas, or phenomena can be compatible, relatable, or complementary\(^\text{19}\) to one another. These categories are

\(^{19}\) One thing may enhance the qualities of another thing, for example.
broad abstractions. A film can be good or bad but not right or wrong, unless it suggests arguments that some people find objectionable. It can be better than another film to some viewers because of the quality of the acting or writing. All of these types or abstractions require reasoning to determine, define, or explain\textsuperscript{20} them.

An action can be considered right in a moral or ethical context. It can be right to claim that legalizing pot will lead to outcomes that will result in harmful activity or harms to those who are not under the influence at the same time that an actor is under the influence. We could make the case that a Catholic pharmacist simply cannot fill a prescription for mifepristone\textsuperscript{21}. We could also make the case that a pharmacist cannot interfere with or overrule (a term related to freedom) the judgement of a doctor and their patient because the drug is considered legally prescribeable by the doctor. For the Catholic pharmacist, overruling the judgement of a doctor might be considered the right thing to do according to religious principle or teaching. Others, however, would contend (make the case) that this would be the wrong thing for the pharmacist to do given the degree of freedom allowed in their job or the harm that this might cause beyond just a few people. They might make this case according to the relationship between The Position and The Arguments: that denying the prescription would present more harm to the universality of the problem than the personal context of the religious person.

It is not difficult to think about positions in the abstract. But we do need to come to some conclusion about details and have general access to concepts of reasoning, such as those related to deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning.

**Deductive Reasoning or Logic**

Deductive Reasoning is a kind of formal reasoning that makes the case for valid conclusions because the steps used to formulate a conclusion make reasonable sense. In this case, the basic form of formula is the syllogism, such as this:

Major Premise: Renewable energy forms are more efficient than non-renewable energy forms.

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\textsuperscript{20} Typically, we don’t equate explanations with arguments or position-taking although explanation can an important aspect of the process of argumentation.

\textsuperscript{21} Colloquially known as the abortion drug.
forms of energy.

  Minor Premise: Nuclear energy is renewable
  Conclusion: therefore, nuclear energy is an efficient form.

We could even apply deductive reasoning to the above in terms of definition:

  Major Premise: Kinds of energy that can renew themselves over time should be considered renewable
  Minor Premise: [list of kinds that can be renewed over time]
  Conclusion: therefore, nuclear power should be considered renewable.

If the premises are followed, then we can conclude at least that the premises were followed. It might even be that the conclusions makes fairly decent sense.

**Inductive Reasoning or Logic**

Inductive reasoning follows a kind of reasoning from specific cases to general conclusions about the world, relying on evidence and instances of observation, leading to probable conclusions. For example, “how many squirrels have tails?” is a question for induction even though it can also be dealt with deductively. Consider how a prediction might matter to inductive logic, especially concerning the running marijuana example, where the legislature was after evidence of some legalization’s outcome. If legalized pot results in more windows being left open in an apartment house, then we can make some fairly reasonable conclusions. There might be many examples of people having ill health because they consume too many sugary drinks. It, therefore, may be reasonable to claim or conclude that sugary drinks can produce ill health. But in all this, we need evidence to start the inquiry.

**Abductive Reasoning or Logic**

Similar in a sense to induction, abduction is a style of inference that loosely goes to seeking out what people might think is the best explanation for a question even if the conclusion doesn’t logically follow to the premises or evidence. It is closely linked to tentative discovery or imaginative, reflective inquiry or hypothesis. Abduction does not support unsupportable conclusions or inconsistent or arbitrary conclusions. For example, a child may be raised thinking that cats have a tendency to smother a sleeping person to death. The child grows and becomes involved with
another person who owns cats. If the first person persists in claiming that cats
smother sleepers, this is not an abductive conclusion. Rather, it is simply an
unsupported or fallacious conclusion.

People are involved in doing this kind of inference making all the time, because
they feel that they do need the best explanation rather than all the other ones that
are putting on the pressure. However, neither of these styles of conclusion making
or ways of using evidence to support positions depend on “whatever” or “feeling-
based” conclusions: one might feel that a thing is true, but this does not make it
true. One does not feel that cells in the body work a certain way or one does not
feel that they are being injured in a certain situation. In these case, how cells work
and injury are conclusions that would require more evidence; if found or if
available, the reasoning would need developing.

All of these styles of reasoning require further inquiry, but we will do this in
other sections of the text when treating specific texts and their particular
approaches.
Chapter Two

Montaigne
2.1: Reading Montaigne

Michel de Montaigne was born in Bordeaux France in 1533, which is a pretty long time ago. All the reader has to do is subtract 1533 from 2019 and you’ll have the yearly distance. He died in 1593 at the age of 60, living through what scholars call the French Renaissance. His first spoken language was Latin, because his tutor only spoke Latin. His family was prominent in Bordeaux society, and many children of well-to-do families were taught outside of common schools. Montaigne started learning his native tongue at the age of six. If you are of Polish origin and were born in the United States, this would be like learning Polish first and then learning English after that. Montaigne was raised in Catholic French society and maintained this faith until his death. He published his first two books of essays in 1550.

Montaigne is credited with popularizing what we have come to know as the “essay.” He knew this style or genre of writing as a kind of trying out or play with ideas. He would pick a topic and pursue it, and the subjects were many, from “conversation” to writing about books. But his approach is significant, as he said, because he was one of the first authors to write about these topics in relation to “himself.” His main subject was “Montaigne” himself and what “Montaigne” thought, often in relation to other writers and poets. The tone that he typically took toward this self study was optimistic, and readers have been drawn to his work because of this approach, his aim being to examine what it means to live as a skill to be learned and studied and what it means to live a good life.

The essay form, especially as it comes to us through Montaigne, requires some work on the part of the modern student, who is typically used to reading very structured texts. The skilled reader will note that in the section that follows this introduction, “To Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die,” begins in one way and ends in another. For Montaigne, the essay is not supposed to be a perfect artifact, presented with a smooth opener or intro followed by a perfectly structured “body”
and then closed with an impeccable conclusion, following the intro/body/conclusion structure with which modern readers are familiar. Rather, in my view, this essay begins to “find itself” after the first couple of paragraphs, which can be confusing, as if Montaigne himself was searching for a way to start the thing. Even for experienced readers, the first few paragraphs can be a tough go.

**A Note on Montaigne’s Essay Title**
I would make the case that the title of Montaigne’s essay is somewhat deceptive. The notion of philosophy merely means a love of learning or wisdom; the word philosophy doesn’t necessarily refer to any one discipline of study, like English or Mathematics, but instead to an entire body of study typical of Montaigne’s day, which was called natural philosophy or the liberal arts. Natural philosophy or the liberal arts could include the study of rhetoric, logic, mathematics, astronomy, theology, and grammar. The title, therefore, should not be taken as a modern audience would, thinking of philosophy as a stand-alone discipline. As students read the text, they may start thinking of the title in terms of the practices of certain types of virtue, which is defined below.

**Sources and Paragraph Structure**
In *To Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die* Montaigne draws from what we would call classical sources with whom the author is familiar, like the Roman writer and statesperson Cicero (born in 106 BC) and the Roman poet Horace (born 65 BC in Venoca, Italy) and many others. Often, Montaigne will write a paragraph and follow this paragraph with a quote from a source. Or, he will begin a paragraph and then weave a quote into the paragraph and then follow the quote with a continuation of his own sentence. The use of the source may be to confirm that Montaigne’s idea or logic is part of an ongoing historical conversation or that the idea he is working with is not unique to him alone.

The text I use for presentation comes from the Gutenberg open-source version, and in this text these references are first presented in their original language and then rewritten into English by the translator. It is the reader’s job to relate
Montaigne’s own ideas with the expression of those ideas in the sources from which he draws, which ties his ideas and conclusions to the thoughts of others, composing a connection from the past to the present. Sometimes Montaigne will use a traditional style quotation, as modern writers do, inserting it inline in a paragraph.

Consider the following paragraph, which provides an example (the treatment of condemned persons in relation to what they might be thinking at the time prior to execution) and then follows with a quotation:

Our courts of justice often send back condemned criminals to be executed upon the place where the crime was committed; but, carry them to fine houses by the way, prepare for them the best entertainment you can—

“Non Siculae dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem:
Non avium cyatheaceae cantus
Somnum reducent.”

[“Sicilian dainties will not tickle their palates, nor the melody of birds and harps bring back sleep.”—Hor., Od., iii. 1, 18.]

Do you think they can relish it? and that the fatal end of their journey being continually before their eyes, would not alter and deprave their palate from tasting these regalios?

This can be seen as a way that Montaigne moves through an argument, presenting an example as support, illustration, or emphasis, and then completing the thought with a reference and exploring further. The reader’s job is to think about how the quote relates to the example or idea Montaigne is working through, if the reader chooses to do this. In this case, the quote is taken from one of Horace’s poems, from Book 3 of his Odes, which is a kind of poem that addresses a specific subject.

Text Structure and Movement

Of course, Montaigne will or has to begin his essay on the subject of living well
with death on the mind somewhere. The reader might see as they study the text that the essay has a warm up period, a portion that presents many examples, and then gains momentum when the author introduces a speech or lecture by Nature, which begins “But Nature compels us to it,” which we might call his big closer (55).

The major arguments to be supported might begin with the word “Now” in the third paragraph. Montaigne writes: “Now, of all the benefits that virtue confers upon us, the contempt of death is one of the greatest, as the means that accommodates human life with a soft and easy tranquility, and gives us a pure and pleasant taste of living, without which all other pleasure would be extinct” (41).

This lead sentence presents an argument that Montaigne has to pursue, using evidence as support. It may be true that modern readers may have an issue with even the translated language. Part of the problem here might have to do with the sentence structure and the vocabulary Montaigne uses. These two issues will force the modern reader to translate the translation, like so: one of the benefits of noble behavior is to reject death or to place death into proper proportion or to not let it get the best of a person. A reading/interpretation might depend on a student’s way of defining the word “contempt.” We have a good idea what Montaigne meant by “virtue.” For this author, virtue means moral, ethical, or proper behavior. But people may have to learn what proper behavior in relation to death or life might be. Montaigne’s essay might be all about pursuing this question of virtue, using the relationship of life to death as a focus.

In our contemporary culture and situation, this question or argument is built into entertainment, education, work, religious practice, and government policy making. How many movies, video games, or everyday decisions force people to consider the question of what makes for a good or productive life? Students choose majors for many reasons, but the choosing of a major puts people into a path of pursuit that will affect their future in significant ways. The choices people make might be based on many reasons. It would appear that Montaigne makes the case that one can make good choices based on several reasons, but it may also be that Montaigne

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22 consider that the text may not be about dying at all, but how how best to live well and without fear.
wants the reader to think about making decisions based on reality, not on fantasy, the needs or impulses of others, or false stories or even bias.

Another issue that Montaigne might be concerned with is what gets in the way of good decision-making or excellence in performance.

Consider this section of the text, where Montaigne pushes the notion that things feared should be confronted rather than “put out of mind.” He writes:

The end of our race is death; ‘tis the necessary object of our aim, which, if it fright us, how is it possible to advance a step without a fit of ague\(^{23}\)? The remedy the vulgar\(^{24}\) use is not to think on’t; but from what brutish stupidity can they derive so gross a blindness? They must bridle the ass by the tail:

“Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro,”

[“Who in his folly seeks to advance backwards”—Lucretius, iv. 474]

‘tis no wonder if he be often trapped in the pitfall. They affright people with the very mention of death, and many cross\(^{25}\) themselves, as it were the name of the devil. And because the making a man’s will is in reference to dying, not a man will be persuaded to take a pen in hand to that purpose, till the physician has passed sentence upon and totally given him over, and then betwixt and terror, God knows in how fit a condition of understanding he is to do it.

Montaigne begins here with a fact: everyone dies, a fact that will surface a lot in the essay given that it is fairly obvious. “The end of our race is death . . .” The next sentence would appear to make the case that if people dwell on the “fear” of the fact or try to avoid it, the fear might be overwhelming and thus become harmful. The “pitfall” referred to in the sentence after the quote is that dwelling on the fear of death will inhibit good judgement or virtue, putting actions off that we could take care of today, such as the writing of a will. The reader could always add ideas here: not just wills but also pursuing things one wants to pursue or not avoiding decisions for the wrong reasons. There are many cases. For example, one may want to pursue a life traveling the world as a kayaker but refrains from doing so.

\(^{23}\) An old, no longer used medical term that described chills or fever, such as caused by malaria.

\(^{24}\) Yet another archaism, meant to denote common folk, like me, or someone unstudied.

\(^{25}\) Making the sign of the cross
because: what if they fail?

The next paragraph provides an example of the fear of things like death even alters language, as if this would somehow soften the blow. In reality, the altered language creates a false sense of reality.

This conclusion leads to a new line of inquiry for the essayist. Why should a person, like us, the professor and students in class, bother with death when it always appears so far off or seems remote or should be made remote, especially for the young who want to live into the future, as Montaigne does (he wants to live another 30 years after all)? He’s not thinking about death because he wants to die, he’s thinking about it because he wants to live “his” life not what others may perceive it to be. The reader will want to note that this is a critical moment in the essay for Montaigne: thinking or judging that death is a future problem or that doesn’t concern present action or thought is a mistake in judgement because . . . And so the reader follows the writer into new adventures.

This is one way of reading Montaigne: following or trying to follow how one idea or conclusion opens up a new problem or line of argument he needs to follow as he pursues his case to convince us that “To Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die.”

The text of Montaigne’s essay is from the Gutenberg version.
That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die
Michel de Montaigne

Cicero says—[Tusc., i. 31. ]—“that to study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one’s self
to die.” The reason of which is, because study and contemplation do in some sort withdraw
from us our soul, and employ it separately from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship
and a resemblance of death; or, else, because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world do in
the end conclude in this point, to teach us not to fear to die. And to say the truth, either our
reason mocks us, or it ought to have no other aim but our contentment only, nor to endeavour
anything but, in sum, to make us live well, and, as the Holy Scripture says, at our ease. All the
opinions of the world agree in this, that pleasure is our end, though we make use of divers
means to attain it: they would, otherwise, be rejected at the first motion; for who would give ear
to him that should propose affliction and misery for his end? The controversies and disputes of
the philosophical sects upon this point are merely verbal:

“Transcurramus solertissimas nugas”

[“Let us skip over those subtle trifles.”—Seneca, Ep., 117.]

—there is more in them of opposition and obstinacy than is consistent with so sacred a
profession; but whatsoever personage a man takes upon himself to perform, he ever mixes his
own part with it.

Let the philosophers say what they will, the thing at which we all aim, even in virtue is
pleasure. It amuses me to rattle in ears this word, which they so nauseate to and if it signify
some supreme pleasure and contentment, it is more due to the assistance of virtue than to any
other assistance whatever. This pleasure, for being more gay, more sinewy, more robust and
more manly, is only the more seriously voluptuous, and we ought give it the name of
pleasure, as that which is more favourable, gentle, and natural, and not that from which we

26 Or self or selfish concerns or those problems that only concern the self.
27 Or role that a person takes up in like, like “engineer” or “salesperson.”
28 We have to understand what Montaigne might have meant by virtue, that is behaviors
that might be considered moral, noble, ethical . . . according to some significant standard, such as
being gentle and compromising. It’s also important to note that Montaigne means virtue in a
different sense than traditionally defined, contrary to those virtues that lead to conflict, cruelty,
and hypocrisy.
29 Montaigne could mean this in the sense of lavish or increase size, an amount.
have denominated it. The other and meaner pleasure, if it could deserve this fair name, it ought to be by way of competition, and not of privilege. I find it less exempt from traverses and inconveniences than virtue itself; and, besides that the enjoyment is more momentary, fluid, and frail, it has its watchings, fasts, and labours, its sweat and its blood; and, moreover, has particular to itself so many several sorts of sharp and wounding passions, and so dull a satiety attending it, as equal it to the severest penance. And we mistake if we think that these inconveniences serve it for a spur and a seasoning to its sweetness (as in nature one contrary is quickened by another), or say, when we come to virtue, that like consequences and difficulties overwhelm and render it austere and inaccessible; whereas, much more aptly than in voluptuousness, they ennoble, sharpen, and heighten the perfect and divine pleasure they procure us. He renders himself unworthy of it who will counterpoise its cost with its fruit, and neither understands the blessing nor how to use it. Those who preach to us that the quest of it is craggy, difficult, and painful, but its fruition pleasant, what do they mean by that but to tell us that it is always unpleasing? For what human means will ever attain its enjoyment? The most perfect have been fain to content themselves to aspire unto it, and to approach it only, without ever possessing it. But they are deceived, seeing that of all the pleasures we know, the very pursuit is pleasant. The attempt ever relishes of the quality of the thing to which it is directed, for it is a good part of, and consubstantial with, the effect. The felicity and beatitude that glitters in Virtue, shines throughout all her appurtenances and avenues, even to the first entry and utmost limits.

Now, of all the benefits that virtue confers upon us, the contempt of death is one of the greatest, as the means that accommodates human life with a soft and easy tranquillity, and gives us a pure and pleasant taste of living, without which all other pleasure would be extinct. Which is the reason why all the rules centre and concur in this one article. And although they all in like manner, with common accord, teach us also to despise pain, poverty, and the other accidents to which human life is subject, it is not, nevertheless, with the same solicitude, as well by reason these accidents are not of so great necessity, the greater part of mankind passing over their whole lives without ever knowing what poverty is, and some without sorrow or sickness, as Xenophilus the musician, who lived a hundred and six years in a perfect and continual health; as also because, at the worst, death can, whenever we please, cut short and put an end to all other inconveniences. But as to death, it is inevitable:

30 Inconveniences
31 Balance
32 Reward, in the sense of balance the effort with the reward, given that a reward may be unimaginable or a false image of the future. Why should the effort put into a thing be unpleasant in and of itself? Montaigne is skeptical of the no pain no gain concept because: when does the pain end and the gain begin in reality?
33 If one is always struggling to get something or reach a goal or conclusion, then when does the fun part come? When does living start?
34 Reading and grasping how this transitional conjunction works is important to reading or following Montaigne’s structure.
“Omnes eodem cogimur; omnium
Versatur urna serius ocias
Sors exitura, et nos in aeternum
Exilium impositura cymbae.”

[“We are all bound one voyage; the lot of all, sooner or later, is
to come out of the urn. All must to eternal exile sail away.”
—Hor., Od., ii. 3, 25.]

and, consequently, if it frights us, ’tis a perpetual torment, for which there is no sort of
consolation. There is no way by which it may not reach us. We may continually turn our heads
this way and that, as in a suspected country:
“Quae, quasi saxum Tantalo, semper impendet.”

[“Ever, like Tantalus stone, hangs over us.”
—Cicero, De Finib., i. 18.]

Our courts of justice often send back condemned criminals to be executed upon the place
where the crime was committed; but, carry them to fine houses by the way, prepare for them
the best entertainment you can—
“Non Siculae dapes
Dulcem elaborabunt saporem:
Non avium cyatheaceae cantus
Somnum reducent.”

[“Sicilian dainties will not tickle their palates, nor the melody of
birds and harps bring back sleep.”—Hor., Od., iii. 1, 18.]

Do you think they can relish it? and that the fatal end of their journey being continually
before their eyes, would not alter and deprave their palate from tasting these regalios?
“Audit iter, numeratque dies, spatioque viarum
Metitur vitam; torquetur peste futura.”

[“He considers the route, computes the time of travelling, measuring
his life by the length of the journey; and torments himself by
thinking of the blow to come.”—Claudianus, in Ruf., ii. 137.]

The end of our race is death; ’tis the necessary object of our aim, which, if it fright us, how
is it possible to advance a step without a fit of ague36? The remedy the vulgar37 use is not to
think on’t; but from what brutish stupidity can they derive so gross a blindness? They must

35 or unfamiliar or suspicious
36 An old, no longer used medical term that described chills or fever, such as caused by malaria.
37 Yet another archaism, meant to denote common folk, like me, or someone unstudied.
bride the ass by the tail:

“Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro,”

[“Who in his folly seeks to advance backwards”—Lucretius, iv. 474]

’tis no wonder if he be often trapped in the pitfall. They affright people with the very
mention of death, and many cross themselves, as it were the name of the devil. And because
the making a man’s will is in reference to dying, not a man will be persuaded to take a pen in
hand to that purpose, till the physician has passed sentence upon and totally given him over,
and then betwixt and terror, God knows in how fit a condition of understanding he is to do it.

The Romans, by reason that this poor syllable death sounded so harshly to their ears and
seemed so ominous, found out a way to soften and spin it out by a periphrasis, and instead of
pronouncing such a one is dead, said, “Such a one has lived,” or “Such a one has ceased to live”
—[Plutarch, Life of Cicero, c. 22:]—for, provided there was any mention of life in the case,
though past, it carried yet some sound of consolation. And from them it is that we have
borrowed our expression, “The late Monsieur such and such a one.”—[“feu Monsieur un tel.”] Peradventure, as the saying is, the term we have lived is worth our money. I was born betwixt
eleven and twelve o’clock in the forenoon the last day of February 1533, according to our
computation, beginning the year the 1st of January,—[This was in virtue of an ordinance of
Charles IX. in 1563. Previously the year commenced at Easter, so that the 1st January 1563
became the first day of the year 1563.]—and it is now but just fifteen days since I was complete
nine-and-thirty years old; I make account to live, at least, as many more. In the meantime, to
trouble a man’s self with the thought of a thing so far off were folly. But what? Young and old
die upon the same terms; no one departs out of life otherwise than if he had but just before
entered into it; neither is any man so old and decrepit, who, having heard of Methuselah, does
not think he has yet twenty good years to come. Fool that thou art! who has assured unto thee
the term of life? Thou dependest upon physicians’ tales: rather consult effects and experience.
According to the common course of things, ’tis long since that thou hast lived by extraordinary
favour; thou hast already outlived the ordinary term of life. And that it is so, reckon up thy
acquaintance, how many more have died before they arrived at thy age than have attained unto
it; and of those who have ennobled their lives by their renown, take but an account, and I dare
lay a wager thou wilt find more who have died before than after five-and-thirty years of age. It
is full both of reason and piety, too, to take example by the humanity of Jesus Christ Himself;
now, He ended His life at three-and-thirty years. The greatest man, that was no more than a
man, Alexander, died also at the same age. How many several ways has death to surprise

38 Making the sign of the cross
39 A kind of figure of speech that uses indirect language.
40 and thus the reason for using periphrasis
41 The author is famous for his dislike of doctors.
42 In this section, Montaigne might be writing to himself, calling himself a fool for
expecting to live another 39 years.
43 The famous Alexander the Great, king of Macedonia.
“Quid quisque, vitet, nunquam homini satis
Cautum est in horas.”

[“Be as cautious as he may, man can never foresee the danger that
may at any hour befal him.”—Hor. O. ii. 13, 13.]

