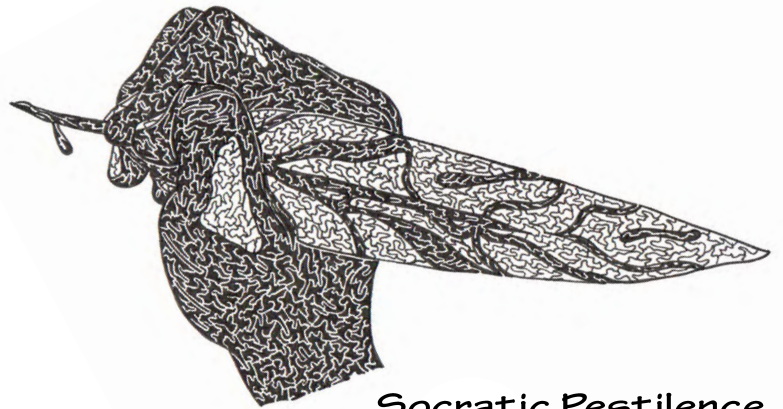


# in medias res

A Liberal Arts Journal  
March 2008



Socratic Pestilence

**Inside:**

I believe. I give.

Violence in Society

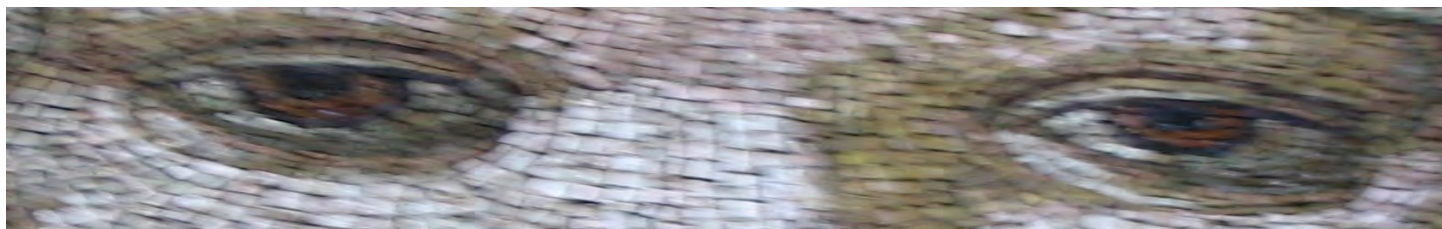
Should French be mandatory in  
schools?

And much more . . .

# Editorial Policy

This journal is devoted to understanding the human condition which is to be *In medias res*, latin, “in the middle of things”. We intend to print a wide range of articles, essays, travelogues, reviews, poetry and fiction which highlight the interests, expertise and manners of thought cultivated in the various disciplines studied at this university. Indeed, the university must, in some sense, have portions of all things in order to be an *universitas*, a whole which has sufficient diversity and depth to merit its name. Situated as we are between many things, ideas, experiences and events, both at the university and in the wider world we might benefit by recognizing and discussing the possibilities inherent in or constitutive of this reality. The purpose of this paper is to create a space where the life of learning and the life of everyday can be brought together. Both students and faculty are encouraged to contribute to this publication.

**Submissions can be made in electronic versions to [inmediasres@stmcollege.ca](mailto:inmediasres@stmcollege.ca) or to STM 223.**



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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the editorial board or of St. Thomas More College.

## THEORY AND LIFE

DANIEL REGNIER

What does theory have to do with life? This rather abstract question might be formulated at a more concrete level: What does *school* have to do with life? Again, the question might be formulated even more specifically: what does this or that academic discipline – history, sociology, literature – have to do with life? Why study these things?

Since these questions are constantly asked by people in very different positions, by students and teachers, by administrators, parents and employers, very diverse answers have been proposed as a response.

One of the most predominant ways of answering these questions, in our day at least, involves invoking the economy. According to this type of explanation, theory is ultimately to be applied by its students as “marketable skills” which should allow them to participate in the economy to their benefit and by extension it would seem to the benefit of the whole society.

Another type of response to the questions mentioned above involves reference to politics. According to this model, education ought to