To omit fevers and pleurisies, who would ever have imagined that a duke of Brittany,—[Jean II. died 1305.]—should be pressed to death in a crowd as that duke was at the entry of Pope Clement, my neighbour, into Lyons?—[Montaigne speaks of him as if he had been a contemporary neighbour, perhaps because he was the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Bertrand le Got was Pope under the title of Clement V., 1305-14.]—Hast thou not seen one of our kings—[Henry II., killed in a tournament, July 10, 1559]—killed at a tilting, and did not one of his ancestors die by jostle of a hog?—[Philip, eldest son of Louis le Gros.]—Aeschylus, threatened with the fall of a house, was to much purpose circumspect to avoid that danger, seeing that he was knocked on the head by a tortoise falling out of an eagle’s talons in the air. Another was choked with a grape-stone;—[Val. Max., ix. 12, ext. 2.]—an emperor killed with the scratch of a comb in combing his head. Aemilius Lepidus with a stumble at his own threshold,—[Pliny, Nat. Hist., vii. 33.]—and Aufidius with a jostle against the door as he entered the council-chamber. And betwixt the very thighs of women, Cornelius Gallus the proctor; Tigillinus, captain of the watch at Rome; Ludovico, son of Guido di Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua; and (of worse example) Speusippus, a Platonic philosopher, and one of our Popes. The poor judge Bebius gave adjournment in a case for eight days; but he himself, meanwhile, was condemned by death, and his own stay of life expired. Whilst Caius Julius, the physician, was anointing the eyes of a patient, death closed his own; and, if I may bring in an example of my own blood, a brother of mine, Captain St. Martin, a young man, three-and-twenty years old, who had already given sufficient testimony of his valour, playing a match at tennis, received a blow of a ball a little above his right ear, which, as it gave no manner of sign of wound or contusion, he took no notice of it, nor so much as sat down to repose himself, but, nevertheless, died within five or six hours after of an apoplexy occasioned by that blow.

These so frequent and common examples passing every day before our eyes, how is it possible a man should disengage himself from the thought of death, or avoid fancying that it has us every moment by the throat? What matter is it, you will say, which way it comes to pass, provided a man does not terrify himself with the expectation? For my part, I am of this mind, and if a man could by any means avoid it, though by creeping under a calf’s skin, I am one that should not be ashamed of the shift; all I aim at is, to pass my time at my ease, and the recreations that will most contribute to it, I take hold of, as little glorious and exemplary as you will:

“Praetulerim . . . delirus inersque videri,
Dum mea delectent mala me, vel denique fallant,

Note the numerous examples that follow.

Because he’s from Bordeaux, where Montaigne was from.
Quam sapere, et ringi.”

[“I had rather seem mad and a sluggard, so that my defects are agreeable to myself, or that I am not painfully conscious of them, than be wise, and chaptious.”—Hor., Ep., ii. 2, 126.]

But ’tis folly to think of doing anything that way. They go, they come, they gallop and dance, and not a word of death. All this is very fine; but withal, when it comes either to themselves, their wives, their children, or friends, surprising them at unawares and unprepared, then, what torment, what outcries, what madness and despair! Did you ever see anything so subdued, so changed, and so confounded? A man must, therefore⁴⁶, make more early provision for it, and this brutish negligence, could it possibly lodge in the brain of any man of sense (which I think utterly impossible), sells us its merchandise too dear. Were it an enemy that could be avoided, I would then advise to borrow arms even of cowardice itself, but seeing it is not, and that it will catch you as well flying and playing the poltroon, as standing to’t like an honest man:—

“Nempe et fugacem persequitur virum,
Nec parcit imbellis juventae
Poplitibus timidoque tergo.”

[“He pursues the flying poltroon, nor spares the hamstrings of the unwarlike youth who turns his back”—Hor., Ep., iii. 2, 14.]

And seeing that no temper of arms is of proof to secure us:—

“Ille licet ferro cautus, se condat et aere,
Mors tamen inclusum protrahet inde caput”

[“Let him hide beneath iron or brass in his fear, death will pull his head out of his armour.”—Propertius iii. 18]

—let us learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight him⁴⁷. And to begin to deprive him⁴⁸ of the greatest advantage he has over us, let us take a way quite contrary to the common course. Let us disarm him of his novelty and strangeness, let us converse and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent in our thoughts as death. Upon all occasions represent him to our imagination in his every shape; at the stumbling of a horse, at the falling of a tile, at the least prick with a pin, let us presently consider, and say to ourselves, “Well, and what if it had been death itself?” and, thereupon, let us encourage and fortify ourselves⁴⁹. Let us evermore, amidst our jollity and feasting, set the remembrance of our frail condition before our eyes, never

⁴⁶ Signifies that Montaigne is reaching a conclusion here.
⁴⁷ Connecticut used to broadcast a commercial of a person who’d won the lottery wearing a suit of armor. This commercial is a direct draw from Montaigne’s notion here. Most people understood the joke.
⁴⁸ “him” is a reference to Death, a form of figure of speech called personification.
⁴⁹ This is a direct reference back to Montaigne’s position: see the title.
suffering ourselves to be so far transported with our delights, but that we have some intervals of reflecting upon, and considering how many several ways this jollity of ours tends to death, and with how many dangers it threatens it. The Egyptians were wont to do after this manner, who in the height of their feasting and mirth, caused a dried skeleton of a man to be brought into the room to serve for a memento to their guests:

“Omnem crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum
Grata superveniet, quae non sperabitur, hora.”

[“Think each day when past is thy last; the next day, as unexpected, will be the more welcome.”—Horace, Ep., i. 4, 13.]

Where death waits for us is uncertain; let us look for him everywhere. The premeditation of death is the premeditation of liberty; he who has learned to die has unlearned to serve. There is nothing evil in life for him who rightly comprehends that the privation of life is no evil: to know, how to die delivers us from all subjection and constraint. Paulus Emilius answered him whom the miserable King of Macedon, his prisoner, sent to entreat him that he would not lead him in his triumph, “Let him make that request to himself.”—Plutarch, Life of Paulus Aemilius, c. 17; Cicero, Tusc., v. 40.

In truth, in all things, if nature do not help a little, it is very hard for art and industry to perform anything to purpose. I am in my own nature not melancholic, but meditative; and there is nothing I have more continually entertained myself withal than imaginations of death, even in the most wanton time of my age:

“Jucundum quum aetas florida ver ageret.”

[“When my florid age rejoiced in pleasant spring.”
—Catullus, lxviii.]

In the company of ladies, and at games, some have perhaps thought me possessed with some jealousy, or the uncertainty of some hope, whilst I was entertaining myself with the remembrance of some one, surprised, a few days before, with a burning fever of which he died, returning from an entertainment like this, with his head full of idle fancies of love and jollity, as mine was then, and that, for aught I knew, the same-destiny was attending me.

“Jam fuerit, nec post unquam revocare licebit.”

[“Presently the present will have gone, never to be recalled.”
Lucretius, iii. 928.]

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50 This is probably the most famous passage in Montaigne’s essay.
51 Other translations use this language: “unlearned how to be a slave.” The synonym is servant.
52 This begins a new section or trail of analysis here. Montaigne is now going to think about whether pondering death as much as he does is a bad thing. It’s a good question: does thinking about death or how to die assist us in thinking about living well or with joy or living without fear?
Yet did not this thought wrinkle my forehead any more than any other. It is impossible but we must feel a sting in such imaginations as these, at first; but with often turning and returning them in one's mind, they, at last, become so familiar as to be no trouble at all: otherwise, I, for my part, should be in a perpetual fright and frenzy; for never man was so distrustful of his life, never man so uncertain as to its duration. Neither health, which I have hitherto ever enjoyed very strong and vigorous, and very seldom interrupted, does prolong, nor sickness contract my hopes. Every minute, methinks, I am escaping, and it eternally runs in my mind, that what may be done to-morrow, may be done to-day. Hazards and dangers do, in truth, little or nothing hasten our end; and if we consider how many thousands more remain and hang over our heads, besides the accident that immediately threatens us, we shall find that the sound and the sick, those that are abroad at sea, and those that sit by the fire, those who are engaged in battle, and those who sit idle at home, are the one as near it as the other.

"Nemo altero fragilior est; nemo in crastinum sui certior."

[“No man is more fragile than another: no man more certain than another of to-morrow.”—Seneca, Ep., 91.]

For anything I have to do before I die, the longest leisure would appear too short, were it but an hour’s business I had to do.

A friend of mine the other day turning over my tablets, found therein a memorandum of something I would have done after my decease, whereupon I told him, as it was really true, that though I was no more than a league’s distance only from my own house, and merry and well, yet when that thing came into my head, I made haste to write it down there, because I was not certain to live till I came home. As a man that am eternally brooding over my own thoughts, and confine them to my own particular concerns, I am at all hours as well prepared as I am ever like to be, and death, whenever he shall come, can bring nothing along with him I did not expect long before. We should always, as near as we can, be booted and spurred, and ready to go, and, above all things, take care, at that time, to have no business with any one but one’s self:

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“Quid brevi fortes jaculamur avo
Multa?”

[“Why for so short a life tease ourselves with so many projects?”
—Hor., Od., ii. 16, 17.]

for we shall there find work enough to do, without any need of addition. One man complains, more than of death, that he is thereby prevented of a glorious victory; another, that he must die before he has married his daughter, or educated his children; a third seems only troubled that he must lose the society of his wife; a fourth, the conversation of his son, as the principal comfort and concern of his being. For my part, I am, thanks be to God, at this instant in such a condition, that I am ready to dislodge, whenever it shall please Him, without regret for anything whatsoever. I disengage myself throughout from all worldly relations; my leave is soon taken of all but myself. Never did any one prepare to bid adieu to the world more absolutely and unreservedly, and to shake hands with all manner of interest in it, than I expect
to do. The deadest deaths are the best:

“’Miser, O miser,’ aiunt, ‘omnia ademit 
Una dies infesta mihi tot praemia vitae.’”

[“’Wretch that I am,’ they cry, ‘one fatal day has deprived me of all joys of life.’”—Lucretius, iii. 911.]

And the builder,

“Manuet,” says he, “opera interrupta, minaeque Murorum ingentes.”

[“The works remain incomplete, the tall pinnacles of the walls unmade.”—AEneid, iv. 88.]

A man must design nothing that will require so much time to the finishing, or, at least, with no such passionate desire to see it brought to perfection. We are born to action:

“Quum moriar, medium solvar et inter opus.”

[“When I shall die, let it be doing that I had designed.”
—Ovid, Amor., ii. 10, 36.]

I would always have a man to be doing, and, as much as in him lies, to extend and spin out the offices of life; and then let death take me planting my cabbages, indifferent to him, and still less of my gardens not being finished. I saw one die, who, at his last gasp, complained of nothing so much as that destiny was about to cut the thread of a chronicle he was then compiling, when he was gone no farther than the fifteenth or sixteenth of our kings:

“Illud in his rebus non addunt: nec tibi earum jam desiderium rerum super insidet una.”

[“They do not add, that dying, we have no longer a desire to possess things.”—Lucretius, iii. 913.]

We are to discharge ourselves from these vulgar and hurtful humours. To this purpose it was that men first appointed the places of sepulture adjoining the churches, and in the most frequented places of the city, to accustom, says Lycurgus, the common people, women, and children, that they should not be startled at the sight of a corpse, and to the end, that the continual spectacle of bones, graves, and funeral obsequies should put us in mind of our frail condition:

“Quin etiam exhilarare viris convivia caede
Mos olim, et miscere epulis spectacula dira
Certantum ferro, saepe et super ipsa cadentum
Pocula, respersis non parco sanguine mensis.”

[“It was formerly the custom to enliven banquets with slaughter, and to combine with the repast the dire spectacle of men contending with the sword, the dying in many cases falling upon the cups, and
covering the tables with blood.”—Silius Italicus, xi. 51.]

And as the Egyptians after their feasts were wont to present the company with a great image of death, by one that cried out to them, “Drink and be merry, for such shalt thou be when thou art dead”; so it is my custom to have death not only in my imagination, but continually in my mouth. Neither is there anything of which I am so inquisitive, and delight to inform myself, as the manner of men’s deaths, their words, looks, and bearing; nor any places in history I am so intent upon; and it is manifest enough, by my crowding in examples of this kind, that I have a particular fancy for that subject. If I were a writer of books, I would compile a register, with a comment, of the various deaths of men: he who should teach men to die would at the same time teach them to live. Dicarchus made one, to which he gave that title; but it was designed for another and less profitable end.

Peradventure, some one may object, that the pain and terror of dying so infinitely exceed all manner of imagination, that the best fencer will be quite out of his play when it comes to the push. Let them say what they will: to premeditate is doubtless a very great advantage; and besides, is it nothing to go so far, at least, without disturbance or alteration? Moreover, Nature herself assists and encourages us: if the death be sudden and violent, we have not leisure to fear; if otherwise, I perceive that as I engage further in my disease, I naturally enter into a certain loathing and disdain of life. I find I have much more ado to digest this resolution of dying, when I am well in health, than when languishing of a fever; and by how much I have less to do with the commodities of life, by reason that I begin to lose the use and pleasure of them, by so much I look upon death with less terror. Which makes me hope, that the further I remove from the first, and the nearer I approach to the latter, I shall the more easily exchange the one for the other. And, as I have experienced in other occurrences, that, as Caesar says, things often appear greater to us at distance than near at hand, I have found, that being well, I have had maladies in much greater horror than when really afflicted with them. The vigour wherein I now am, the cheerfulness and delight wherein I now live, make the contrary estate appear in so great a disproportion to my present condition, that, by imagination, I magnify those inconveniences by one-half, and apprehend them to be much more troublesome, than I find them really to be, when they lie the most heavy upon me; I hope to find death the same.

Let us but observe in the ordinary changes and declinations we daily suffer, how nature deprives us of the light and sense of our bodily decay. What remains to an old man of the vigour of his youth and better days?

“Heu! senibus vitae portio quanta manet.”

[“Alas, to old men what portion of life remains!”—Maximian, vel Pseudo-Gallus, i. 16.]

53 Here deliberately bringing back a prior example.
54 Perhaps
55 It may be that when people know that they are diminishing, they begin to hate life. But this is unnecessary, according to Montaigne, if one embraces life knowing that death is a reality. One must reality, not fear.
Caesar, to an old weather-beaten soldier of his guards, who came to ask him leave that he might kill himself, taking notice of his withered body and decrepit motion, pleasantly answered, “Thou fanciest, then, that thou art yet alive.”—[Seneca, Ep., 77.]—Should a man fall into this condition on the sudden, I do not think humanity capable of enduring such a change: but nature, leading us by the hand, an easy and, as it were, an insensible pace, step by step conducts us to that miserable state, and by that means makes it familiar to us, so that we are insensible of the stroke when our youth dies in us, though it be really a harder death than the final dissolution of a languishing body, than the death of old age; forasmuch as the fall is not so great from an uneasy being to none at all, as it is from a sprightly and flourishing being to one that is troublesome and painful.

The body, bent and bowed, has less force to support a burden\(^{56}\); and it is the same with the soul, and therefore it is, that we are to raise her up firm and erect against the power of this adversary. For, as it is impossible she should ever be at rest, whilst she stands in fear of it; so, if she once can assure herself, she may boast (which is a thing as it were surpassing human condition) that it is impossible that disquiet, anxiety, or fear, or any other disturbance, should inhabit or have any place in her\(^{57}\):

> “Non vulnus instants Tyranni
Mentha cadi solida, neque Auster
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriae,
Nec fulminantis magna Jovis manus.”

[“Not the menacing look of a tyrant shakes her well-settled soul, nor turbulent Auster, the prince of the stormy Adriatic, nor yet the strong hand of thundering Jove, such a temper moves.”
—Hor., Od., iii. 3, 3.]

She is then become sovereign of all her lusts and passions, mistress of necessity, shame, poverty, and all the other injuries of fortune. Let us, therefore, as many of us as can, get this advantage; ‘tis the true and sovereign liberty here on earth, that fortifies us wherewithal to defy violence and injustice, and to contemn prisons and chains:

> “In manicis et
Compedibus saevo te sub custode tenebo.
Ipse Deus, simul atque volam, me solvet. Opinor,
Hoc sentit; moriar; mors ultima linea rerum est.”

[“I will keep thee in fetters and chains, in custody of a savage keeper.—A god will when I ask Him, set me free. This god I think is death. Death is the term of all things.”
—Hor., Ep., i. 16, 76.]

\(^{56}\) If a person hasn’t prepared for it, then old age will be a burden.

\(^{57}\) Preparation, therefore, lessens the fear of death and thus makes way for freedom to live unhindered by fear and the consequences of that fear.
Our very religion itself has no surer human foundation than the contempt of death. Not only the argument of reason invites us to it—for why should we fear to lose a thing, which being lost, cannot be lamented? —but, also, seeing we are threatened by so many sorts of death, is it not infinitely worse eternally to fear them all, than once to undergo one of them? And what matters it, when it shall happen, since it is inevitable? To him that told Socrates, “The thirty tyrants have sentenced thee to death”; “And nature them,” said he.—[Socrates was not condemned to death by the thirty tyrants, but by the Athenians.-Diogenes Laertius, ii.35.]

What a ridiculous thing it is to trouble ourselves about taking the only step that is to deliver us from all trouble! As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so in our death is the death of all things included. And therefore to lament that we shall not be alive a hundred years hence, is the same folly as to be sorry we were not alive a hundred years ago. Death is the beginning of another life. So did we weep, and so much it cost us to enter into this, and so did we put off our former veil in entering into it. Nothing can be a grievance that is but once. Is it reasonable so long to fear a thing that will so soon be despatched? Long life, and short, are by death made all one; for there is no long, nor short, to things that are no more. Aristotle tells us that there are certain little beasts upon the banks of the river Hypanis, that never live above a day: they which die at eight of the clock in the morning, die in their youth, and those that die at five in the evening, in their decrepitude: which of us would not laugh to see this moment of continuance put into the consideration of weal or woe? The most and the least, of ours, in comparison with eternity, or yet with the duration of mountains, rivers, stars, trees, and even of some animals, is no less ridiculous.—[Seneca, Consol. ad Marciam, c. 20.]

But nature compels us to it. “Go out of this world,” says she, “as you entered into it; the same pass you made from death to life, without passion or fear, the same, after the same manner, repeat from life to death. Your death is a part of the order of the universe, ‘tis a part of the life of the world.

“Inter se mortales mutua vivunt
........................................
Et, quasi cursores, vitai lampada tradunt.”

[“Mortals, amongst themselves, live by turns, and, like the runners

58 This paragraph opens yet another aspect of the analysis: why lament something that happens only once and is inevitable anyway?
59 Why lament the very thing that is going to relieve us from the torment of life (if indeed it is a torment)?
60 An interesting turn of phrase.
61 Note that punctuation in Montaigne’s day was not systematic.
62 This begins the big closing argument, where Montaigne goes into his big emotional climax and conclusion.
63 Here Montaigne would seem to equate the time before birth as a kind of death-like state of being. Most people are uncomfortable with the question: “What were you doing prior to your actual or real life.”
in the games, give up the lamp, when they have won the race, to the
next comer.—” Lucretius, ii. 75, 78."

“Shall I exchange for you this beautiful contexture of things? ‘Tis the condition of your creation; death is a part of you, and whilst you endeavour to evade it, you evade yourselves. This very being of yours that you now enjoy is equally divided betwixt life and death. The day of your birth is one day’s advance towards the grave:

“Prima, qux vitam dedit, hora carpsit.”

[“The first hour that gave us life took away also an hour.”
—Seneca, Her. Fur., 3 Chor. 874.]

“Nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet.”

[“As we are born we die, and the end commences with the beginning.”
—Manilius, Ast., iv. 16.]

“All the whole time you live, you purloin from life and live at the expense of life itself. The perpetual work of your life is but to lay the foundation of death. You are in death, whilst you are in life, because you still are after death, when you are no more alive; or, if you had rather have it so, you are dead after life, but dying all the while you live; and death handles the dying much more rudely than the dead, and more sensibly and essentially. If you have made your profit of life, you have had enough of it; go your way satisfied.

“Cur non ut plenus vita; conviva recedis?”

[“Why not depart from life as a sated guest from a feast?
“Lucretius, iii. 951.”

“If you have not known how to make the best use of it, if it was unprofitable to you, what need you care to lose it, to what end would you desire longer to keep it?

“Cur amplius addere quaeris,
Rursum quod pereat male, et ingratum occidat omne?’

[“Why seek to add longer life, merely to renew ill-spent time, and be again tormented?”—Lucretius, iii. 914.]

“Life in itself is neither good nor evil; it is the scene of good or evil as you make it.’ And, if you have lived a day, you have seen all: one day is equal and like to all other days. There is no other light, no other shade; this very sun, this month, these very stars, this very order and

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64 In this section, Nature is speaking to Montaigne, which is another use of the figure of speech called personification. Nature here is given human qualities, the ability to speak and think.”

65 Perhaps meaning, wasting life away on things that matter not.

66 And so we get to a significant aspect of Montaigne’s argument: living well is a skill one must learn. This is a foundational question.
disposition of things, is the same your ancestors enjoyed, and that shall also entertain your posterity:

"'Non alium videre patres, aliumve nepotes
Aspicient.'

["Your grandsires saw no other thing; nor will your posterity."
—Manilius, i. 529.]

"And, come the worst that can come, the distribution and variety of all the acts of my comedy are performed in a year. If you have observed the revolution of my four seasons, they comprehend the infancy, the youth, the virility, and the old age of the world: the year has played his part, and knows no other art but to begin again; it will always be the same thing:

"'Versamur ibidem, atque insumus usque.'

["We are turning in the same circle, ever therein confined."
—Lucretius, iii. 1093.]

"'Atque in se sua per vestigia volvit annus.'

["The year is ever turning around in the same footsteps."
—Virgil, Georg., ii. 402.]

"I am not prepared to create for you any new recreations:

"'Nam tibi prxterea quod machiner, inveniamque
Quod placeat, nihil est; eadem sunt omnia semper.'

["I can devise, nor find anything else to please you: 'tis the same thing over and over again."—Lucretius iii. 957

"Give place to others, as others have given place to you. Equality is the soul of equity. Who can complain of being comprehended in the same destiny, wherein all are involved? Besides, live as long as you can, you shall by that nothing shorten the space you are to be dead; 'tis all to no purpose; you shall be every whit as long in the condition you so much fear, as if you had died at nurse:

"'Licet quot vis vivendo vincere secla,
Mors aeterna tamen nihilominus illa manebit.'

["Live triumphing over as many ages as you will, death still will remain eternal."—Lucretius, iii. 1103]

"And yet I will place you in such a condition as you shall have no reason to be displeased.

"'In vera nescis nullum fore morte alium te,
Qui possit vivus tibi to lugere peremptum,
Stansque jacentem.'

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67 It would seem to make sense that death doesn’t really care about how long a person lives.
[“Know you not that, when dead, there can be no other living self to lament you dead, standing on your grave.”—Idem., ibid., 898.]

“Nor shall you so much as wish for the life you are so concerned about:

’Nec sibi enim quisquam tum se vitamque requirit.

’Nec desiderium nostri nos afficit ullum.’

“Death is less to be feared than nothing, if there could be anything less than nothing.

’Multo . . . mortem minus ad nos esse putandum,

Si minus esse potest, quam quod nihil esse videmus.’

“Neither can it any way concern you, whether you are living or dead: living, by reason that you are still in being; dead, because you are no more. Moreover, no one dies before his hour: the time you leave behind was no more yours than that was lapsed and gone before you came into the world; nor does it any more concern you.

’Respice enim, quam nil ad nos anteacta vetustas

Temporis aeterni fuerit.’

[“Consider how as nothing to us is the old age of times past.”
—Lucretius iii. 985]

Wherever your life ends, it is all there. The utility of living consists not in the length of days, but in the use of time; a man may have lived long, and yet lived but a little. Make use of time while it is present with you. It depends upon your will, and not upon the number of days, to have a sufficient length of life. Is it possible you can imagine never to arrive at the place towards which you are continually going? and yet there is no journey but hath its end. And, if company will make it more pleasant or more easy to you, does not all the world go the self-same way?

’Omnia te, vita perfuncta, sequentur.’

[“All things, then, life over, must follow thee.”
—Lucretius, iii. 981.]

“Does not all the world dance the same brawl that you do? Is there anything that does not grow old, as well as you? A thousand men, a thousand animals, a thousand other creatures, die at the same moment that you die:

’Nam nox nulla diem, neque noctem aurora sequuta est,

Quae non audierit mistos vagitibus aegris

Ploratus, mortis comites et funeris atri.’

[“No night has followed day, no day has followed night, in which there has not been heard sobs and sorrowing cries, the companions of death and funerals.”—Lucretius, v. 579.]

“To what end should you endeavour to draw back, if there be no possibility to evade it? you have seen examples enough of those who have been well pleased to die, as thereby
delivered from heavy miseries; but have you ever found any who have been dissatisfied with
dying? It must, therefore, needs be very foolish to condemn a thing you have neither
experimented in your own person, nor by that of any other. Why dost thou complain of me and
of destiny? Do we do thee any wrong? Is it for thee to govern us, or for us to govern thee?
Though, peradventure, thy age may not be accomplished, yet thy life is: a man of low stature is
as much a man as a giant; neither men nor their lives are measured by the ell. Chiron refused to
be immortal, when he was acquainted with the conditions under which he was to enjoy it, by
the god of time itself and its duration, his father Saturn. Do but seriously consider how much
more insupportable and painful an immortal life would be to man than what I have already
given him. If you had not death, you would eternally curse me for having deprived you of it; I
have mixed a little bitterness with it, to the end, that seeing of what convenience it is, you might
not too greedily and indiscreetly seek and embrace it: and that you might be so established in
this moderation, as neither to nauseate life, nor have any antipathy for dying, which I have
decreed you shall once do, I have tempered the one and the other betwixt pleasure and pain. It
was I that taught Thales, the most eminent of your sages, that to live and to die were indifferent;
which made him, very wisely, answer him, ‘Why then he did not die?’ ‘Because,’ said he, ‘it is
indifferent.’—[Diogenes Laertius, i. 35.]—Water, earth, air, and fire, and the other parts of this
creation of mine, are no more instruments of thy life than they are of thy death. Why dost thou
fear thy last day? it contributes no more to thy dissolution, than every one of the rest: the last
step is not the cause of lassitude: it does not confess it. Every day travels towards death; the last
only arrives at it.” These are the good lessons our mother Nature teaches.

I have often considered with myself whence it should proceed, that in war the image of
death, whether we look upon it in ourselves or in others, should, without comparison, appear
less dreadful than at home in our own houses (for if it were not so, it would be an army of
doctors and whining milksops), and that being still in all places the same, there should be,
notwithstanding, much more assurance in peasants and the meaner sort of people, than in
others of better quality. I believe, in truth, that it is those terrible ceremonies and preparations
wherewith we set it out, that more terrify us than the thing itself; a new, quite contrary way of
living; the cries of mothers, wives, and children; the visits of astounded and afflicted friends; the
attendance of pale and blubbering servants; a dark room, set round with burning tapers; our
beds environed with physicians and divines; in sum, nothing but ghostliness and horror round
about us; we seem dead and buried already. Children are afraid even of those they are best
acquainted with, when disguised in a visor; and so ‘tis with us; the visor must be removed as
well from things as from persons, that being taken away, we shall find nothing underneath but
the very same death that a mean servant or a poor chambermaid died a day or two ago, without
any manner of apprehension. Happy is the death that deprives us of leisure for preparing such
ceremonials.

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68 This sentence closes Natures speech or address to Montaigne.
Chapter Three

Aristotle
3.1: Considering and Responding to Aristotle

Aristotle is not the easiest historical figure of note to read in the world. The reason is because the work called Politics is about developing a basic but systematic understanding of the concept that we call the state and this author’s vision of how it is composed and how it might or should work. Things that we might either take for granted or ideas and phenomenon we think might be obvious are not supposed to be obvious in such a work as Politics. In Politics, the idea or concept is broken down into its parts, like trying to understand a car by taking each piece of it apart and then remaking the thing without the assistance of a guide. It is not easy to do.

Something like a car when dismantled into its parts becomes a mystery, much like a computer would become a mystery to someone who found just one part and wondered what the other parts look like. The student thinker already knows that most people don’t know how a cell phone or an automobile work. Most people know what they are; they know how to use them; they can turn them on and turn them off; but how the digital or mechanical magic functions inside remains a mystery. Likewise, most people grow up in a neighborhood, a town, a state, and the larger entity of a country, like the United States of America. How all these work is the plot plan of Aristotle’s Politics.

This is what might make such a work interesting for the college thinker. The college reader/thinker might read Politics and respond with something like this: “Yeah, I’ve seen or thought about this myself.” This is a good thing. In all of this, we as readers want to ask the question: why are things the way they are?

Concepts and Ideas

There are a few basic ideas that require some coverage from the start. The first set of ideas are merely geographical, because this matters:

1. In Aristotle, we’re dealing with a world that is relatively small in geographical size. We have access to all parts of the world; the people who lived in
and around what we call Greece were extensive travelers; Aristotle for a time was the teacher of Alexander the Great, who roamed as far as India. But the world was a lot smaller then and it took a great deal of time to get around.

Other ideas are cultural:

2. In Aristotle, we’re dealing with a culture whose dominant human force is men, and typically men of military background and who owned property. We call this a patriarchic society. And so, father or “master” will be the head of the house. Leaders of cities, such as a king, will be viewed as “fathers” or “masters” of their domains.

3. Women and children, in Aristotle’s world, are not necessarily considered fully human, thus eligible for civic service or practitioners of civic virtue. Women did not have a great deal of political power. They had their roles and their roles were typically fixed.

4. Aristotle’s culture is an enslaving culture, where people could place themselves into positions of being owned to pay off debts or could be enslaved by law or as a result of warfare.

5. In Aristotle’s world, the “state” physically speaking was most likely a part of a powerful city, like Athens, Thebes, or Sparta, that formed a hub of other cities or towns aligned as a form of “city-state,” a federation of cities (towns, villages, settlements). The city-state (a state of cities) could align with others to form a League. For example, Aristotle was born in the town of Stagira, which at the time was a member of the Chalcidian league. This is an early form of federalism as it is practiced now in the United States, which is a federal republic. It was also a way of constructing economic and political alliances. We could see Connecticut aligned with other states that form a league, called the United States or the “New England League.” Technically, a League would be defined as a federation of city-states in Aristotle’s day.

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69 Which means simply to bind together for advantage. Soccer players know all about this.
70 The root here is “to form an alliance or union by agreement or set of rules.”
Some Ideas: Sophrosyne and the Virtues of Temperance and Moderation, Purity, Decorum, Self-control and the Like

In Aristotle’s day, and maybe even ours, the idea of sophrosyne is the demonstration of excellence of character. Moderating one’s appetites, showing self-control, and other virtues would demonstrate sophrosyne in the behaviors of any given person. It is not what one has or possesses, it is what one does. The emphasis here is on actions that a human being demonstrates in their daily living. Some writers, like Montaigne, would refer to these as virtues.

Arete is a different concept, describing skill in the form of excellence. We could make the case that everyone has some characteristic of excellence that could or should be identified and then developed via education, whatever that education might look like. Talent, habit, discipline are all related to the notion of arete, as does the idea of purpose and ability to fulfill a goal with some amount of skill.

A significant virtue in an Aristotelean context may be the idea of temperance or moderation, the ability or activity of moderating emotion, passion, or exuberance. A person might be passionate about something, such as faith or even video games, but one can approach these activities with the control of emotion of passion, so that the action or behavior avoids harm to others or to the self.

Purity in the context of excellence of character goes to the avoidance of those things that may corrupt thought or action. It goes to the avoidance of behaviors that corrupt an individual person’s motivations or goals. It’s not difficult to understand the idea of purity as a virtue with specific examples. Let’s say that a student is trying to learn algebra. Instead of studying what needs to be studied, a person instead decides to watch all the episodes of 13 Reasons Why. This decision or activity would corrupt the original purpose of study algebra because it distract from the goal. Everyone struggles with this issue.

Purity, temperance and moderation are linked to the idea of decorum. Decorum goes to the idea of how one should behave according to their current position in life. For example, a police office should demonstrate certain kinds of behavior or standards of behavior. A politician who has been elected to represent others, should follow some sort of standard of behavior related to their official station or position.
This goes to the notion of decorum. Standards of decorum have to be defined and demonstrated in terms of the actions a person may take, not just claiming that they are important in the abstract.

**A Method of Reading or Study**

One way to read the text of the *Politics* is to practice the skill of finding relationships between the ideas and concepts the author describes then relating those to the present day. For example, the first thing that Aristotle writes in Part 1 of Book 1 of *Politics* is “Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good . . .” Rather than moving on, the reader might pause and think about what all this might mean, practically speaking. For example, what the writer mean by the word “good” and another question the reader might ask is: is this an accurate statement? What is the good that a society or group or neighborhood might be after?

This will become important when you read Alexis de Tocqueville on the important of associations in American life, Montaigne on the significance of mastering fear, the Declaration of Independence, or Madison on education. When the student reader can make a relationship between these works and their own lives, then we know that reading is happening.

One of the common rhetorical methods Aristotle uses to make his arguments is to use analogy, comparison and illustration. Consider Part II where Aristotle tries to support this argument: “In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other . . .” The argument is signaled by the phrase “In the first place” and by the word “must.” Aristotle as the writer feels that it is important to make the case that to understand the state, one must also understand that some things cannot exist without other things. As readers, we want to understand what Aristotle means by this, because this is also an important idea in modern life. Why? Because we live in relation to the benefits and problems the state of Connecticut invites into our lives, whether we agree with it all or disagree with some of the decisions made on a citizen’s behalf.

To make the case, Aristotle finds examples in nature, in social and filial relationships, and in textual examples. This is not our society but Aristotle’s, and
so he uses terms as he understood them, such as “barbarian” (meaning, someone not Greek) and slave, which has a few different meanings: a follower, a subject, someone who is ordered about, as a servant would be, an enslaved individual, or a group of people who may have been bested in combat and are now under the leadership of others or another city-state.

In modern or contemporary life, all of these terms have changed. Is an employee a servant, for example?

To be a ruler or leader, one must have followers or, what we now call, a constituency, Aristotle would argue. To be the boss, one must have employees or else you are a boss of one person. In some cases, Aristotle writes, that these relations and their characteristics are natural, and so, a few paragraphs into Part 2 he can write, “Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal.” But it is important to know what the author means my “nature” and “political animal” in this sense.

We as readers want to be able to explain how he comes to this “hence” or conclusion based on the evidence.

We as readers also want to pay close attention to what the arguments are and how Aristotle goes about supporting them. In this way, we should be able to debate or ask questions on the merits of the text not on whether we disagree with the author’s cultural position or attitude.
3.2: Arguments from Nature

Arguments from nature are an interesting sort of argument. They begin with anecdotal claims or observations, such as looking around at the present, existing spaces we walk around in and saying, well, this is just the way things are. They can take a dangerous direction, where one might make the case that one thing is true, false, right, wrong because it just seems to be the “way things are.”

But nature arguments can also be useful when thinking about why a problem exists or might exist in the future. They also might make for a method of avoiding significant investigations into problems or problem finding.
Politics: Book 1: Parts 1-8
Aristotle

Part I
Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.

Some people think that the qualifications of a statesman, king, householder, and master are the same, and that they differ, not in kind, but only in the number of their subjects. For example, the ruler over a few is called a master; over more, the manager of a household; over a still larger number, a statesman or king, as if there were no difference between a great household and a small state. The distinction which is made between the king and the statesman is as follows: When the government is personal, the ruler is a king; when, according to the rules of the political science, the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, then he is called a statesman.

But all this is a mistake; for governments differ in kind, as will be evident to any one who considers the matter according to the method which has hitherto guided us. As in other departments of science, so in politics, the compound should always be resolved into the simple elements or least parts of the whole. We must therefore look at the elements of which the state is composed, in order that we may see in what the different kinds of rule differ from one another, and whether any scientific result can be attained about each one of them.

Part II
He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them. In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of deliberate purpose, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved. For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave; hence master and slave have the same interest. Now nature has distinguished between the female and the slave. For she is not niggardly, like the smith who fashions the Delphian knife for many uses; she makes each thing for a single use, and every instrument is best made when intended for one
and not for many uses. But among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves, because there is no natural ruler among them: they are a community of slaves, male and female. Wherefore the poets say,

"It is meet that Hellenes should rule over barbarians;"

as if they thought that the barbarian and the slave were by nature one.

Out of these two relationships between man and woman, master and slave, the first thing to arise is the family, and Hesiod is right when he says,

"First house and wife and an ox for the plough,"

for the ox is the poor man's slave. The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants, and the members of it are called by Charondas 'companions of the cupboard,' and by Epimenides the Cretan, 'companions of the manger.' But when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village. And the most natural form of the village appears to be that of a colony from the family, composed of the children and grandchildren, who are said to be suckled 'with the same milk.' And this is the reason why Hellenic states were originally governed by kings; because the Hellenes were under royal rule before they came together, as the barbarians still are. Every family is ruled by the eldest, and therefore in the colonies of the family the kingly form of government prevailed because they were of the same blood. As Homer says:

"Each one gives law to his children and to his wives."

For they lived dispersedly, as was the manner in ancient times. Wherefore men say that the Gods have a king, because they themselves either are or were in ancient times under the rule of a king. For they imagine, not only the forms of the Gods, but their ways of life to be like their own.

When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best.

Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the

"Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one,"

whom Homer denounces- the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be
compared to an isolated piece at draughts.

Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.

Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that. But things are defined by their working and power; and we ought not to say that they are the same when they no longer have their proper quality, but only that they have the same name. The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors. For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he have not virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.

Part III

Seeing then that the state is made up of households, before speaking of the state we must speak of the management of the household. The parts of household management correspond to the persons who compose the household, and a complete household consists of slaves and freemen. Now we should begin by examining everything in its fewest possible elements; and the first and fewest possible parts of a family are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children. We have therefore to consider what each of these three relations is and ought to be: I mean the relation of master and servant, the marriage relation (the conjunction of man and wife has no name of its own), and thirdly, the procreative relation (this also has no proper name). And there is another element of a household, the so-called art of getting wealth, which, according to some, is identical with household management, according to others, a principal part of it; the nature of this art will also have to be considered by us.
Let us first speak of master and slave, looking to the needs of practical life and also seeking to attain some better theory of their relation than exists at present. For some are of opinion that the rule of a master is a science, and that the management of a household, and the mastership of slaves, and the political and royal rule, as I was saying at the outset, are all the same. Others affirm that the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature, and that the distinction between slave and freeman exists by law only, and not by nature; and being an interference with nature is therefore unjust.

Part IV

Property is a part of the household, and the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he be provided with necessaries. And as in the arts which have a definite sphere the workers must have their own proper instruments for the accomplishment of their work, so it is in the management of a household. Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, others lifeless; in the rudder, the pilot of a ship has a lifeless, in the look-out man, a living instrument; for in the arts the servant is a kind of instrument. Thus, too, a possession is an instrument for maintaining life. And so, in the arrangement of the family, a slave is a living possession, and property a number of such instruments; and the servant is himself an instrument which takes precedence of all other instruments. For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet,

"of their own accord entered the assembly of the Gods;"

if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves. Here, however, another distinction must be drawn; the instruments commonly so called are instruments of production, whilst a possession is an instrument of action. The shuttle, for example, is not only of use; but something else is made by it, whereas of a garment or of a bed there is only the use. Further, as production and action are different in kind, and both require instruments, the instruments which they employ must likewise differ in kind. But life is action and not production, and therefore the slave is the minister of action. Again, a possession is spoken of as a part is spoken of; for the part is not only a part of something else, but wholly belongs to it; and this is also true of a possession. The master is only the master of the slave; he does not belong to him, whereas the slave is not only the slave of his master, but wholly belongs to him. Hence we see what is the nature and office of a slave; he who is by nature not his own but another's man, is by nature a slave; and he may be said to be another's man who, being a human being, is also a possession. And a possession may be defined as an instrument of action, separable from the possessor.

Part V
But is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right, or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature?

There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.

And there are many kinds both of rulers and subjects (and that rule is the better which is exercised over better subjects- for example, to rule over men is better than to rule over wild beasts; for the work is better which is executed by better workmen, and where one man rules and another is ruled, they may be said to have a work); for in all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, whether continuous or discrete, a distinction between the ruling and the subject element comes to fight. Such a duality exists in living creatures, but not in them only; it originates in the constitution of the universe; even in things which have no life there is a ruling principle, as in a musical mode. But we are wandering from the subject. We will therefore restrict ourselves to the living creature, which, in the first place, consists of soul and body: and of these two, the one is by nature the ruler, and the other the subject. But then we must look for the intentions of nature in things which retain their nature, and not in things which are corrupted. And therefore we must study the man who is in the most perfect state both of body and soul, for in him we shall see the true relation of the two; although in bad or corrupted natures the body will often appear to rule over the soul, because they are in an evil and unnatural condition. At all events we may firstly observe in living creatures both a despotic and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotic rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule. And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. The same holds good of animals in relation to men; for tame animals have a better nature than wild, and all tame animals are better off when they are ruled by man; for then they are preserved. Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.

Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. For he who can be, and therefore is, another’s and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature. Whereas the lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle; they obey their instincts. And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life. Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labor, the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace. But the opposite often happens- that some have the souls and others have the bodies of freemen.
And doubtless if men differed from one another in the mere forms of their bodies as much as the statues of the Gods do from men, all would acknowledge that the inferior class should be slaves of the superior. And if this is true of the body, how much more just that a similar distinction should exist in the soul? but the beauty of the body is seen, whereas the beauty of the soul is not seen. It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.

**Part VI**

But that those who take the opposite view have in a certain way right on their side, may be easily seen. For the words slavery and slave are used in two senses. There is a slave or slavery by law as well as by nature. The law of which I speak is a sort of convention - the law by which whatever is taken in war is supposed to belong to the victors. But this right many jurists impeach, as they would an orator who brought forward an unconstitutional measure: they detest the notion that, because one man has the power of doing violence and is superior in brute strength, another shall be his slave and subject. Even among philosophers there is a difference of opinion. The origin of the dispute, and what makes the views invade each other's territory, is as follows: in some sense virtue, when furnished with means, has actually the greatest power of exercising force; and as superior power is only found where there is superior excellence of some kind, power seems to imply virtue, and the dispute to be simply one about justice (for it is due to one party identifying justice with goodwill while the other identifies it with the mere rule of the stronger). If these views are thus set out separately, the other views have no force or plausibility against the view that the superior in virtue ought to rule, or be master. Others, clinging, as they think, simply to a principle of justice (for law and custom are a sort of justice), assume that slavery in accordance with the custom of war is justified by law, but at the same moment they deny this. For what if the cause of the war be unjust? And again, no one would ever say he is a slave who is unworthy to be a slave. Were this the case, men of the highest rank would be slaves and the children of slaves if they or their parents chance to have been taken captive and sold. Wherefore Hellenes do not like to call Hellenes slaves, but confine the term to barbarians. Yet, in using this language, they really mean the natural slave of whom we spoke at first; for it must be admitted that some are slaves everywhere, others nowhere. The same principle applies to nobility. Hellenes regard themselves as noble everywhere, and not only in their own country, but they deem the barbarians noble only when at home, thereby implying that there are two sorts of nobility and freedom, the one absolute, the other relative. The Helen of Theodectes says:

"Who would presume to call me servant who am on both sides sprung from the stem of the Gods?"

What does this mean but that they distinguish freedom and slavery, noble and humble birth, by the two principles of good and evil? They think that as men and animals beget men and animals, so from good men a good man springs. But this is what nature, though she may intend it, cannot always accomplish.
We see then that there is some foundation for this difference of opinion, and that all are not either slaves by nature or freemen by nature, and also that there is in some cases a marked distinction between the two classes, rendering it expedient and right for the one to be slaves and the others to be masters: the one practicing obedience, the others exercising the authority and lordship which nature intended them to have. The abuse of this authority is injurious to both; for the interests of part and whole, of body and soul, are the same, and the slave is a part of the master, a living but separated part of his bodily frame. Hence, where the relation of master and slave between them is natural they are friends and have a common interest, but where it rests merely on law and force the reverse is true.

Part VII

The previous remarks are quite enough to show that the rule of a master is not a constitutional rule, and that all the different kinds of rule are not, as some affirm, the same with each other. For there is one rule exercised over subjects who are by nature free, another over subjects who are by nature slaves. The rule of a household is a monarchy, for every house is under one head: whereas constitutional rule is a government of freemen and equals. The master is not called a master because he has science, but because he is of a certain character, and the same remark applies to the slave and the freeman. Still there may be a science for the master and science for the slave. The science of the slave would be such as the man of Syracuse taught, who made money by instructing slaves in their ordinary duties. And such a knowledge may be carried further, so as to include cookery and similar menial arts. For some duties are of the more necessary, others of the more honorable sort; as the proverb says, 'slave before slave, master before master.' But all such branches of knowledge are servile. There is likewise a science of the master, which teaches the use of slaves; for the master as such is concerned, not with the acquisition, but with the use of them. Yet this so-called science is not anything great or wonderful; for the master need only know how to order that which the slave must know how to execute. Hence those who are in a position which places them above toil have stewards who attend to their households while they occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics. But the art of acquiring slaves, I mean of justly acquiring them, differs both from the art of the master and the art of the slave, being a species of hunting or war. Enough of the distinction between master and slave.

Part VIII

Let us now inquire into property generally, and into the art of getting wealth, in accordance with our usual method, for a slave has been shown to be a part of property. The first question is whether the art of getting wealth is the same with the art of managing a household or a part of it, or instrumental to it; and if the last, whether in the way that the art of making shuttles is instrumental to the art of weaving, or in the way that the casting of bronze is instrumental to the art of the statuary, for they are not instrumental in the same way, but the one provides tools and the other material; and by material I mean the substratum out of which any work is made; thus wool is the material of the weaver, bronze of the statuary. Now it is
easy to see that the art of household management is not identical with the art of getting wealth, for the one uses the material which the other provides. For the art which uses household stores can be no other than the art of household management. There is, however, a doubt whether the art of getting wealth is a part of household management or a distinct art. If the getter of wealth has to consider whence wealth and property can be procured, but there are many sorts of property and riches, then are husbandry, and the care and provision of food in general, parts of the wealth-getting art or distinct arts? Again, there are many sorts of food, and therefore there are many kinds of lives both of animals and men; they must all have food, and the differences in their food have made differences in their ways of life. For of beasts, some are gregarious, others are solitary; they live in the way which is best adapted to sustain them, accordingly as they are carnivorous or herbivorous or omnivorous: and their habits are determined for them by nature in such a manner that they may obtain with greater facility the food of their choice. But, as different species have different tastes, the same things are not naturally pleasant to all of them; and therefore the lives of carnivorous or herbivorous animals further differ among themselves. In the lives of men too there is a great difference. The laziest are shepherds, who lead an idle life, and get their subsistence without trouble from tame animals; their flocks having to wander from place to place in search of pasture, they are compelled to follow them, cultivating a sort of living farm. Others support themselves by hunting, which is of different kinds. Some, for example, are brigands, others, who dwell near lakes or marshes or rivers or a sea in which there are fish, are fishermen, and others live by the pursuit of birds or wild beasts. The greater number obtain a living from the cultivated fruits of the soil. Such are the modes of subsistence which prevail among those whose industry springs up of itself, and whose food is not acquired by exchange and retail trade- there is the shepherd, the husbandman, the brigand, the fisherman, the hunter. Some gain a comfortable maintenance out of two employments, eking out the deficiencies of one of them by another: thus the life of a shepherd may be combined with that of a brigand, the life of a farmer with that of a hunter. Other modes of life are similarly combined in any way which the needs of men may require. Property, in the sense of a bare livelihood, seems to be given by nature herself to all, both when they are first born, and when they are grown up. For some animals bring forth, together with their offspring, so much food as will last until they are able to supply themselves; of this the verminous or oviparous animals are an instance; and the viviparous animals have up to a certain time a supply of food for their young in themselves, which is called milk. In like manner we may infer that, after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man. And so, in one point of view, the art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practice against wild beasts, and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just.

Of the art of acquisition then there is one kind which by nature is a part of the
management of a household, in so far as the art of household management must either find ready to hand, or itself provide, such things necessary to life, and useful for the community of the family or state, as can be stored. They are the elements of true riches; for the amount of property which is needed for a good life is not unlimited, although Solon in one of his poems says that

"No bound to riches has been fixed for man."

But there is a boundary fixed, just as there is in the other arts; for the instruments of any art are never unlimited, either in number or size, and riches may be defined as a number of instruments to be used in a household or in a state. And so we see that there is a natural art of acquisition which is practiced by managers of households and by statesmen, and what is the reason of this.
Chapter Four

Plato
4.1: Reading Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, which is a form of evidence and appeal appearing in his larger work, *The Republic*, written as a conversation or dialogue between Socrates (who relates the story of the allegory) and Glaucon (Plato’s brother), is a significant section which has influenced other writers and thinkers to this day as a way of thinking about knowledge, action, education, and responsibility in a civic context. It might even fall into the category of an argument based on nature: meaning: this is the way the world would appear to work when we think about how to determine or develop a position on a subject or determine a problem.

From a literary point of view, reading this kind of work and digging out its significance requires the critically thinking reader to identify how the things, people, or events explored in the “allegory” reflect other things, people, or events in the real world. A bird in an allegory might signify “freedom,” for example. The light in Plato’s allegory, as an additional example, might signify knowledge. The *Allegory of the Cave* is supposed to mean something to the reader; its purpose is to be understood for its purpose, much like a game is meant to be won or lost.

**Method of Study**

The reader should consider the first sentence of the selection in relation to Aristotle’s *Politics*, the *Declaration*, de Tocqueville, Madison on Education, Wollstonecraft, and Toni Morrison’s Nobel Lecture (some of these works may not be read in this course because of time limitations), where she uses the same technique to illustrate the significance of language to understanding, readings which may appear in other modules of this text. For our current purposes, we should think about the first sentence of the *Allegory of the Cave* in our present study. It reads:

… I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—
Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads.

Plato uses the word “figure” as the eighth word in the initial sentence. What he means here or as the word is translated to mean is as an introduction to a kind of “figure of speech” or metaphor, illustration, example, anecdote, or in this case an extended metaphor called an allegory. Let’s say the thinker wants to explain how a can opener works to someone who has never experienced a can opener. The thinker would have to use some sort of comparison to things that the reader or listener may understand. So to shorthand Plato’s first sentence, we’d say, assuming this is speech: if you want to now how it is that people understand a concept or understand the world or what our general condition is, let me provide the reader or thinker an illustration or explanation. Thus the word: “Behold!” or in other words, “check this out.”

“Human beings” follows to signal that this is the way the world is for most of us. In our world, according to Plato, we’re stuck in a cave facing a wall back-lit by the cave opening. We’re stuck in this situation from birth to our current age. What appears on the wall is the world as we “know or experience it,” in our “enlightened” or “unenlightened” position. The student thinker might already be considering how this “allegory” and its gathering of metaphors is comparable to modern computer and cell phone screens because Plato is using the same kind of idea: his people in the cave are watching a screen. In this regard, consider the new phenomenon of “deep fake” video or photography where what appears to be real is really false. Consider this video of ducks crossing a street, which appears real, but never really happened. See hoaxeye for more of this sort of fakery.

In the Allegory of the Cave, the image of the shadows is significant to the initial part of the story. The people in the cave can “only” see the shadows thrown by the

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71 A story that might reveal a meaning about something else.
72 Light is a traditional metaphor for knowledge or knowing.
73 The condition of not knowing or ignorance. Ignorance does imply lack of ability but a lack or knowledge or a will avoidance of it: To ignore.
object above and behind them, and it is these shadows they take for reality, not the “real” objects that cast the shadows. In modern terminology, we think of these kinds of casted shadows as the things or objects we experience daily. The car you drive or the ideas you believe to be true or false are, in this sense, shadows cast against the screen (what you see) in front of you, but it is the physical objects that cast the shadows that constitute “reality.” What we experience day to day are the shadows on the wall not the real objects.

For many thinkers, this explains why people disagree with each other; it explains why people have trouble getting past differences, problems, and personalities. It explains why the world is a mass of often competing interests.

However, this is just the beginning of peoples’ experience. The student thinker has to be able to follow Plato’s logic about what comes if a person frees themselves from the cave. Does the logic that Plato follows makes sense to you as you follow the conversation and its development?

Understanding the Nature of Things

Socrates (the author is Plato) in the Allegory asks this question of Glaucon: what would happen if a person was set free from the confines of the cave and what then what happens after all all that? Can the student reader identify and describe how Socrates explains the observer’s potential change, going from observing and judging shadows versus the “true” objects that are now in their field of view, such as the moon and the stars?

Plato throughout our section of the Allegory will explain what all this is supposed to mean, such as the movement out of the cave representing education and learning.

But a significant issue in the Allegory also has a lot to do with the potential responsibility that comes with this education. One of the ideas that the student reader will want to know is this: Plato has a problem he’s trying to solve here which goes to the purpose of the Allegory. So, the question becomes, what’s the point?
Basic Questions

Why are citizens and residents of the United States required to go to school?

Sometimes people can cut out prior to graduating high school. But why does compulsory education go to 12 years? Why not 10?

What does it mean for a person to be educated?

Why can’t a young child choose not to be educated?

Are there alternatives to the kinds of education people receive in the United States?

Can a person remain in the Plato’s cave and survive?

Plato writes:

But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

What do you think the author here means that the “idea of good appears last of all”?
The Allegory of the Cave: Chapter 7 of The Republic

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp

74 From Plato, The Republic, Chapter 7.
pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision,—what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them,—will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take refuge in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer,

'Better to be the poor servant of a poor master,'

and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions
and live in this miserable manner.

Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable), would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed—whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.

Yes, very natural.

And is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in courts of law, or in other places, about the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavouring to meet the conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice?

Anything but surprising, he replied.

Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind’s eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above.
out of the light into the den.

That, he said, is a very just distinction.

But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

Very true.

And must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?

Yes, he said, such an art may be presumed.

And whereas the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be akin to bodily qualities, for even when they are not originally innate they can be implanted later by habit and exercise, the virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; or, on the other hand, hurtful and useless. Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue—how eager he is, how clearly his paltry soul sees the way to his end; he is the reverse of blind, but his keen eye-sight is forced into the service of evil, and he is mischievous in proportion to his cleverness?

Very true, he said.

But what if there had been a circumcision of such natures in the days of their youth; and they had been severed from those sensual pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which, like leaden weights, were attached to them at their birth, and which drag them down and turn the vision of their souls upon the things that are below—if, I say, they had been released from these impediments and turned in the opposite direction, the very same faculty in them would have seen the truth as keenly as they see what their eyes are turned to now.

Very likely.

Yes, I said; and there is another thing which is likely, or rather a necessary inference from what has preceded, that neither the uneducated and uninformed of the truth, nor yet those who never make an end of their education, will be able ministers of State; not the former, because they have no single aim of duty which is the rule of all their actions, private as well as public; nor the latter, because they will not act at all except upon compulsion, fancying that they are already dwelling apart in the islands of the blest.

Very true, he replied.

Then, I said, the business of us who are the founders of the State will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all—they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now.
What do you mean?
I mean that they remain in the upper world: but this must not be allowed; they must be made to descend again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labours and honours, whether they are worth having or not.

But is not this unjust? he said; ought we to give them a worse life, when they might have a better?

You have again forgotten, my friend, I said, the intention of the legislator, who did not aim at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole State, and he held the citizens together by persuasion and necessity, making them benefactors of the State, and therefore benefactors of one another; to this end he created them, not to please themselves, but to be his instruments in binding up the State.

True, he said, I had forgotten.

Observe, Glaucon, that there will be no injustice in compelling our philosophers to have a care and providence of others; we shall explain to them that in other States, men of their class are not obliged to share in the toils of politics: and this is reasonable, for they grow up at their own sweet will, and the government would rather not have them. Being self-taught, they cannot be expected to show any gratitude for a culture which they have never received. But we have brought you into the world to be rulers of the hive, kings of yourselves and of the other citizens, and have educated you far better and more perfectly than they have been educated, and you are better able to share in the double duty. Wherefore each of you, when his turn comes, must go down to the general underground abode, and get the habit of seeing in the dark. When you have acquired the habit, you will see ten thousand times better than the inhabitants of the den, and you will know what the several images are, and what they represent, because you have seen the beautiful and just and good in their truth. And thus our State, which is also yours, will be a reality, and not a dream only, and will be administered in a spirit unlike that of other States, in which men fight with one another about shadows only and are distracted in the struggle for power, which in their eyes is a great good. Whereas the truth is that the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed, and the State in which they are most eager, the worst.

Quite true, he replied.

And will our pupils, when they hear this, refuse to take their turn at the toils of State, when they are allowed to spend the greater part of their time with one another in the heavenly light?

Impossible, he answered; for they are just men, and the commands which we impose upon them are just; there can be no doubt that every one of them will take office as a stern necessity, and not after the fashion of our present rulers of State.

Yes, my friend, I said; and there lies the point. You must contrive for your future rulers another and a better life than that of a ruler, and then you may have a well-ordered State; for only in the State which offers this, will they rule who are truly rich, not in silver and gold, but in virtue and wisdom, which are the true blessings of life. Whereas if they go to the administration of public affairs, poor and hungering after their own private advantage, thinking that hence they are to snatch the chief good, order there can never be; for they will be fighting about office,
and the civil and domestic broils which thus arise will be the ruin of the rulers themselves and of the whole State.

Most true, he replied.

...
Chapter Five

Machiavelli
CHAPTER VIII — CONCERNING THOSE WHO HAVE OBTAINED A PRINCIPALITY BY WICKEDNESS

Although a prince may rise from a private station in two ways, neither of which can be entirely attributed to fortune or genius, yet it is manifest to me that I must not be silent on them, although one could be more copiously treated when I discuss republics. These methods are when, either by some wicked or nefarious ways, one ascends to the principality, or when by the favour of his fellow-citizens a private person becomes the prince of his country. And speaking of the first method, it will be illustrated by two examples—one ancient, the other modern—and without entering further into the subject, I consider these two examples will suffice those who may be compelled to follow them.

Agathocles, the Sicilian,(* *) became King of Syracuse not only from a private but from a low and abject position. This man, the son of a potter, through all the changes in his fortunes always led an infamous life. Nevertheless, he accompanied his infamies with so much ability of mind and body that, having devoted himself to the military profession, he rose through its ranks to be Praetor of Syracuse. Being established in that position, and having deliberately resolved to make himself prince and to seize by violence, without obligation to others, that which had been conceded to him by assent, he came to an understanding for this purpose with Amilcar, the Carthaginian, who, with his army, was fighting in Sicily. One morning he assembled the people and the senate of Syracuse, as if he had to discuss with them things relating to the Republic, and at a given signal the soldiers killed all the senators and the richest of the people; these dead, he seized and held the principedom of that city without any civil commotion. And although he was twice routed by the Carthaginians, and ultimately besieged, yet not only was he able to defend his city, but leaving part of his men for its defence, with the others he attacked Africa, and in a short time raised the siege of Syracuse. The Carthaginians, reduced to extreme necessity, were compelled to come to terms with Agathocles, and, leaving Sicily to him, had to be content with the possession of Africa.

(* *) Agathocles the Sicilian, born 361 B.C., died 289 B.C.

Therefore, he who considers the actions and the genius of this man will see nothing, or little, which can be attributed to fortune, inasmuch as he attained pre-eminence, as is shown above, not by the favour of any one, but step by step in the military profession, which steps were gained with a thousand troubles and perils, and were afterwards boldly held by him with many hazardous dangers. Yet it cannot be called talent to slay fellow-citizens, to deceive friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; such methods may gain empire, but not glory. Still, if the courage of Agathocles in entering into and extricating himself from
dangers be considered, together with his greatness of mind in enduring and overcoming hardships, it cannot be seen why he should be esteemed less than the most notable captain. Nevertheless, his barbarous cruelty and inhumanity with infinite wickedness do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men. What he achieved cannot be attributed either to fortune or genius.

In our times, during the rule of Alexander the Sixth, Oliverotto da Fermo, having been left an orphan many years before, was brought up by his maternal uncle, Giovanni Fogliani, and in the early days of his youth sent to fight under Pagolo Vitelli, that, being trained under his discipline, he might attain some high position in the military profession. After Pagolo died, he fought under his brother Vitellozzo, and in a very short time, being endowed with wit and a vigorous body and mind, he became the first man in his profession. But it appearing a paltry thing to serve under others, he resolved, with the aid of some citizens of Fermo, to whom the slavery of their country was dearer than its liberty, and with the help of the Vitelleschi, to seize Fermo. So he wrote to Giovanni Fogliani that, having been away from home for many years, he wished to visit him and his city, and in some measure to look upon his patrimony; and although he had not laboured to acquire anything except honour, yet, in order that the citizens should see he had not spent his time in vain, he desired to come honourably, so would be accompanied by one hundred horsemen, his friends and retainers; and he entreated Giovanni to arrange that he should be received honourably by the Fermians, all of which would be not only to his honour, but also to that of Giovanni himself, who had brought him up.

Giovanni, therefore, did not fail in any attentions due to his nephew, and he caused him to be honourably received by the Fermians, and he lodged him in his own house, where, having passed some days, and having arranged what was necessary for his wicked designs, Oliverotto gave a solemn banquet to which he invited Giovanni Fogliani and the chiefs of Fermo. When the viands and all the other entertainments that are usual in such banquets were finished, Oliverotto artfully began certain grave discourses, speaking of the greatness of Pope Alexander and his son Cesare, and of their enterprises, to which discourse Giovanni and others answered; but he rose at once, saying that such matters ought to be discussed in a more private place, and he betook himself to a chamber, whither Giovanni and the rest of the citizens went in after him. No sooner were they seated than soldiers issued from secret places and slaughtered Giovanni and the rest. After these murders Oliverotto, mounted on horseback, rode up and down the town and besieged the chief magistrate in the palace, so that in fear the people were forced to obey him, and to form a government, of which he made himself the prince. He killed all the malcontents who were able to injure him, and strengthened himself with new civil and military ordinances, in such a way that, in the year during which he held the principality, not only was he secure in the city of Fermo, but he had become formidable to all his neighbours. And his destruction would have been as difficult as that of Agathocles if he had not allowed himself to be overreached by Cesare Borgia, who took him with the Orsini and Vitelli at Sinigalia, as was stated above. Thus one year after he had committed this parricide, he was strangled, together with Vitellozzo, whom he had made his leader in valour and wickedness.

Some may wonder how it can happen that Agathocles, and his like, after infinite treacheries and cruelties, should live for long secure in his country, and defend himself from
external enemies, and never be conspired against by his own citizens; seeing that many others, by means of cruelty, have never been able even in peaceful times to hold the state, still less in the doubtful times of war. I believe that this follows from severities\(^\text{75}\)\(^(*)\) being badly or properly used. Those may be called properly used, if of evil it is possible to speak well, that are applied at one blow and are necessary to one’s security, and that are not persisted in afterwards unless they can be turned to the advantage of the subjects. The badly employed are those which, notwithstanding they may be few in the commencement, multiply with time rather than decrease. Those who practise the first system are able, by aid of God or man, to mitigate in some degree their rule, as Agathocles did. It is impossible for those who follow the other to maintain themselves.

Hence it is to be remarked that, in seizing a state, the usurper ought to examine closely into all those injuries which it is necessary for him to inflict, and to do them all at one stroke so as not to have to repeat them daily; and thus by not unsettling men he will be able to reassure them, and win them to himself by benefits. He who does otherwise, either from timidity or evil advice, is always compelled to keep the knife in his hand; neither can he rely on his subjects, nor can they attach themselves to him, owing to their continued and repeated wrongs. For injuries ought to be done all at one time, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; benefits ought to be given little by little, so that the flavour of them may last longer.

And above all things, a prince ought to live amongst his people in such a way that no unexpected circumstances, whether of good or evil, shall make him change; because if the necessity for this comes in troubled times, you are too late for harsh measures; and mild ones will not help you, for they will be considered as forced from you, and no one will be under any obligation to you for them.

\(^{75}\) Mr Burd suggests that this word probably comes near the modern equivalent of Machiavelli’s thought when he speaks of ”crudelta” than the more obvious ”cruelties.”
CHAPTER IX: Concerning a Civil Principality

OF THE CIVIC PRINCIPALITY

But coming to the other point—where a leading citizen becomes the prince of his country, not by wickedness or any intolerable violence, but by the favour of his fellow citizens—this may be called a civil principality: nor is genius or fortune altogether necessary to attain to it, but rather a happy shrewdness. I say then that such a principality is obtained either by the favour of the people or by the favour of the nobles. Because in all cities these two distinct parties are found, and from this it arises that the people do not wish to be ruled nor oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles wish to rule and oppress the people; and from these two opposite desires there arises in cities one of three results, either a principality, self-government, or anarchy.

A principality is created either by the people or by the nobles, accordingly as one or other of them has the opportunity; for the nobles, seeing they cannot withstand the people, begin to cry up the reputation of one of themselves, and they make him a prince, so that under his shadow they can give vent to their ambitions. The people, finding they cannot resist the nobles, also cry up the reputation of one of themselves, and make him a prince so as to be defended by his authority. He who obtains sovereignty by the assistance of the nobles maintains himself with more difficulty than he who comes to it by the aid of the people, because the former finds himself with many around him who consider themselves his equals, and because of this he can neither rule nor manage them to his liking. But he who reaches sovereignty by popular favour finds himself alone, and has none around him, or few, who are not prepared to obey him.

Besides this, one cannot by fair dealing, and without injury to others, satisfy the nobles, but you can satisfy the people, for their object is more righteous than that of the nobles, the latter wishing to oppress, while the former only desire not to be oppressed. It is to be added also that a prince can never secure himself against a hostile people, because of there being too many, whilst from the nobles he can secure himself, as they are few in number. The worst that a prince may expect from a hostile people is to be abandoned by them; but from hostile nobles he has not only to fear abandonment, but also that they will rise against him; for they, being in these affairs more far-seeing and astute, always come forward in time to save themselves, and to obtain favours from him whom they expect to prevail. Further, the prince is compelled to live always with the same people, but he can do well without the same nobles, being able to make and unmake them daily, and to give or take away authority when it pleases him.

Therefore, to make this point clearer, I say that the nobles ought to be looked at mainly in two ways: that is to say, they either shape their course in such a way as binds them entirely to your fortune, or they do not. Those who so bind themselves, and are not rapacious, ought to be
honoured and loved; those who do not bind themselves may be dealt with in two ways; they may fail to do this through pusillanimity and a natural want of courage, in which case you ought to make use of them, especially of those who are of good counsel; and thus, whilst in prosperity you honour them, in adversity you do not have to fear them. But when for their own ambitious ends they shun binding themselves, it is a token that they are giving more thought to themselves than to you, and a prince ought to guard against such, and to fear them as if they were open enemies, because in adversity they always help to ruin him.

Therefore, one who becomes a prince through the favour of the people ought to keep them friendly, and this he can easily do seeing they only ask not to be oppressed by him. But one who, in opposition to the people, becomes a prince by the favour of the nobles, ought, above everything, to seek to win the people over to himself, and this he may easily do if he takes them under his protection. Because men, when they receive good from him of whom they were expecting evil, are bound more closely to their benefactor; thus the people quickly become more devoted to him than if he had been raised to the principality by their favours; and the prince can win their affections in many ways, but as these vary according to the circumstances one cannot give fixed rules, so I omit them; but, I repeat, it is necessary for a prince to have the people friendly, otherwise he has no security in adversity.

Nabis, Prince of the Spartans, sustained the attack of all Greece, and of a victorious Roman army, and against them he defended his country and his government; and for the overcoming of this peril it was only necessary for him to make himself secure against a few, but this would not have been sufficient had the people been hostile. And do not let any one impugn this statement with the trite proverb that "He who builds on the people, builds on the mud," for this is true when a private citizen makes a foundation there, and persuades himself that the people will free him when he is oppressed by his enemies or by the magistrates; wherein he would find himself very often deceived, as happened to the Gracchi in Rome and to Messer Giorgio Scali in Florence. But granted a prince who has established himself as above, who can command, and is a man of courage, undismayed in adversity, who does not fail in other qualifications, and who, by his resolution and energy, keeps the whole people encouraged—such a one will never find himself deceived in them, and it will be shown that he has laid his foundations well.

(*) Nabis, tyrant of Sparta, conquered by the Romans under Flamininus in 195 B.C.; killed 192 B.C.

(+) Messer Giorgio Scali. This event is to be found in Machiavelli's "Florentine History," Book III.

These principalities are liable to danger when they are passing from the civil to the absolute order of government, for such princes either rule personally or through magistrates. In the latter case their government is weaker and more insecure, because it rests entirely on the goodwill of those citizens who are raised to the magistracy, and who, especially in troubled times, can destroy the government with great ease, either by intrigue or open defiance; and the prince has not the chance amid tumults to exercise absolute authority, because the citizens and subjects, accustomed to receive orders from magistrates, are not of a mind to obey him amid
these confusions, and there will always be in doubtful times a scarcity of men whom he can trust. For such a prince cannot rely upon what he observes in quiet times, when citizens have need of the state, because then every one agrees with him; they all promise, and when death is far distant they all wish to die for him; but in troubled times, when the state has need of its citizens, then he finds but few. And so much the more is this experiment dangerous, inasmuch as it can only be tried once. Therefore a wise prince ought to adopt such a course that his citizens will always in every sort and kind of circumstance have need of the state and of him, and then he will always find them faithful.
6.1: Reading Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is a significant work that makes a case against adhering to the traditional roles that people should play in society and culture. There is a lot of history behind the work, especially regarding arguments swirling in the late 18th century and early 19th century about tradition, custom, and, specifically, that women and men should live and organize society based on traditional feminine and masculine definitions. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is generally judged as one of the most powerful arguments in favor of liberty, education, and the extensions of civil and political rights to women and a powerful expression of the benefits of these possibilities for people and society in general. Broadly speaking, tradition claimed that women should aim for beauty and passivity, while men’s lives should strive for strength, power, and learning. Her’s is a significant work in the history of ideas because of the influence she exerted on future thinkers and activists.

One essay here can hardly capture the energy of the times in which Wollstonecraft wrote, which saw the American, Haitian, and French revolutions in full force, and other significant changes in society.

**Reading Wollstonecraft**

One big idea in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* that a student thinker might engage is the idea of corruption, especially if the idea is pursued in the context of Plato’s *Allegory*, Jefferson’s *Declaration* and the American Constitution’s 19th Amendment. Girls in her day, according to Wollstonecraft, are raised and educated to be attractive to men when they become women, as “ornaments,” nurturers of children, and home-bound servants to the needs of men and boys. This “definition” regarding women neglects their “real” natures as thinking human beings, argues Wollstonecraft, restricting other possibilities, such as the development of mental ability, discipline, and fuller definitions of what it means to be a person. She writes
To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character: or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue.

In this way, their natures are forced into customary stereotypes or actors and this forcing or set of imposed controls is ultimately unethical, immoral, and thus a corruption of reality, harming women and men in terms of virtue, as Montaigne knew this term.

Another idea that Wollstonecraft treats is the idea of equality and its relationship to morality and human possibility. Equality has a lot to with the possible choices one might have in life. The author uses the idea of equality not for strict comparison of men and women, but as a means of thinking about possibility and a measuring stick for what we might call reality. Equality for Wollstonecraft does not mean that if given the chance people will suddenly be able to climb as well as monkeys or attain the strength of gorillas. One might be offered, however, the chance to try. Restriction, in this sense, is a way of defining.

In addition, another significant idea to consider is Wollstonecraft’s method. By method I mean the techniques Wollstonecraft uses to make her case, using arguments, evidence, and appeals to develop her case. Wollstonecraft often appeals to the very methods of argumentation and reason (typically domains reserved for men) to appeal to her reading audience, aggressively applying a persuasive framework throughout her long work.

__76__ See note in the following excerpt.
From Chapter Two of A Vindication of the Rights of
Women: THE PREVAILING OPINION OF A
SEXUAL CHARACTER DISCUSSED.

To account for, and excuse the tyranny\(^{77}\) of man, many ingenious arguments have been
brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at
attaining a very different character: or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have
sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet it should
seem, allowing them to have souls\(^{78}\), that there is but one way appointed by providence\(^{79}\) to
lead MANKIND to either virtue or happiness.

If then women are not a swarm\(^{80}\) of ephemeron triftlers\(^{81}\), why should they be kept in
ignorance under the specious name of innocence\(^{82}\)? Men complain, and with reason, of the
follies and caprices of our sex\(^{83}\), when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and
groveling vices. Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance\(^{84}\)! The mind will ever
be unstable that has only prejudices\(^{85}\) to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury
when there are no barriers to break its force. Women are told from their infancy, and taught by
the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed
cunning, softness of temper, OUTWARD obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile

\(^{77}\) Maintaining the status quo, which places men in positions of power over women and
girls.

\(^{78}\) This may go to the idea of agency: meaning, having their own minds or motivations or
goals outside of what others may want for them.

\(^{79}\) Traditionally, providence here means some sort of God-given plan, or some plan outside
of an individual’s control, such as a parent’s intention for a child.

\(^{80}\) Wollstonecraft knows how to apply diction: a swarm is a mass of beings that doesn’t
think but follows what everyone else thinks is true, false, right, wrong, better than . . .

\(^{81}\) Trivial actors

\(^{82}\) Traditionally, this goes to the Aristotelean notion of one’s natural place in the order of
relationships. See definition of Aristotelean.

\(^{83}\) Women or girls

\(^{84}\) Meaning: if people are denied philosophical education (liberal arts), they will remain
ignorant, or kept in their place.

\(^{85}\) See the next sentence
kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives.

Thus Milton describes our first frail mother; though when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation.

How grossly do they insult us, who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes! For instance, the winning softness, so warmly, and frequently recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expressions, and how insignificant is the being—can it be an immortal one? who will condescend to govern by such sinister methods! "Certainly," says Lord Bacon, "man is of kin to the beasts by his body: and if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature!" Men, indeed, appear to me to act in a very unphilosophical manner, when they try to secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood. Rousseau was more consistent when he wished to stop the progress of reason in both sexes; for if men eat of the tree of knowledge, women will come in for a taste: but, from the imperfect cultivation which their understandings now receive, they only attain a knowledge of evil.

Consequently, the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart; or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent.

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86 Meaning: should men be in charge of defining what women or girls should want in or from life?
87 This reference will be obscure to readers who are unfamiliar with John Milton, whose work *Paradise Lost* was significant in influencing readers about the roles and virtues of women in a biblical context, i.e., traditional. For a Tunxis context, student should take the course British Literature I.
88 Eve. See the *Book of Genesis*.
89 A reference to Islam.
90 A reference to the question: should women’s role in life only be about pleasing men?
91 Again, a reference to a traditional view of women: that they should be concerned solely to pleasing men or maintaining a household.
92 Francis Bacon, born 1561 in England. Credited with significantly influencing our ideas on the scientific method.
93 Childhood is traditionally thought to be a symbol for innocence and purity. Here Wollstonecraft is about debunking an argument from nature or tradition.
94 A compositional technique used by Wollstonecraft to claim, given what I’ve been writing about or explaining, here’s why women should be educated beyond tradition or nature.
95 See Montaigne: *That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die*.
96 Independent from the typical roles Wollstonecraft was explore in the prior paragraphs. Or: rendering women as independent thinkers.
In fact, it is a farce to call any being whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau’s opinion respecting men: I extend it to women, and confidently assert that they have been drawn out of their sphere by false refinement, and not by an endeavour to acquire masculine qualities. Still the regal homage which they receive is so intoxicating, that, till the manners of the times are changed, and formed on more reasonable principles, it may be impossible to convince them that the illegitimate power, which they obtain by degrading themselves, is a curse, and that they must return to nature and equality, if they wish to secure the placid satisfaction that unsophisticated affections impart. But for this epoch we must wait—wait, perhaps, till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason, and, preferring the real dignity of man to childish state, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings; and if then women do not resign the arbitrary power of beauty, they will prove that they have LESS mind than man. I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare, what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weaker characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a lower key; but I am afraid it would have been the whine of affectation, and not the faithful expression of my feelings, of the clear result, which experience and reflection have led me to draw. When I come to that division of the subject, I shall advert to the passages that I more particularly disapprove of, in the works of the authors I have just alluded to; but it is first necessary to observe, that my objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue.

Though to reason on Rousseau’s ground, if man did attain a degree of perfection of mind when his body arrived at maturity, it might be proper in order to make a man and his wife ONE, that she should rely entirely on his understanding; and the graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, would form a whole in which strength and beauty would be equally

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97 Human being

98 Meaning: to be independent of some outside influence. In other words, someone who can make up their own mind, rather than being forced into a specific role assigned by others.

99 Wollstonecraft considers the traditional roles of women to be false or wrong or harmful, not just to women but also to men.

100 Here Wollstonecraft appeals to counterargument.

101 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Swiss writer, who died in 1778.

102 Dr. John Gregory was a famous Scottish physician and moralist, who, in his work *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, makes the case that women who have learning should hide it because it would harm their ability to attracted a husband. This work was published by his son, James. It’s unknown whether the father ever intended this work for a wider audience.

103 In this section, Wollstonecraft signals that she’s moving into her arguments after establishing the problem. Much of Wollstonecraft’s work asserts counterargument as she attempts to prove that women and men would benefit from allowing women access to a liberal arts education.
conspicuous. But, alas! husbands, as well as their helpmates, are often only overgrown children; nay, thanks to early debauchery, scarcely men in their outward form, and if the blind lead the blind, one need not come from heaven to tell us the consequence.

Many are the causes that, in the present corrupt state of society, contribute to enslave women by cramping their understandings and sharpening their senses\textsuperscript{104}. One, perhaps, that silently does more mischief than all the rest, is their disregard of order\textsuperscript{105}.

To do every thing in an orderly\textsuperscript{106} manner, is a most important precept, which women, who, generally speaking, receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom attend to with that degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy are broken into method, observe. This negligent kind of guesswork, for what other epithet can be used to point out the random exertions of a sort of instinctive common sense, never brought to the test of reason? prevents their generalizing matters of fact, so they do to-day, what they did yesterday, merely because they did it yesterday\textsuperscript{107}.

This contempt of the understanding in early life has more baneful consequences than is commonly supposed; for the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory\textsuperscript{108} kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour\textsuperscript{109} necessary to give vigour to the faculties\textsuperscript{110}, and clearness to the judgment. In the present state of society, a little learning is required to support the character of a gentleman; and boys are obliged to submit to a few years of discipline\textsuperscript{111}. But in the education of women the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment; even while enervated by confinement and false notions of modesty, the body\textsuperscript{112} is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which

\textsuperscript{104} A key and famous passage in the text. It’s not just an issue for women but for anyone denied access to those virtues judged as ethical or moral.

\textsuperscript{105} If women are not allowed the kind of education traditionally reserved for men, then order is corrupted because the traditional roles of women preserve a false understanding of human nature as a whole. A hint at the significance of Aristotle’s influence in the history of culture and ideas.

\textsuperscript{106} The idea of order in Wollstonecraft’s text is very important. It’s a key concept in our modern lives. Here the contrary notion, disorder, is related to corruption of truth.

\textsuperscript{107} An explicit appeal to arguments of tradition.

\textsuperscript{108} Disorganized. Without purpose or focus.

\textsuperscript{109} Passion or effort

\textsuperscript{110} To wake up a neglected ability

\textsuperscript{111} Training or learning

\textsuperscript{112} The whole person
relaxed half-formed\textsuperscript{113} limbs never exhibit. Besides, in youth their faculties are not brought forward by emulation; and having no serious scientific study, if they have natural sagacity it is turned too soon on life and manners. They dwell on effects, and modifications, without tracing them back to causes; and complicated rules to adjust behaviour are a weak substitute for simple principles.

As a proof that education gives this appearance of weakness to females, we may instance the example of military men\textsuperscript{114}, who are, like them, sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles. The consequences are similar; soldiers acquire a little superficial knowledge, snatched from the muddy current of conversation, and, from continually mixing with society, they gain, what is termed a knowledge of the world; and this acquaintance with manners and customs has frequently been confounded with a knowledge of the human heart. But can the crude fruit of casual observation, never brought to the test of judgment, formed by comparing speculation and experience, deserve such a distinction? Soldiers, as well as women, practice the minor virtues with punctilious politeness. Where is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same; all the difference that I can discern, arises from the superior advantage of liberty\textsuperscript{115} which enables the former to see more of life.

It is wandering\textsuperscript{116} from my present subject, perhaps, to make a political remark; but as it was produced naturally by the train of my reflections, I shall not pass it silently over.

Standing armies can never consist of resolute, robust men; they may be well disciplined machines, but they will seldom contain men under the influence of strong passions or with very vigorous faculties\textsuperscript{117}. And as for any depth of understanding, I will venture to affirm, that it is as rarely to be found in the army as amongst women; and the cause, I maintain, is the same. It may be further observed, that officers are also particularly attentive to their persons, fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures, and ridicule. Like the FAIR sex, the business of their lives is gallantry. They were taught to please, and they only live to please. Yet they do not lose their rank in the distinction of sexes, for they are still reckoned superior to women, though in what

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{113} A key theme: women are only partially formed intellectually if restricted from a liberal arts education.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Because they haven’t also been provided a balanced or fully formed education and thus they may not know how to apply fully-formed conclusions. Consider here modern critiques of police officers who must deal with all kinds of people in their daily job.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} See Montaigne. Or, see JS Mill \textit{On Liberty}.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} The reader might connect this aside to Montaigne. Sometimes the essay writer is straying off task to make a point or to explore some other, related, or significant idea. Perfectly acceptable.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Perhaps meaning, broader abilities rather than just their own intuition, experience, or limited or specific training. Here Wollstonecraft appears to grasp that specific training may limit the imagination.
\end{itemize}
their superiority\textsuperscript{118} consists, beyond what I have just mentioned, it is difficult to discover.

The great misfortune is this\textsuperscript{119}, that they both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have from reflection, any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural; satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices\textsuperscript{120}, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. So that if they have any sense, it is a kind of instinctive glance, that catches proportions, and decides with respect to manners; but fails when arguments are to be pursued below the surface, or opinions analyzed.

May not the same remark be applied to women? Nay, the argument may be carried still further, for they are both thrown out of a useful station by the unnatural distinctions established in civilized life. Riches and hereditary honours have made cyphers of women to give consequence to the numerical figure; and idleness has produced a mixture of gallantry and despotism in society, which leads the very men who are the slaves of their mistresses, to tyrannize over their sisters, wives, and daughters. This is only keeping them in rank and file, it is true. Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing. The sensualist, indeed, has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been duped by their lovers, as princes by their ministers, whilst dreaming that they reigned over them.

I now principally allude to Rousseau, for his character of Sophia is, undoubtedly, a captivating one, though it appears to me grossly unnatural; however, it is not the superstructure, but the foundation of her character, the principles on which her education was built, that I mean to attack; nay, warmly as I admire the genius of that able writer, whose opinions I shall often have occasion to cite, indignation always takes place of admiration, and the rigid frown of insulted virtue effaces the smile of complacency, which his eloquent periods are wont to raise, when I read his voluptuous reveries. Is this the man, who, in his ardour for virtue, would banish all the soft arts of peace, and almost carry us back to Spartan discipline? Is this the man who delights to paint the useful struggles of passion, the triumphs of good dispositions, and the heroic flights which carry the glowing soul out of itself? How are these mighty sentiments lowered when he describes the prettyfoot and enticing airs of his little favourite! But, for the present, I waive the subject, and, instead of severely reprehending the transient effusions of overweening sensibility, I shall only observe, that whoever has cast a benevolent eye on society, must often have been gratified by the sight of humble mutual love, not dignified by sentiment, nor strengthened by a union in intellectual pursuits. The domestic

\textsuperscript{118} Traditionally, superiority in this sense may mean the presumption that others should be allowed to make decisions for others or define the roles or behaviors that others should conform to. See Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s \textit{Letter from a Birmingham Jail}.

\textsuperscript{119} In plain language: and so the problem with all of this is . . .

\textsuperscript{120} Yet another key theme: prejudgment is learned because of limited understanding of broader ideas and other points of view.
trifles of the day have afforded matter for cheerful converse, and innocent caresses have softened toils which did not require great exercise of mind, or stretch of thought: yet, has not the sight of this moderate felicity excited more tenderness than respect? An emotion similar to what we feel when children are playing, or animals sporting, whilst the contemplation of the noble struggles of suffering merit has raised admiration, and carried our thoughts to that world where sensation will give place to reason.

Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.

Let us examine this question. Rousseau declares, that a woman should never, for a moment feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her NATURAL cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a SWEETER companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude the corner stones of all human virtue, shall be cultivated with certain restrictions, because with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.

What nonsense! When will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject! If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim.

... Women ought to endeavour to purify their hearts; but can they do so when their uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power? To gain the affections of a virtuous man, is affectation necessary?

Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man; but, to ensure her husband's affections, must a wife, who, by the exercise of her mind and body, whilst she was discharging the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother, has allowed her constitution to retain its natural strength, and her nerves a healthy tone, is she, I say, to condescend, to use art, and feign a sickly delicacy, in order to secure her husband's affection? Weakness may excite tenderness, and gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not gratify a noble mind that pants for and deserves to be respected. Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship!

In a seraglio, I grant, that all these arts are necessary; the epicure must have his palate tickled, or he will sink into apathy; but have women so little ambition as to be satisfied with such a condition? Can they supinely dream life away in the lap of pleasure, or in the languor of weariness, rather than assert their claim to pursue reasonable pleasures, and render themselves conspicuous, by practising the virtues which dignify mankind? Surely she has not an immortal soul who can loiter life away, merely employed to adorn her person, that she may amuse the languid hours, and soften the cares of a fellow-creature who is willing to be enlivened by her smiles and tricks, when the serious business of life is over.
Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing
her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of
her husband; and if she deserves his regard by possessing such substantial qualities, she will
not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of
constitution to excite her husband’s passions. In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that
the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the
most gentle of their sex.

…

Surely there can be but one rule of right, if morality has an eternal foundation, and
whoever sacrifices virtue, strictly so called, to present convenience, or whose DUTY it is to act
in such a manner, lives only for the passing day, and cannot be an accountable creature.

The poet then should have dropped his sneer when he says,
"If weak women go astray,
The stars are more in fault than they."

For that they are bound by the adamantine chain of destiny is most certain, if it be proved
that they are never to exercise their own reason, never to be independent, never to rise above
opinion, or to feel the dignity of a rational will that only bows to God, and often forgets that the
universe contains any being but itself, and the model of perfection to which its ardent gaze is
turned, to adore attributes that, softened into virtues, may be imitated in kind, though the
degree overwhelms the enraptured mind.

If, I say, for I would not impress by declamation when reason offers her sober light, if they
are really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves; or, like the
brutes who are dependent on the reason of man, when they associate with him; but cultivate
their minds, give them the salutary, sublime curb of principle, and let them attain conscious
dignity by feeling themselves only dependent on God. Teach them, in common with man, to
submit to necessity, instead of giving, to render them more pleasing, a sex to morals.

Further, should experience prove that they cannot attain the same degree of strength of
mind, perseverance and fortitude, let their virtues be the same in kind, though they may vainly
struggle for the same degree; and the superiority of man will be equally clear, if not clearer; and
truth, as it is a simple principle, which admits of no modification, would be common to both.
Nay, the order of society, as it is at present regulated, would not be inverted, for woman would
then only have the rank that reason assigned her, and arts could not be practised to bring the
balance even, much less to turn it.

These may be termed Utopian dreams. Thanks to that Being who impressed them on my
soul, and gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till becoming
dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view with indignation, the mistaken
notions that enslave my sex.

I love man as my fellow; but his sceptre real or usurped, extends not to me, unless the
reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and
not to man. In fact, the conduct of an accountable being must be regulated by the operations of
its own reason; or on what foundation rests the throne of God?
It appears to me necessary to dwell on these obvious truths, because females have been insulted, as it were; and while they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces, that enable them to exercise a short lived tyranny. Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect; and this ignoble desire, like the servility in absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women are, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature; let it also be remembered, that they are the only flaw.

... They might, also study politics, and settle their benevolence on the broadest basis; for the reading of history will scarcely be more useful than the perusal of romances, if read as mere biography; if the character of the times, the political improvements, arts, etc. be not observed. In short, if it be not considered as the history of man; and not of particular men, who filled a niche in the temple of fame, and dropped into the black rolling stream of time, that silently sweeps all before it, into the shapeless void called eternity. For shape can it be called, "that shape hath none?"

Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner, which might save many from common and legal prostitution. Women would not then marry for a support, as men accept of places under government, and neglect the implied duties; nor would an attempt to earn their own subsistence, a most laudable one! sink them almost to the level of those poor abandoned creatures who live by prostitution. For are not milliners and mantuamakers reckoned the next class? The few employments open to women, so far from being liberal, are menial; and when a superior education enables them to take charge of the education of children as governesses, they are not treated like the tutors of sons, though even clerical tutors are not always treated in a manner calculated to render them respectable in the eyes of their pupils, to say nothing of the private comfort of the individual. But as women educated like gentlewomen, are never designed for the humiliating situation which necessity sometimes forces them to fill; these situations are considered in the light of a degradation; and they know little of the human heart, who need to be told, that nothing so painfully sharpens the sensibility as such a fall in life.

Some of these women might be restrained from marrying by a proper spirit or delicacy, and others may not have had it in their power to escape in this pitiful way from servitude; is not that government then very defective, and very unmindful of the happiness of one half of its members, that does not provide for honest, independent women, by encouraging them to fill respectable stations? But in order to render their private virtue a public benefit, they must have a civil existence in the state, married or single; else we shall continually see some worthy woman, whose sensibility has been rendered painfully acute by undeserved contempt, droop like "the lily broken down by a plough share."

It is a melancholy truth; yet such is the blessed effects of civilization! the most respectable women are the most oppressed; and, unless they have understandings far superior to the common run of understandings, taking in both sexes, they must, from being treated like
contemptible beings, become contemptible. How many women thus waste life away, the prey of
discontent, who might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and
stood erect, supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads surcharged with
the dew of sensibility, that consumes the beauty to which it at first gave lustre; nay, I doubt
whether pity and love are so near a-kin as poets feign, for I have seldom seen much compassion
excited by the helplessness of females, unless they were fair; then, perhaps, pity was the soft
handmaid of love, or the harbinger of lust.

How much more respectable is the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any
duty, than the most accomplished beauty! beauty did I say? so sensible am I of the beauty of
moral loveliness, or the harmonious propriety that attunes the passions of a well-regulated
mind, that I blush at making the comparison; yet I sigh to think how few women aim at
attaining this respectability, by withdrawing from the giddy whirl of pleasure, or the indolent
calm that stupifies the good sort of women it sucks in.

Proud of their weakness, however, they must always be protected, guarded from care, and
all the rough toils that dignify the mind. If this be the fiat of fate, if they will make themselves
insignificant and contemptible, sweetly to waste "life away," let them not expect to be valued
when their beauty fades, for it is the fate of the fairest flowers to be admired and pulled to
pieces by the careless hand that plucked them. In how many ways do I wish, from the purest
benevolence, to impress this truth on my sex; yet I fear that they will not listen to a truth, that
dear-bought experience has brought home to many an agitated bosom, nor willingly resign the
privileges of rank and sex for the privileges of humanity, to which those have no claim who do
not discharge its duties.

Those writers are particularly useful, in my opinion, who make man feel for man,
independent of the station he fills, or the drapery of factitious sentiments. I then would fain
convince reasonable men of the importance of some of my remarks and prevail on them to
weigh dispassionately the whole tenor of my observations. I appeal to their understandings;
and, as a fellow-creature claim, in the name of my sex, some interest in their hearts. I entreat
them to assist to emancipate their companion to make her a help meet for them!

Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship,
instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate
sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better citizens. We should
then love them with true affection, because we should learn to respect ourselves; and the peace
of mind of a worthy man would not be interrupted by the idle vanity of his wife, nor his babes
sent to nestle in a strange bosom, having never found a home in their mother’s.
Reading John Stuart Mill
Chapter III from On Liberty

... As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments of living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.

In maintaining this principle, the greatest difficulty to be encountered does not lie in the appreciation of means towards an acknowledged end, but in the indifference of persons in general to the end itself. If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated[Pg 106] by the terms civilisation, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be under-valued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control would present no extraordinary difficulty. But the evil is, that individual spontaneity is hardly recognised by the common modes of thinking, as having any intrinsic worth, or deserving any regard on its own account. The majority, being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are (for it is they who make them what they are), cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody; and what is more, spontaneity forms no part of the ideal of the majority of moral and social reformers, but is rather looked on with jealousy, as a troublesome and perhaps rebellious obstruction to the general acceptance of what these reformers, in their own judgment, think would be best for mankind. Few persons, out of Germany, even comprehend the meaning of the doctrine which Wilhelm von Humboldt, so eminent both as a savant and as a politician, made the text of a treatise—that "the end of man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal or immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole;" that, therefore, the object "towards which every human being must ceaselessly direct his efforts, and on which especially those who design to influence their fellow-men must ever keep their eyes, is the individuality of power and development;" that for this there are two requisites, "freedom, and a variety of situations;" and that from the union of these arise "individual vigour and manifold diversity," which combine

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themselves in "originality."[11]

Little, however, as people are accustomed to a doctrine like that of Von Humboldt, and surprising as it may be to them to find so high a value attached to individuality, the question, one must nevertheless think, can only be one of degree. No one's idea of excellence in conduct is that people should do absolutely nothing but copy one another. No one would assert that people ought not to put into their mode of life, and into the conduct of their concerns, any impress whatever of their own judgment, or of their own individual character. On the other hand, it would be absurd to pretend that people ought to live as if nothing whatever had been known in the world before they came into it; as if experience had as yet done nothing towards showing that one mode of existence, or of conduct, is preferable to another. Nobody denies that people should be so taught and trained in youth, as to know and benefit by the ascertained results of human experience. But it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way. It is for him to find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character. The traditions and customs of other people are, to a certain extent, evidence of what their experience has taught them; presumptive evidence, and as such, have a claim to his deference: but, in the first place, their experience may be too narrow; or they may not have interpreted it rightly. Secondly, their interpretation of experience may be correct, but unsuitable to him. Customs are made for customary circumstances, and customary characters: and his circumstances or his character may be uncustomary. Thirdly, though the customs be both good as customs, and suitable to him, yet to conform to custom, merely as custom, does not educate or develop in him any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being. The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best. The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used. The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it. If the grounds of an opinion are not conclusive to the person's own reason, his reason cannot be strengthened, but is likely to be weakened by his adopting it: and if the inducements to an act are not such as are consentaneous to his own feelings and character (where affection, or the rights of others, are not concerned), it is so much done towards rendering his feelings and character inert and torpid, instead of active and energetic.

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 to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but
also what manner of men they are that do it. Among the works of man, which human life is
rightly employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first in importance surely is man himself.

Supposing it were possible to get houses built, corn grown, battles fought, causes tried, and
even churches erected and prayers said, by machinery—by automatons in human form—it
would be a considerable loss to exchange for these automatons even the men and women who
at present inhabit the more civilised parts of the world, and who assuredly are but starved
specimens of what nature can and will produce. Human nature is not a machine to be built after
a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow
and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which
make it a living thing.

It will probably be conceded that it is desirable people should exercise their
understandings, and that an intelligent following of custom, or even occasionally an intelligent
development from custom, is better than a blind and simply mechanical adhesion to it. To a certain
extent it is admitted, that our understanding should be our own: but there is not the same
willingness to admit that our desires and impulses should be our own likewise; or that to
possess impulses of our own, and of any strength, is anything but a peril and a snare. Yet
desires and impulses are as much a part of a perfect human being, as beliefs and restraints: and
strong impulses are only perilous when not properly balanced; when one set of aims and
inclinations is developed into strength, while others, which ought to co-exist with them, remain
weak and inactive. It is not because men's desires are strong that they act ill; it is because their
consciences are weak. There is no natural connection between strong impulses and a weak
conscience. The natural connection is the other way. To say that one person's desires and
feelings are stronger and more various than those of another, is merely to say that he
has more of the raw material of human nature, and is therefore capable, perhaps of more evil,
but certainly of more good. Strong impulses are but another name for energy. Energy may be
turned to bad uses; but more good may always be made of an energetic nature, than of an
indolent and impassive one. Those who have most natural feeling, are always those whose
cultivated feelings may be made the strongest. The same strong susceptibilities which make the
personal impulses vivid and powerful, are also the source from whence are generated the most
passionate love of virtue, and the sternest self-control. It is through the cultivation of these, that
society both does its duty and protects its interests: not by rejecting the stuff of which heroes are
made, because it knows not how to make them. A person whose desires and impulses are his
own—are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own
culture—is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no
character, no more than a steam-engine has a character. If, in addition to being his own, his
impulses are strong, and are under the government of a strong will, he has an energetic
character. Whoever thinks that individuality of desires and impulses should not be
encouraged to unfold itself, must maintain that society has no need of strong natures—is not the
better for containing many persons who have much character—and that a high general average
of energy is not desirable.

In some early states of society, these forces might be, and were, too much ahead of the
power which society then possessed of disciplining and controlling them. There has been a time
when the element of spontaneity and individuality was in excess, and the social principle had a hard struggle with it. The difficulty then was, to induce men of strong bodies or minds to pay obedience to any rules which required them to control their impulses. To overcome this difficulty, law and discipline, like the Popes struggling against the Emperors, asserted a power over the whole man, claiming to control all his life in order to control his character—which society had not found any other sufficient means of binding. But society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences. Things are vastly changed, since the passions of those who were strong by station or by personal endowment were in a state of habitual rebellion against laws and ordinances, and required to be rigorously chained up to enable the persons within their reach to enjoy any particle of security. In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual, or the family, do not ask themselves—what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair-play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? or (worse still) what is usually done by persons of a station and circumstances superior to mine? I do not mean that they choose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they live in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature?

It is so, on the Calvinistic theory. According to that, the one great offence of man is Self-will. All the good of which humanity is capable, is comprised in Obedience. You have no choice; thus you must do, and no otherwise: "whatever is not a duty, is a sin." Human nature being radically corrupt, there is no redemption for any one until human nature is killed within him. To one holding this theory of life, crushing out any of the human faculties, capacities, and susceptibilities, is no evil: man needs no capacity, but that of surrendering himself to the will of God: and if he uses any of his faculties for any other purpose but to do that supposed will more effectually, he is better without them. That is the theory of Calvinism; and it is held, in a mitigated form, by many who do not consider themselves Calvinists; the mitigation consisting in giving a less ascetic interpretation to the alleged will of God; asserting it to be his will that mankind should gratify some of their inclinations; of course not in the manner they themselves prefer, but in the way of obedience, that is, in a way prescribed to them by authority; and, therefore, by the necessary conditions of the case, the same for all.

In some such insidious form there is at present a strong tendency to this narrow theory of life, and to the pinched and hidebound type of human character which it patronises. Many
persons, no doubt, sincerely think that human beings thus cramped and dwarfed, are as their Maker designed them to be; just as many have thought that trees are a much finer thing when clipped into pollards, or cut out into figures of animals, than as nature made them. But if it be any part of religion to believe that man was made by a good being, it is more consistent with that faith to believe, that this Being gave all human faculties that they might be cultivated and unfolded, not rooted out and consumed, and that he takes delight in every nearer approach made by his creatures to the ideal conception embodied in them, every increase in any of their capabilities of comprehension, of action, or of enjoyment. There is a different type of human excellence from the Calvinistic; a conception of humanity as having its nature bestowed on it for other purposes than merely to be abnegated. "Pagan self-assertion" is one of the elements of human worth, as well as "Christian self-denial."[12] There is a Greek ideal of self-development, which the Platonic and Christian ideal of self-government blends with, but does not supersede. It may be better to be a John Knox than an Alcibiades, but it is better to be a Pericles than either; nor would a Pericles, if we had one in these days, be without anything good which belonged to John Knox.

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others. There is a greater fulness of life about his own existence, and when there is more life in the units there is more in the mass which is composed of them. As much compression as is necessary to prevent the stronger specimens of human nature from encroaching on the rights of others, cannot be dispensed with; but for this there is ample compensation even in the point of view of human development. The means of development which the individual loses by being prevented from gratifying his inclinations to the injury of others, are chiefly obtained at the expense of the development of other people. And even to himself there is a full equivalent in the better development of the social part of his nature, rendered possible by the restraint put upon the selfish part. To be held to rigid rules of justice for the sake of others, develops the feelings and capacities which have the good of others for their object. But to be restrained in things not affecting their good, by their mere displeasure, develops nothing valuable, except such force of character as may unfold itself in resisting the restraint. If acquiesced in, it dulls and blunts the whole nature. To give any fair-play to the nature of each, it is essential that different persons should be allowed to lead different lives. In proportion as this latitude has been exercised in any age, has that age been noteworthy to posterity. Even despotism does not produce its worst effects, so long as Individuality exists under it; and whatever crushes individuality is despotism, by whatever name it may be called, and whether it professes to be enforcing the will of God or the injunctions of men. Having said that Individuality is the same thing with development, and that it is only the
cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings, I might here close the argument: for what more or better can be said of any condition of human affairs, than that it brings human beings themselves nearer to the best thing they can be? or what worse can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this? Doubtless, however, these considerations will not suffice to convince those who most need convincing; and it is necessary further to show, that these developed human beings are of some use to the undeveloped—to point out to those who do not desire liberty, and would not avail themselves of it, that they may be in some intelligible manner rewarded for allowing other people to make use of it without hindrance.

In the first place, then, I would suggest that they might possibly learn something from them. It will not be denied by anybody, that originality is a valuable element in human affairs. There is always need of persons not only to discover new truths, and point out when what were once truths are true no longer, but also to commence new practices, and set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life. This cannot well be gainsaid by anybody who does not believe that the world has already attained perfection in all its ways and practices. It is true that this benefit is not capable of being rendered by everybody alike: there are but few persons, in comparison with the whole of mankind, whose experiments, if adopted by others, would be likely to be any improvement on established practice. But these few are the salt of the earth; without them, human life would become a stagnant pool. Not only is it they who introduce good things which did not before exist; it is they who keep the life in those which already existed. If there were nothing new to be done, would human intellect cease to be necessary? Would it be a reason why those who do the old things should forget why they are done, and do them like cattle, not like human beings? There is only too great a tendency in the best beliefs and practices to degenerate into the mechanical; and unless there were a succession of persons whose ever-recurring originality prevents the grounds of those beliefs and practices from becoming merely traditional, such dead matter would not resist the smallest shock from anything really alive, and there would be no reason why civilisation should not die out, as in the Byzantine Empire. Persons of genius, it is true, are, and are always likely to be, a small minority; but in order to have them, it is necessary to preserve the soil in which they grow. Genius can only breathe freely in an atmosphere of freedom. Persons of genius are, ex vi termini, more individual than any other people—less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character. If from timidity they consent to be forced into one of these moulds, and to let all that part of themselves which cannot expand under the pressure remain unexpanded, society will be little the better for their genius. If they are of a strong character, and break their fetters, they become a mark for the society which has not succeeded in reducing them to commonplace, to point at with solemn warning as "wild," "erratic," and the like; much as if one should complain of the Niagara river for not flowing smoothly between its banks like a Dutch canal.

I insist thus emphatically on the importance of genius, and the necessity of allowing it to unfold itself freely both in thought and in practice, being well aware that no one will deny the
position in theory, but knowing also that almost every one, in reality, is totally indifferent to it. People think genius a fine thing if it enables a man to write an exciting poem, or paint a picture. But in its true sense, that of originality in thought and action, though no one says that it is not a thing to be admired, nearly all, at heart, think that they can do very well without it. Unhappily this is too natural to be wondered at. Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of. They cannot see what it is to do for them: how should they? If they could see what it would do for them, it would not be originality. The first service which originality has to render them, is that of opening their eyes: which being once fully done, they would have a chance of being themselves original. Meanwhile, recollecting that nothing was ever yet done which some one was not the first to do, and that all good things which exist are the fruits of originality, let them be modest enough to believe that there is something still left for it to accomplish, and assure themselves that they are more in need of originality, the less they are conscious of the want.

In sober truth, whatever homage may be professed, or even paid, to real or supposed mental superiority, the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind. In ancient history, in the middle ages, and in a diminishing degree through the long transition from feudalism to the present time, the individual was a power in himself; and if he had either great talents or a high social position, he was a considerable power. At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world. The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organ of the tendencies and instincts of masses. This is as true in the moral and social relations of private life as in public transactions. Those whose opinions go by the name of public opinion, are not always the same sort of public: in America they are the whole white population; in England, chiefly the middle class. But they are always a mass, that is to say, collective mediocrity. And what is a still greater novelty, the mass do not now take their opinions from dignitaries in Church or State, from ostensible leaders, or from books. Their thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspapers. I am not complaining of all this. I do not assert that anything better is compatible, as a general rule, with the present low state of the human mind. But that does not hinder the government of mediocrity from being mediocre government. No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities, and tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few. The initiation of all wise or noble things, comes and must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual. The honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open. I am not countenancing the sort of "hero-worship" which applauds the strong man of genius for forcibly seizing on the government of the world and making it do his bidding in spite of itself. All he can claim is, freedom to point out the way. The power of compelling others into it, is not only inconsistent with the freedom and development of all the
rest, but corrupting to the strong man himself. It does seem, however, that when the opinions of masses of merely average men are everywhere become or becoming the dominant power, the counterpoise and corrective to that tendency would be, the more and more pronounced individuality of those who stand on the higher eminences of thought. It is in these circumstances most especially, that exceptional individuals, instead of being deterred, should be encouraged in acting differently from the mass. In other times there was no advantage in their doing so, unless they acted not only differently, but better. In this age the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time.

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There is one characteristic of the present direction of public opinion, peculiarly calculated to make it intolerant of any marked demonstration of individuality. The general average of mankind are not only moderate in intellect, but also moderate in inclinations: they have no tastes or wishes strong enough to incline them to do anything unusual, and they consequently do not understand those who have, and class all such with the wild and intemperate whom they are accustomed to look down upon. Now, in addition to this fact which is general, we have only to suppose that a strong movement has set in towards the improvement of morals, and it is evident what we have to expect. In these days such a movement has set in; much has actually been effected in the way of increased regularity of conduct, and discouragement of excesses; and there is a philanthropic spirit abroad, for the exercise of which there is no more inviting field than the moral and prudential improvement of our fellow-creatures. These tendencies of the times cause the public to be more disposed than at most former periods to prescribe general rules of conduct, and endeavour to make every one conform to the approved standard. And that standard, express or tacit, is to desire nothing strongly. Its ideal of character is to be without any marked character; to maim by compression, like a Chinese lady’s foot, every part of human nature which stands out prominently, and tends to make the person markedly dissimilar in outline to commonplace humanity.

As is usually the case with ideals which exclude one-half of what is desirable, the present standard of approbation produces only an inferior imitation of the other half. Instead of great energies guided by vigorous reason, and strong feelings strongly controlled by a conscientious will, its result is weak feelings and weak energies, which therefore can be kept in outward conformity to rule without any strength either of will or of reason. Already energetic characters on any large scale are becoming merely traditional. There is now scarcely any outlet for energy in this country except business. The energy expended in that may still be regarded as considerable. What little is left from that employment, is expended on some hobby; which may be a useful, even a philanthropic hobby, but is always some one thing, and generally a thing of small dimensions. The greatness of England is now all collective: individually small, we only
appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining; and with this our moral and religious philanthropists are perfectly contented. But it was men of another stamp than this that made England what it has been; and men of another stamp will be needed to prevent its decline.

The despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary, which is called, according to circumstances, the spirit of liberty, or that of progress or improvement. The spirit of improvement is not always a spirit of liberty, for it may aim at forcing improvements on an unwilling people; and the spirit of liberty, in so far as it resists such attempts, may ally itself locally and temporarily with the opponents of improvement; but the only unfailing and permanent source of improvement is liberty, since by it there are as many possible independent centres of improvement as there are individuals. The progressive principle, however, in either shape, whether as the love of liberty or of improvement, is antagonistic to the sway of Custom, involving at least emancipation from that yoke; and the contest between the two constitutes the chief interest of the history of mankind. The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of Custom is complete. This is the case over the whole East. Custom is there, in all things, the final appeal; justice and right mean conformity to custom; the argument of custom no one, unless some tyrant intoxicated with power, thinks of resisting. And we see the result. Those nations must once have had originality; they did not start out of the ground populous, lettered, and versed in many of the arts of life; they made themselves all this, and were then the greatest and most powerful nations in the world. What are they now? The subjects or dependants of tribes whose forefathers wandered in the forests when theirs had magnificent palaces and gorgeous temples, but over whom custom exercised only a divided rule with liberty and progress. A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality. If a similar change should befall the nations of Europe, it will not be in exactly the same shape: the despotism of custom with which these nations are threatened is not precisely stationariness. It proscribes singularity, but it does not preclude change, provided all change together. We have discarded the fixed costumes of our forefathers; every one must still dress like other people, but the fashion may change once or twice a year. We thus take care that when there is change, it shall be for change's sake, and not from any idea of beauty or convenience; for the same idea of beauty or convenience would not strike all the world at the same moment, and be simultaneously thrown aside by all at another moment. But we are progressive as well as changeable: we continually make new inventions in mechanical things, and keep them until they are again superseded by better; we are eager for improvement in politics, in education, even in morals, though in this last our idea of improvement chiefly consists in persuading or forcing other people to be as good as ourselves. It is not progress that we object to; on the contrary, we flatter ourselves that we are the most progressive people who ever lived. It is individuality that we war against: we should think we had done wonders if we had made ourselves all alike; forgetting that the unlikeness of one person to another is generally the first thing which draws the attention of either to the imperfection of his own type, and the superiority of another, or the possibility, by combining
the advantages of both, of producing something better than either. We have a warning example in China—a nation of much talent, and, in some respects, even wisdom, owing to the rare good fortune of having been provided at an early period with a particularly good set of customs, the work, in some measure, of men to whom even the most enlightened European must accord, under certain limitations, the title of sages and philosophers. They are remarkable, too, in the excellence of their apparatus for impressing, as far as possible, the best wisdom they possess upon every mind in the community, and securing that those who have appropriated most of it shall occupy the posts of honour and power. Surely the people who did this have discovered the secret of human progressiveness, and must have kept themselves steadily at the head of the movement of the world. On the contrary, they have become stationary—have remained so for thousands of years; and if they are ever to be farther improved, it must be by foreigners. They have succeeded beyond all hope in what English philanthropists are so industriously working at—in making a people all alike, all governing their thoughts and conduct by the same maxims and rules; and these are the fruits. The modern régime of public opinion is, in an unorganised form, what the Chinese educational and political systems are in an organised; and unless individuality shall be able successfully to assert itself against this yoke, Europe, notwithstanding its noble antecedents and its professed Christianity, will tend to become another China.
Chapter Eight

Jefferson et al
8.1: Reading the Declaration

The American *Declaration of Independence* can be a strange document for the modern reader. Technically, it is a legal document, drafted by a committee composed of five people as a formal declaration of separation from the British Empire on behalf of the American Colonies who went through a complicated process leading up to the Continental Congress. The 5 members of the committee were Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin, with most agreeing that Jefferson should write the first draft. It is important to note that the Declaration of Independence is not an essay or an article, but a legal statement of separation.

In its own words, the purpose of the document is to “declare the formal statement of Independence” and to “declare the causes” or the reasons for the separation of the colonies from the British. These reasons begin after the second paragraph. The third to last paragraph refers to the items on the list as “Oppressions.” These “oppressions” are written in two forms in the list: charges against “He,” who is George III, the British king of the time, as in He has . . .” and then direct examples of “abuses” and “usurpations”\(^{122}\) beginning with the preposition “For,” as in “For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:”

The final paragraph presents a conclusion in the form that should follow a line of reasoning or set of steps. It uses the complex adverb “therefore” (meaning: consequently) to express the “consequence” of the logic steps that came before it. The authors write: “We, therefore, . . . Solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are . . . Free and Independent States . . .”

It is often difficult to read the *Declaration* in terms of its grammatical logic, following, for example, its use of commas and uppercase letter tendencies. The authors knew how to turn a phrase, but a hard set of grammatical or punctuational

\(^{122}\) Taking something away from someone by force, such as property.
rules wasn’t necessarily widespread doing the late 18th Century. In this sense, we have to concentrate on the words on the page and their syntactical relationship rather than the divisions of sentences. In addition, the conventions of language at the time, especially for formal documents, was relatively decorative, using lengthy multi-syllabic words like “magnanimity” and “establishment” and words that modern readers will find obscure, such as “usurpations.” We have to assume that the writers new what they were doing with this language, deliberately shaping for their audience, which is declared as “mankind.” Recall our discussion of the standard of universality in relation to The Problem in the Persuasive Framework.

The main nouns and verbs of sentences are often divided by long chains of phrases. For example, the first and most famous sentence at the top of the Declaration does not reveal its subject and verb—“respect . . . requires” (143)—until after several phrases and technical clauses which set up the subject and predicate. Consider the first prepositional phrase: “When in the Course of human events.” We as modern thinkers know that this introduces a focus on time and a metaphor for motion or flow through time. The word “Course” evokes the idea of moving water or whatever other type of material the reader might consider in terms of moving through time.

Student thinkers should read through each phrase of every paragraph and think about what each is doing in its position or context in the sentence, which might take some time. The second clause of the first sentence is relatively easy to figure out. Yet the verb “to assume” might provide some confusion because the conjunction “and” joins the two phrases that begin “to dissolve” and “to assume,” and so the sentence should read “it becomes necessary . . . to dissolve (one relationship) . . . and too assume another (relationship).”

In order to grasp the sentence then, modern readers might need to do so some word replacement and then consider simply paraphrasing to make sense of the language.

Terminology also matters to understanding the document because words in the

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123 Syntax is a term that means the order of words and how that order shapes meaning.
125 In the sense of “take” or “take on” not “suppose”
late 18th Century might carry alternative or more emphasis in the ideas of the day. The second paragraph, for example, has an interesting and fairly straightforward structure. The first sentence claims certain kinds of rights. The sentence that follows relates “government” to those rights and so forth.
8.2: Argument and The Declaration

In the American *Declaration of Independence*, the framework of persuasion is relatively easy to identify though the language may not be easy to penetrate. The problem\textsuperscript{126} has to do with being linked to a nation whose interests may not align with its own colonies. There is a sense that the child has grown up and is ready to go off on its own and “to assume” equal status among other nations, nations that are independent and “free.” We could also put it into the terms of a relationship, that the relationship between nations is comparable to the relationship between individuals.

The document, after paragraph 2, is packed with examples of abuses that eventually add up so much in number that they support the basic position or argument that the colonies are justified in declaring independence. The authors make this case:

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

It would appear to make sense that if a governing power becomes “destructive” of basic freedoms and “unalienable rights,” people who are suffering that destruction should have some recourse or answer or solution: thus the persuasive framework. The writers of the *Declaration*, however, understood that some standard or threshold of abuse had to be met, so that the quest to break away wouldn’t seem arbitrary or meritless. The authors signal this problem in a later sentence in the same paragraph:

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty,

\textsuperscript{126} In description or in signaling, the writer should always try to state the problem as simply as possible, where simplicity is possible.
to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Here the word “Despotism” with the adjective “absolute” is important. Tyranny and authoritarianism are synonymous with despotism. Despotism itself already carries the notion of absolute in its definition, so the use of the adjective “absolute” is denotatively repetitious, but in the context of the argument being made, it is effective as a form of exaggeration for effect. The treatment of the Colonies is not just despotic, which is bad enough, but “absolutely” so, according to the authors. This is not just any old kind of average despotism, such as that between parent and child or between owner and dog, where some degree of freedom may be provided but not absolute freedom. No, this is “absolute” despotism. It is like claiming that an action is not just bad, it is “very very very” bad.

The authors will have to prove to the extent possible that the British have become so “destructive” and despotic that the Colonies are justified in declaring independence. A college student, for example, might make the case that a particular college is oppressive of that students’ freedom or rights. One response to this would be to write out a Declaration of Independence from whatever college or university. The student might follow the same structure of Jeffersonian Declaration of Independence.

The Colonies and its agents aren’t just acting arbitrarily or without judgement, so the authors argue. They have been patient with their British leaders. They’ve tried to reason with the British Crown. All of this has come to nothing, thus also providing reasons for declaring independence. The authors write: “Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.” The image here, for purposes of persuasion, amounts to an appeal. The characterization of the problem appears to be of a long suffering person who has reached the end of all their options. No other option is available but separation, and thus the reason for

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127 In terms of the dictionary definition. For purposes of context, Mary Wollstonecraft will use this term in the first sentence of our selection: tyranny, meaning despotism. This term has a lot of weight in late 18th century writing.

128 As has been discussed in other areas, an appeal is a form of support for an argument or position.
the *Declaration of Independence* of the Colonies from the British Empire.

In history, and for Americans and others who may be interested, this is serious business. The *Declaration* is still a living document not just because of the ideas expressed but because of the nature of the document in its formal, rhetorical, and legal sense.
The Declaration of Independence

In Congress, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant
from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy.
scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.
Chapter Nine

Madison
9.1: Reading Madison's Letter to William Berry

In 1822, William Taylor Berry was the Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky. At this time, Kentucky was debating the creation of a subsidized public education system. He wrote the following letter to James Madison, the 4th President of the United States (March 4, 1809 – March 4, 1817), between Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe, and one of the original signers of the American Constitution, to secure support for the endeavor. The program was voted down. The meaning of subsidized here means that this would be tax payer supported schooling.

Currently in the United States, most children are educated at public schools, and the money for those schools is drawn from property taxes. Technically this not “free” education because these monies are drawn from a tax from individuals, families, businesses, or whoever may be paying a portion of the tax on their property. Students attending the school, however, don’t pay money out of their pockets when they enter the school building so the concept is that the schooling is “publicly funded.”
The liberal appropriations made by the Legislature of Kentucky for a general system of Education cannot be too much applauded. A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

I have always felt a more than ordinary interest in the destinies of Kentucky. Among her earliest settlers were some of my particular friends and Neighbors. And I was myself among the foremost advocates for submitting to the Will of the "District" the question and the time of its becoming a separate member of the American family. Its rapid growth & signal prosperity in this character have afforded me much pleasure; which is not a little enhanced by the enlightened patriotism which is now providing for the State a Plan of Education embracing every class of Citizens, and every grade & department of Knowledge. No error is more certain than the one proceeding from a hasty & superficial view of the subject: that the people at large have no interest in the establishment of Academies, Colleges, and Universities, where a few only, and those not of the poorer classes can obtain for their sons the advantages of superior education. It is thought to be unjust that all should be taxed for the benefit of a part, and that too the part least needing it.

If provision were not made at the same time for every part, the objection would be a natural one. But, besides the consideration when the higher Seminaries belong to a plan of general education, that it is better for the poorer classes to have the aid of the richer by a general tax on property, than that every parent should provide at his own expense for the education of his children, it is certain that every Class is interested in establishments which give to the human mind its highest improvements, and to every Country its truest and most durable celebrity.

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129 Note the phrasing in this sentence.
130 One of the most frequently cited sentences in American history on the nature of the relationship between virtue and political theory.
Learned Institutions ought to be favorite objects with every free people. They throw that light over the public mind which is the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty. They are the nurseries of skilful Teachers for the schools distributed throughout the Community. They are themselves schools for the particular talents required for some of the Public Trusts, on the able execution of which the welfare of the people depends. They multiply the educated individuals from among whom the people may elect a due portion of their public Agents of every description; more especially of those who are to frame the laws; by the perspicuity, the consistency, and the stability, as well as by the just & equal spirit of which the great social purposes are to be answered.

Without such Institutions, the more costly of which can scarcely be provided by individual means, none but the few whose wealth enables them to support their sons abroad can give them the fullest education; and in proportion as this is done, the influence is monopolized which superior information every where possesses. At cheaper & nearer seats of Learning parents with slender incomes may place their sons in a course of education putting them on a level with the sons of the Richest. Whilst those who are without property, or with but little, must be peculiarly interested in a System which unites with the more Learned Institutions, a provision for diffusing through the entire Society the education needed for the common purposes of life. A system comprizing the Learned Institutions may be still further recommended to the more indigent class of Citizens by such an arrangement as was reported to the General Assembly of Virginia, in the year 1779, by a Committee appointed to revise laws in order to adapt them to the genius of Republican Government. It made part of a "Bill for the more general diffusion of knowledge" that wherever a youth was ascertained to possess talents meriting an education which his parents could not afford, he should be carried forward at the public expence, from seminary to seminary, to the completion of his studies at the highest.

But why should it be necessary in this case, to distinguish the Society into classes according to their property? When it is considered that the establishment and endowment of Academies, Colleges, and Universities are a provision, not merely for the existing generation, but for succeeding ones also; that in Governments like ours a constant rotation of property results from the free scope to industry, and from the laws of inheritance, and when it is considered moreover, how much of the exertions and privations of all are meant not for themselves, but for their posterity, there can be little ground for objections from any class, to plans of which every class must have its turn of benefits. The rich man, when contributing to a permanent plan for the education of the poor, ought to reflect that he is providing for that of his own descendants; and the poor man who concurs in a provision for those who are not poor that at no distant day it may be enjoyed by descendants from himself. It does not require a long life to witness these vicissitudes of fortune.

It is among the happy peculiarities of our Union, that the States composing it derive from their relation to each other and to the whole, a salutary emulation, without the enmity involved in competitions among States alien to each other. This emulation, we may perceive, is not without its influence in several important respects; and in none ought it to be more felt than in the merit of diffusing the light and the advantages of Public Instruction. In the example therefore which Kentucky is presenting, she not only consults her own welfare, but is giving an
impulse to any of her sisters who may be behind her in the noble career.

Throughout the Civilized World, nations are courting the praise of fostering Science and the useful Arts, and are opening their eyes to the principles and the blessings of Representative Government. The American people owe it to themselves, and to the cause of free Government, to prove by their establishments for the advancement and diffusion of Knowledge, that their political Institutions, which are attracting observation from every quarter, and are respected as Models, by the new-born States in our own Hemisphere, are as favorable to the intellectual and moral improvement of Man as they are conformable to his individual & social Rights. What spectacle can be more edifying or more seasonable, than that of Liberty & Learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual & surest support?

The Committee, of which your name is the first, have taken a very judicious course in endeavouring to avail Kentucky of the experience of elder States, in modifying her Schools. I enclose extracts from the laws of Virginia on that subject; though I presume they will give little aid; the less as they have as yet been imperfectly carried into execution. The States where such systems have been long in operation will furnish much better answers to many of the enquiries stated in your Circular. But after all, such is the diversity of local circumstances, more particularly as the population varies in density & sparseness, that the details suited to some may be little so to others. As the population however, is becoming less & less sparse, and it will be well in laying the foundation of a Good System, to have a view to this progressive change, much attention seems due to examples in the Eastern States, where the people are most compact, & where there has been the longest experience in plans of popular education.

I know not that I can offer on the occasion any suggestions not likely to occur to the Committee. Were I to hazard one, it would be in favour of adding to Reading, Writing, & Arithmetic, to which the instruction of the poor, is commonly limited, some knowledge of Geography; such as can easily be conveyed by a Globe & Maps, and a concise Geographical Grammar. And how easily & quickly might a general idea even, be conveyed of the Solar System, by the aid of a Planatarium of the Cheapest construction. No information seems better calculated to expand the mind and gratify curiosity than what would thus be imparted. This is especially the case, with what relates to the Globe we inhabit, the Nations among which it is divided, and the characters and customs which distinguish them. An acquaintance with foreign Countries in this mode, has a kindred effect with that of seeing them as travellers, which never fails, in uncorrupted minds, to weaken local prejudices, and enlarge the sphere of benevolent feelings. A knowledge of the Globe & its various inhabitants, however slight, might moreover, create a taste for Books of Travels and Voyages; out of which might grow a general taste for History, an inexhaustible fund of entertainment & instruction. Any reading not of a vicious species must be a good substitute for the amusements too apt to fill up the leisure of the labouring classes.
Federalist no.39: The Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles

To the People of the State of New York:

THE last paper having concluded the observations which were meant to introduce a candid survey of the plan of government reported by the convention, we now proceed to the execution of that part of our undertaking.

The first question that offers itself is, whether the general form and aspect of the government be strictly republican. It is evident that no other form would be reconcilable with the genius of the people of America; with the fundamental principles of the Revolution; or with that honorable determination which animates every votary of freedom, to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government. If the plan of the convention, therefore, be found to depart from the republican character, its advocates must abandon it as no longer defensible.

What, then, are the distinctive characters of the republican form? Were an answer to this question to be sought, not by recurring to principles, but in the application of the term by political writers, to the constitution of different States, no satisfactory one would ever be found. Holland, in which no particle of the supreme authority is derived from the people, has passed almost universally under the denomination of a republic. The same title has been bestowed on Venice, where absolute power over the great body of the people is exercised, in the most absolute manner, by a small body of hereditary nobles. Poland, which is a mixture of aristocracy and of monarchy in their worst forms, has been dignified with the same appellation. The government of England, which has one republican branch only, combined with an hereditary aristocracy and monarchy, has, with equal impropriety, been frequently placed on the list of republics. These examples, which are nearly as dissimilar to each other as to a genuine republic, show the extreme inaccuracy with which the term has been used in political disquisitions.

If we resort for a criterion to the different principles on which different forms of government are established, we may define a republic to be, or at least may bestow that name on, a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure, for a limited period, or during good behavior. It is ESSENTIAL to such a government that it be derived from the great body of the society, not from an inconsiderable proportion, or a favored class of it; otherwise a handful of tyrannical nobles, exercising their oppressions by a delegation of their powers, might aspire to the rank of republicans, and claim for their government the honorable
title of republic. It is SUFFICIENT for such a government that the persons administering it be appointed, either directly or indirectly, by the people; and that they hold their appointments by either of the tenures just specified; otherwise every government in the United States, as well as every other popular government that has been or can be well organized or well executed, would be degraded from the republican character. According to the constitution of every State in the Union, some or other of the officers of government are appointed indirectly only by the people. According to most of them, the chief magistrate himself is so appointed. And according to one, this mode of appointment is extended to one of the co-ordinate branches of the legislature. According to all the constitutions, also, the tenure of the highest offices is extended to a definite period, and in many instances, both within the legislative and executive departments, to a period of years. According to the provisions of most of the constitutions, again, as well as according to the most respectable and received opinions on the subject, the members of the judiciary department are to retain their offices by the firm tenure of good behavior.

On comparing the Constitution planned by the convention with the standard here fixed, we perceive at once that it is, in the most rigid sense, conformable to it. The House of Representatives, like that of one branch at least of all the State legislatures, is elected immediately by the great body of the people. The Senate, like the present Congress, and the Senate of Maryland, derives its appointment indirectly from the people. The President is indirectly derived from the choice of the people, according to the example in most of the States. Even the judges, with all other officers of the Union, will, as in the several States, be the choice, though a remote choice, of the people themselves, the duration of the appointments is equally conformable to the republican standard, and to the model of State constitutions. The House of Representatives is periodically elective, as in all the States; and for the period of two years, as in the State of South Carolina. The Senate is elective, for the period of six years; which is but one year more than the period of the Senate of Maryland, and but two more than that of the Senates of New York and Virginia. The President is to continue in office for the period of four years; as in New York and Delaware, the chief magistrate is elected for three years, and in South Carolina for two years. In the other States the election is annual. In several of the States, however, no constitutional provision is made for the impeachment of the chief magistrate. And in Delaware and Virginia he is not impeachable till out of office. The President of the United States is impeachable at any time during his continuance in office. The tenure by which the judges are to hold their places, is, as it unquestionably ought to be, that of good behavior. The tenure of the ministerial offices generally, will be a subject of legal regulation, conformably to the reason of the case and the example of the State constitutions.

Could any further proof be required of the republican complexion of this system, the most decisive one might be found in its absolute prohibition of titles of nobility, both under the federal and the State governments; and in its express guaranty of the republican form to each of the latter.

"But it was not sufficient," say the adversaries of the proposed Constitution, "for the convention to adhere to the republican form. They ought, with equal care, to have preserved the FEDERAL form, which regards the Union as a CONFEDERACY of sovereign states; instead of
which, they have framed a NATIONAL government, which regards the Union as a CONSOLIDATION of the States." And it is asked by what authority this bold and radical innovation was undertaken? The handle which has been made of this objection requires that it should be examined with some precision.

Without inquiring into the accuracy of the distinction on which the objection is founded, it will be necessary to a just estimate of its force, first, to ascertain the real character of the government in question; secondly, to inquire how far the convention were authorized to propose such a government; and thirdly, how far the duty they owed to their country could supply any defect of regular authority.

First. In order to ascertain the real character of the government, it may be considered in relation to the foundation on which it is to be established; to the sources from which its ordinary powers are to be drawn; to the operation of those powers; to the extent of them; and to the authority by which future changes in the government are to be introduced.

On examining the first relation, it appears, on one hand, that the Constitution is to be founded on the assent and ratification of the people of America, given by deputies elected for the special purpose; but, on the other, that this assent and ratification is to be given by the people, not as individuals composing one entire nation, but as composing the distinct and independent States to which they respectively belong. It is to be the assent and ratification of the several States, derived from the supreme authority in each State, the authority of the people themselves. The act, therefore, establishing the Constitution, will not be a NATIONAL, but a FEDERAL act.

That it will be a federal and not a national act, as these terms are understood by the objectors; the act of the people, as forming so many independent States, not as forming one aggregate nation, is obvious from this single consideration, that it is to result neither from the decision of a MAJORITY of the people of the Union, nor from that of a MAJORITY of the States. It must result from the UNANIMOUS assent of the several States that are parties to it, differing no otherwise from their ordinary assent than in its being expressed, not by the legislative authority, but by that of the people themselves. Were the people regarded in this transaction as forming one nation, the will of the majority of the whole people of the United States would bind the minority, in the same manner as the majority in each State must bind the minority; and the will of the majority must be determined either by a comparison of the individual votes, or by considering the will of the majority of the States as evidence of the will of a majority of the people of the United States. Neither of these rules have been adopted. Each State, in ratifying the Constitution, is considered as a sovereign body, independent of all others, and only to be bound by its own voluntary act. In this relation, then, the new Constitution will, if established, be a FEDERAL, and not a NATIONAL constitution.

The next relation is, to the sources from which the ordinary powers of government are to be derived. The House of Representatives will derive its powers from the people of America; and the people will be represented in the same proportion, and on the same principle, as they are in the legislature of a particular State. So far the government is NATIONAL, not FEDERAL. The Senate, on the other hand, will derive its powers from the States, as political and coequal societies; and these will be represented on the principle of equality in the Senate, as they now
are in the existing Congress. So far the government is FEDERAL, not NATIONAL. The executive power will be derived from a very compound source. The immediate election of the President is to be made by the States in their political characters. The votes allotted to them are in a compound ratio, which considers them partly as distinct and coequal societies, partly as unequal members of the same society. The eventual election, again, is to be made by that branch of the legislature which consists of the national representatives; but in this particular act they are to be thrown into the form of individual delegations, from so many distinct and coequal bodies politic. From this aspect of the government it appears to be of a mixed character, presenting at least as many FEDERAL as NATIONAL features.

The difference between a federal and national government, as it relates to the OPERATION OF THE GOVERNMENT, is supposed to consist in this, that in the former the powers operate on the political bodies composing the Confederacy, in their political capacities; in the latter, on the individual citizens composing the nation, in their individual capacities. On trying the Constitution by this criterion, it falls under the NATIONAL, not the FEDERAL character; though perhaps not so completely as has been understood. In several cases, and particularly in the trial of controversies to which States may be parties, they must be viewed and proceeded against in their collective and political capacities only. So far the national countenance of the government on this side seems to be disfigured by a few federal features. But this blemish is perhaps unavoidable in any plan; and the operation of the government on the people, in their individual capacities, in its ordinary and most essential proceedings, may, on the whole, designate it, in this relation, a NATIONAL government.

But if the government be national with regard to the OPERATION of its powers, it changes its aspect again when we contemplate it in relation to the EXTENT of its powers. The idea of a national government involves in it, not only an authority over the individual citizens, but an indefinite supremacy over all persons and things, so far as they are objects of lawful government. Among a people consolidated into one nation, this supremacy is completely vested in the national legislature. Among communities united for particular purposes, it is vested partly in the general and partly in the municipal legislatures. In the former case, all local authorities are subordinate to the supreme; and may be controlled, directed, or abolished by it at pleasure. In the latter, the local or municipal authorities form distinct and independent portions of the supremacy, no more subject, within their respective spheres, to the general authority, than the general authority is subject to them, within its own sphere. In this relation, then, the proposed government cannot be deemed a NATIONAL one; since its jurisdiction extends to certain enumerated objects only, and leaves to the several States a residuary and inviolable sovereignty over all other objects. It is true that in controversies relating to the boundary between the two jurisdictions, the tribunal which is ultimately to decide, is to be established under the general government. But this does not change the principle of the case. The decision is to be impartially made, according to the rules of the Constitution; and all the usual and most effectual precautions are taken to secure this impartiality. Some such tribunal is clearly essential to prevent an appeal to the sword and a dissolution of the compact; and that it ought to be established under the general rather than under the local governments, or, to speak more properly, that it could be safely established under the first alone, is a position not likely to
be combated.

If we try the Constitution by its last relation to the authority by which amendments are to be made, we find it neither wholly NATIONAL nor wholly FEDERAL. Were it wholly national, the supreme and ultimate authority would reside in the MAJORITY of the people of the Union; and this authority would be competent at all times, like that of a majority of every national society, to alter or abolish its established government. Were it wholly federal, on the other hand, the concurrence of each State in the Union would be essential to every alteration that would be binding on all. The mode provided by the plan of the convention is not founded on either of these principles. In requiring more than a majority, and principles. In requiring more than a majority, and particularly in computing the proportion by STATES, not by CITIZENS, it departs from the NATIONAL and advances towards the FEDERAL character; in rendering the concurrence of less than the whole number of States sufficient, it loses again the FEDERAL and partakes of the NATIONAL character.

The proposed Constitution, therefore, is, in strictness, neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both. In its foundation it is federal, not national; in the sources from which the ordinary powers of the government are drawn, it is partly federal and partly national; in the operation of these powers, it is national, not federal; in the extent of them, again, it is federal, not national; and, finally, in the authoritative mode of introducing amendments, it is neither wholly federal nor wholly national.

PUBLIUS.
Chapter Ten

Dr. Martin Luther King
Reading Dr. Martin Luther King
Letter from a Birmingham Jail
Chapter Eleven

de Tocqueville
Reading de Tocqueville

Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* can be seen as an unlikely work of examinational prose. The author and his partner came to the United States with a goal of studying the prison system, but the travel plans changed, eventually leading to the writing of this work, whose subject must have fascinated the author, given his own background as a citizen of France.

The student thinker should come to the study of this work with the idea that it is not going to be easy. Vocabulary, structure, and context all require some amount of attention paid to what the reader may not know about a lot of things, like the idea of tariffs, taxes, associations, and how the local, state, and national government operate now and at the time of the writing of *Democracy on America*.

One of the most difficult ideas that might inform the reading of the work is that the United States at the time is a somewhat different place than what we know or live in now.

Slavery as an economic, social, and cultural system will have existed for already 221 years, the first enslaved people being brought to the Virginia colony in 1619 (2019 marks the 400th anniversary of this very sad event). The reader must come to the reading of de Tocqueville knowing that the Civil War has yet to happen and that the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (1865) will not be ratified for another 25 years. And so when the author refers to citizens, he is referring to people in the United States who own property and who have white skin color. These are important non-political facts.

Much of the country at the time is rural.
Chapter 12

Political Associations In The United States

First publication 1835, second 1840

Daily use which the Anglo–Americans make of the right of association — Three kinds of political associations — In what manner the Americans apply the representative system to associations — Dangers resulting to the State — Great Convention of 1831 relative to the Tariff — Legislative character of this Convention — Why the unlimited exercise of the right of association is less dangerous in the United States than elsewhere — Why it may be looked upon as necessary — Utility of associations in a democratic people.

In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used, or more unsparingly applied to a multitude of different objects, than in America. Besides the permanent associations which are established by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties, a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of private individuals.

The citizen of the United States is taught from his earliest infancy to rely upon his own exertions in order to resist the evils and the difficulties of life; he looks upon social authority with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he only claims its assistance when he is quite unable to shift without it. This habit may even be traced in the schools of the rising generation, where the children in their games are wont to submit to rules which they have themselves established, and to punish misdemeanors which they have themselves defined. The same spirit pervades every act of social life. If a stoppage occurs in a thoroughfare, and the circulation of the public is hindered, the neighbors immediately constitute a deliberative body; and this extemporaneous assembly gives rise to an executive power which remedies the inconvenience before anybody has thought of recurring to an authority superior to that of the persons immediately concerned.

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131 The word “objects” here is somewhat archaic. Try not to be confused by the word. As you drive around the state you see evidence of associations, like clubs, unions, and people who might band together for a specific purpose, maybe even these new kinds of clubs where people throw axes around. Here the author means objects as being purposes or goals. Like objectives. A political party is supposed to have an on objective. But de Tocqueville might often refer to the goal of a certain group as an “object.”

132 The reader might think about this in terms of what Aristotle referred to as the “objective” of a community—to seek out some good. See Politics, Part 1, Book 1.
If the public pleasures are concerned, an association is formed to provide for the splendor and the regularity of the entertainment. Societies are formed to resist enemies which are exclusively of a moral nature, and to diminish the vice of intemperance: in the United States associations are established to promote public order, commerce, industry, morality, and religion; for there is no end which the human will, seconded by the collective exertions of individuals, despairs of attaining.

I shall hereafter have occasion to show the effects of association upon the course of society, and I must confine myself for the present to the political world. When once the right of association is recognized, the citizens may employ it in several different ways.

An association consists simply in the public assent which a number of individuals give to certain doctrines, and in the engagement which they contract to promote the spread of those doctrines by their exertions. The right of association with these views is very analogous to the liberty of unlicensed writing; but societies thus formed possess more authority than the press. When an opinion is represented by a society, it necessarily assumes a more exact and explicit form. It numbers its partisans, and compromises their welfare in its cause: they, on the other hand, become acquainted with each other, and their zeal is increased by their number. An association unites the efforts of minds which have a tendency to diverge in one single channel, and urges them vigorously towards one single end which it points out.

The second degree in the right of association is the power of meeting. When an association is allowed to establish centres of action at certain important points in the country, its activity is increased and its influence extended. Men have the opportunity of seeing each other; means of execution are more readily combined, and opinions are maintained with a degree of warmth and energy which written language cannot approach.

Lastly, in the exercise of the right of political association, there is a third degree: the partisans of an opinion may unite in electoral bodies, and choose delegates to represent them in a central assembly. This is, properly speaking, the application of the representative system to a party.

Thus, in the first instance, a society is formed between individuals professing the same opinion, and the tie which keeps it together is of a purely intellectual nature; in the second case, small assemblies are formed which only represent a fraction of the party. Lastly, in the third case, they constitute a separate nation in the midst of the nation, a government within the Government. Their delegates, like the real delegates of the majority, represent the entire collective force of their party; and they enjoy a certain degree of that national dignity and great influence which belong to the chosen representatives of the people. It is true that they have not

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133 This work is translated from the French language. As a translation, the writing can often be hard to figure both in terms of style and vocabulary. Consider this two part sentence which tries to define an “association.” Can you simplify the sentence down to its core meaning and in just a few words? You’d have to understand what is meant by “doctrine,” “engagement,” “contract,” and “exertions.”

134 See reading notes (pg). The “right” to associate is like the “right” to write: you don’t need a license, just the will to do it.
the right of making the laws, but they have the power of attacking those which are in being, and of drawing up beforehand those which they may afterwards cause to be adopted.

If, in a people which is imperfectly accustomed to the exercise of freedom, or which is exposed to violent political passions, a deliberating minority, which confines itself to the contemplation of future laws, be placed in juxtaposition to the legislative majority, I cannot but believe that public tranquillity incurs very great risks in that nation. There is doubtless a very wide difference between proving that one law is in itself better than another and proving that the former ought to be substituted for the latter. But the imagination of the populace is very apt to overlook this difference, which is so apparent to the minds of thinking men. It sometimes happens that a nation is divided into two nearly equal parties, each of which affects to represent the majority. If, in immediate contiguity to the directing power, another power be established, which exercises almost as much moral authority as the former, it is not to be believed that it will long be content to speak without acting; or that it will always be restrained by the abstract consideration of the nature of associations which are meant to direct but not to enforce opinions, to suggest but not to make the laws.

The more we consider the independence of the press in its principal consequences, the more are we convinced that it is the chief and, so to speak, the constitutive element of freedom in the modern world. A nation which is determined to remain free is therefore right in demanding the unrestrained exercise of this independence. But the unrestrained liberty of political association cannot be entirely assimilated to the liberty of the press. The one is at the same time less necessary and more dangerous than the other. A nation may confine it within certain limits without forfeiting any part of its self-control; and it may sometimes be obliged to do so in order to maintain its own authority.

In America the liberty of association for political purposes is unbounded. An example will show in the clearest light to what an extent this privilege is tolerated.

The question of the tariff, or of free trade, produced a great manifestation of party feeling in America; the tariff was not only a subject of debate as a matter of opinion, but it exercised a favorable or a prejudicial influence upon several very powerful interests of the States. The North attributed a great portion of its prosperity, and the South all its sufferings, to this system; insomuch that for a long time the tariff was the sole source of the political animosities which agitated the Union.

In 1831, when the dispute was raging with the utmost virulence, a private citizen of Massachusetts proposed to all the enemies of the tariff, by means of the public prints, to send delegates to Philadelphia in order to consult together upon the means which were most fitted to promote freedom of trade. This proposal circulated in a few days from Maine to New Orleans by the power of the printing-press: the opponents of the tariff adopted it with enthusiasm; meetings were formed on all sides, and delegates were named. The majority of these individuals were well known, and some of them had earned a considerable degree of celebrity. South Carolina alone, which afterwards took up arms in the same cause, sent sixty-three delegates. On October 1, 1831, this assembly, which according to the American custom had taken the name of a Convention, met at Philadelphia; it consisted of more than two hundred members. Its debates were public, and they at once assumed a legislative character; the extent of
the powers of Congress, the theories of free trade, and the different clauses of the tariff, were
discussed in turn. At the end of ten days’ deliberation the Convention broke up, after having
published an address to the American people, in which it declared:

I. That Congress had not the right of making a tariff, and that the existing tariff was
unconstitutional;

II. That the prohibition of free trade was prejudicial to the interests of all nations, and to
that of the American people in particular.

It must be acknowledged that the unrestrained liberty of political association has not
hitherto produced, in the United States, those fatal consequences which might perhaps be
expected from it elsewhere. The right of association was imported from England, and it has
always existed in America; so that the exercise of this privilege is now amalgamated with the
manners and customs of the people. At the present time the liberty of association is become a
necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority. In the United States, as soon as a party
is become preponderant, all public authority passes under its control; its private supporters
occupy all the places, and have all the force of the administration at their disposal. As the most
distinguished partisans of the other side of the question are unable to surmount the obstacles
which exclude them from power, they require some means of establishing themselves upon
their own basis, and of opposing the moral authority of the minority to the physical power
which domineers over it. Thus a dangerous expedient is used to obviate a still more formidable
danger.

The omnipotence of the majority appears to me to present such extreme perils to the
American Republics that the dangerous measure which is used to repress it seems to be more
advantageous than prejudicial. And here I am about to advance a proposition which may
remind the reader of what I said before in speaking of municipal freedom: There are no
countries in which associations are more needed, to prevent the despotism of faction or the
arbitrary power of a prince, than those which are democratically constituted. In aristocratic
nations the body of the nobles and the more opulent part of the community are in themselves
natural associations, which act as checks upon the abuses of power. In countries in which these
associations do not exist, if private individuals are unable to create an artificial and a temporary
substitute for them, I can imagine no permanent protection against the most galling tyranny;
and a great people may be oppressed by a small faction, or by a single individual, with
impunity.

The meeting of a great political Convention (for there are Conventions of all kinds), which
may frequently become a necessary measure, is always a serious occurrence, even in America,
and one which is never looked forward to, by the judicious friends of the country, without
alarm. This was very perceptible in the Convention of 1831, at which the exertions of all the
most distinguished members of the Assembly tended to moderate its language, and to restrain
the subjects which it treated within certain limits. It is probable, in fact, that the Convention of
1831 exercised a very great influence upon the minds of the malcontents, and prepared them for
the open revolt against the commercial laws of the Union which took place in 1832.

It cannot be denied that the unrestrained liberty of association for political purposes is the
privilege which a people is longest in learning how to exercise. If it does not throw the nation
into anarchy, it perpetually augments the chances of that calamity. On one point, however, this perilous liberty offers a security against dangers of another kind; in countries where associations are free, secret societies are unknown. In America there are numerous factions, but no conspiracies.

Different ways in which the right of association is understood in Europe and in the United States — Different use which is made of it.

The most natural privilege of man, next to the right of acting for himself, is that of combining his exertions with those of his fellow-creatures, and of acting in common with them. I am therefore led to conclude that the right of association is almost as inalienable as the right of personal liberty. No legislator can attack it without impairing the very foundations of society. Nevertheless, if the liberty of association is a fruitful source of advantages and prosperity to some nations, it may be perverted or carried to excess by others, and the element of life may be changed into an element of destruction. A comparison of the different methods which associations pursue in those countries in which they are managed with discretion, as well as in those where liberty degenerates into license, may perhaps be thought useful both to governments and to parties.

The greater part of Europeans look upon an association as a weapon which is to be hastily fashioned, and immediately tried in the conflict. A society is formed for discussion, but the idea of impending action prevails in the minds of those who constitute it: it is, in fact, an army; and the time given to parley serves to reckon up the strength and to animate the courage of the host, after which they direct their march against the enemy. Resources which lie within the bounds of the law may suggest themselves to the persons who compose it as means, but never as the only means, of success.

Such, however, is not the manner in which the right of association is understood in the United States. In America the citizens who form the minority associate, in order, in the first place, to show their numerical strength, and so to diminish the moral authority of the majority; and, in the second place, to stimulate competition, and to discover those arguments which are most fitted to act upon the majority; for they always entertain hopes of drawing over their opponents to their own side, and of afterwards disposing of the supreme power in their name. Political associations in the United States are therefore peaceable in their intentions, and strictly legal in the means which they employ; and they assert with perfect truth that they only aim at success by lawful expedients.

The difference which exists between the Americans and ourselves depends on several causes. In Europe there are numerous parties so diametrically opposed to the majority that they can never hope to acquire its support, and at the same time they think that they are sufficiently strong in themselves to struggle and to defend their cause. When a party of this kind forms an association, its object is, not to conquer, but to fight. In America the individuals who hold opinions very much opposed to those of the majority are no sort of impediment to its power, and all other parties hope to win it over to their own principles in the end. The exercise of the right of association becomes dangerous in proportion to the impossibility which excludes great parties from acquiring the majority. In a country like the United States, in which the differences of opinion are mere differences of hue, the right of association may remain unrestrained.
without evil consequences. The inexperience of many of the European nations in the enjoyment of liberty leads them only to look upon the liberty of association as a right of attacking the Government. The first notion which presents itself to a party, as well as to an individual, when it has acquired a consciousness of its own strength, is that of violence: the notion of persuasion arises at a later period and is only derived from experience. The English, who are divided into parties which differ most essentially from each other, rarely abuse the right of association, because they have long been accustomed to exercise it. In France the passion for war is so intense that there is no undertaking so mad, or so injurious to the welfare of the State, that a man does not consider himself honored in defending it, at the risk of his life.

But perhaps the most powerful of the causes which tend to mitigate the excesses of political association in the United States is Universal Suffrage. In countries in which universal suffrage exists the majority is never doubtful, because neither party can pretend to represent that portion of the community which has not voted. The associations which are formed are aware, as well as the nation at large, that they do not represent the majority: this is, indeed, a condition inseparable from their existence; for if they did represent the preponderating power, they would change the law instead of soliciting its reform. The consequence of this is that the moral influence of the Government which they attack is very much increased, and their own power is very much enfeebled.

In Europe there are few associations which do not affect to represent the majority, or which do not believe that they represent it. This conviction or this pretension tends to augment their force amazingly, and contributes no less to legalize their measures. Violence may seem to be excusable in defence of the cause of oppressed right. Thus it is, in the vast labyrinth of human laws, that extreme liberty sometimes corrects the abuses of license, and that extreme democracy obviates the dangers of democratic government. In Europe, associations consider themselves, in some degree, as the legislative and executive councils of the people, which is unable to speak for itself. In America, where they only represent a minority of the nation, they argue and they petition.

The means which the associations of Europe employ are in accordance with the end which they propose to obtain. As the principal aim of these bodies is to act, and not to debate, to fight rather than to persuade, they are naturally led to adopt a form of organization which differs from the ordinary customs of civil bodies, and which assumes the habits and the maxims of military life. They centralize the direction of their resources as much as possible, and they intrust the power of the whole party to a very small number of leaders.

The members of these associations respond to a watchword, like soldiers on duty; they profess the doctrine of passive obedience; say rather, that in uniting together they at once abjure the exercise of their own judgment and free will; and the tyrannical control which these societies exercise is often far more insupportable than the authority possessed over society by the Government which they attack. Their moral force is much diminished by these excesses, and they lose the powerful interest which is always excited by a struggle between oppressors and the oppressed. The man who in given cases consents to obey his fellows with servility, and who submits his activity and even his opinions to their control, can have no claim to rank as a free citizen.
The Americans have also established certain forms of government which are applied to their associations, but these are invariably borrowed from the forms of the civil administration. The independence of each individual is formally recognized; the tendency of the members of the association points, as it does in the body of the community, towards the same end, but they are not obliged to follow the same track. No one abjures the exercise of his reason and his free will; but every one exerts that reason and that will for the benefit of a common undertaking.
Civil Disobedience
I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe- "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

This American government- what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this; for the people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have. Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even impose on themselves, for their own advantage. It is excellent, we must all allow. Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. For government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most expedient, the governed are most let alone by it. Trade and commerce, if they were not made of india-rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way; and, if one were to judge these men wholly by the effects of their actions and not partly by their intentions, they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous persons who put obstructions on the railroads.

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.

After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the
Chapter Thirteen

Thomas Paine
Common Sense
Nobel Prize Speech: 1993

“Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind but wise.” Or was it an old man? A guru, perhaps. Or a griot soothing restless children. I have heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures.

“In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question. Among her people she is both the law and its transgression. The honor she is paid and the awe in which she is held reach beyond her neighborhood to places far away; to the city where the intelligence of rural prophets is the source of much amusement.

One day the woman is visited by some young people who seem to be bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is. Their plan is simple: they enter her house and ask the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability: her blindness. They stand before her, and one of them says, “Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead.”

She does not answer, and the question is repeated. “Is the bird I am holding living or dead?”

Still she doesn’t answer. She is blind and cannot see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She does not know their color, gender or homeland. She only knows their motive.

The old woman’s silence is so long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter.

Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. “I don’t know”, she says. “I don’t know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands.”

Her answer can be taken to mean: if it is dead, you have either found it that way or you have killed it. If it is alive, you can still kill it. Whether it is to stay alive, it is your decision. Whatever the case, it is your responsibility.

For parading their power and her helplessness, the young visitors are reprimanded, told they are responsible not only for the act of mockery but also for the small bundle of life sacrificed to achieve its aims. The blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised.

Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird-in-the-hand might signify has always been attractive to me, but especially so now thinking, as I have been, about the work I do that has brought me to this company. So I choose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to
her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency – as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her: “Is it living or dead?” is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperiled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smithered to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental. Exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

She is convinced that when language dies, out of carelessness, disuse, indifference and absence of esteem, or killed by fiat, not only she herself, but all users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechlessness, of disabled and disabiling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as a device for grappling with meaning, providing guidance, or expressing love. But she knows tongue-suicide is not only the choice of children. It is common among the infantile heads of state and power merchants whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience.

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties for menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek – it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.

The old woman is keenly aware that no intellectual mercenary, nor insatiable dictator, no paid-for politician or demagogue; no counterfeit journalist would be persuaded by her thoughts. There is and will be rousing language to keep citizens armed and arming; slaughtered and slaughtering in the malls, courthouses, post offices, playgrounds, bedrooms and
boulevards; stirring, memorializing language to mask the pity and waste of needless death. There will be more diplomatic language to countenance rape, torture, assassination. There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to throttle women, to pack their throats like paté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness.

Underneath the eloquence, the glamor, the scholarly associations, however stirring or seductive, the heart of such language is languishing, or perhaps not beating at all – if the bird is already dead.

She has thought about what could have been the intellectual history of any discipline if it had not insisted upon, or been forced into, the waste of time and life that rationalizations for and representations of dominance required – lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded.

The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction, or the weight of many languages that precipitated the tower’s failed architecture. That one monolithic language would have expedited the building and heaven would have been reached. Whose heaven, she wonders? And what kind? Perhaps the achievement of Paradise was premature, a little hasty if no one could take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives period. Had they, the heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet. Complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of heaven as life; not heaven as post-life.

She would not want to leave her young visitors with the impression that language should be forced to stay alive merely to be. The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie. When a President of the United States thought about the graveyard his country had become, and said, “The world will little note nor long remember what we say here. But it will never forget what they did here,” his simple words are exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties because they refused to encapsulate the reality of 600,000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the “final word”, the precise “summing up”, acknowledging their “poor power to add or detract”, his words signal deference to the uncapturability of the life it mourns. It is the deference that moves her, that recognition that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never “pin down” slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable.

Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction. But who does not know of literature banned because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate? And how many are outraged by the thought of a self-ravaged tongue?
Word-work is sublime, she thinks, because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference – the way in which we are like no other life.

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

“Once upon a time, …” visitors ask an old woman a question. Who are they, these children? What did they make of that encounter? What did they hear in those final words: “The bird is in your hands”? A sentence that gestures towards possibility or one that drops a latch? Perhaps what the children heard was “It’s not my problem. I am old, female, black, blind. What wisdom I have now is in knowing I cannot help you. The future of language is yours.”

They stand there. Suppose nothing was in their hands? Suppose the visit was only a ruse, a trick to get to be spoken to, taken seriously as they have not been before? A chance to interrupt, to violate the adult world, its miasma of discourse about them, for them, but never to them? Urgent questions are at stake, including the one they have asked: “Is the bird we hold living or dead?” Perhaps the question meant: “Could someone tell us what is life? What is death?” No trick at all; no silliness. A straightforward question worthy of the attention of a wise one. An old one. And if the old and wise who have lived life and faced death cannot describe either, who can?

But she does not; she keeps her secret; her good opinion of herself; her gnomic pronouncements; her art without commitment. She keeps her distance, enforces it and retreats into the singularity of isolation, in sophisticated, privileged space.

Nothing, no word follows her declaration of transfer. That silence is deep, deeper than the meaning available in the words she has spoken. It shivers, this silence, and the children, annoyed, fill it with language invented on the spot.

“Is there no speech,” they ask her, “no words you can give us that helps us break through your dossier of failures? Through the education you have just given us that is no education at all because we are paying close attention to what you have done as well as to what you have said? To the barrier you have erected between generosity and wisdom?

“We have no bird in our hands, living or dead. We have only you and our important question. Is the nothing in our hands something you could not bear to contemplate, to even guess? Don’t you remember being young when language was magic without meaning? When what you could say, could not mean? When the invisible was what imagination strove to see? When questions and demands for answers burned so brightly you trembled with fury at not knowing?

“Do we have to begin consciousness with a battle heroines and heroes like you have already fought and lost leaving us with nothing in our hands except what you have imagined is there? Your answer is artful, but its artfulness embarrasses us and ought to embarrass you. Your answer is indecent in its self-congratulation. A made-for-television script that makes no sense if there is nothing in our hands.

“Why didn’t you reach out, touch us with your soft fingers, delay the sound bite, the lesson, until you knew who we were? Did you so despise our trick, our modus operandi you could not see that we were baffled about how to get your attention? We are young. Unripe. We have heard all our short lives that we have to be responsible. What could that possibly mean in
the catastrophe this world has become; where, as a poet said, “nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced.” Our inheritance is an affront. You want us to have your old, blank eyes and see only cruelty and mediocrity. Do you think we are stupid enough to perjure ourselves again and again with the fiction of nationhood? How dare you talk to us of duty when we stand waist deep in the toxin of your past?

“You trivialize us and trivialize the bird that is not in our hands. Is there no context for our lives? No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong? You are an adult. The old one, the wise one. Stop thinking about saving your face. Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story. Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp; if love so ignites your words they go down in flames and nothing is left but their scald. Or if, with the reticence of a surgeon’s hands, your words suture only the places where blood might flow. We know you can never do it properly—once and for all. Passion is never enough; neither is skill. But try. For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don’t tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief’s wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear’s caul. You, old woman, blessed with blindness, can speak the language that tells us what only language can: how to see without pictures. Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation.

“Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company.

“Tell us about ships turned away from shorelines at Easter, placenta in a field. Tell us about a wagonload of slaves, how they sang so softly their breath was indistinguishable from the falling snow. How they knew from the hunch of the nearest shoulder that the next stop would be their last. How, with hands prayed in their sex, they thought of heat, then sun. Lifting their faces as though it was there for the taking. Turning as though there for the taking. They stop at an inn. The driver and his mate go in with the lamp leaving them humming in the dark. The horse’s void steams into the snow beneath its hooves and its hiss and melt are the envy of the freezing slaves.

“The inn door opens: a girl and a boy step away from its light. They climb into the wagon bed. The boy will have a gun in three years, but now he carries a lamp and a jug of warm cider. They pass it from mouth to mouth. The girl offers bread, pieces of meat and something more: a glance into the eyes of the one she serves. One helping for each man, two for each woman. And a look. They look back. The next stop will be their last. But not this one. This one is warmed.”

It’s quiet again when the children finish speaking, until the woman breaks into the silence.

“Finally”, she says, “I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together.”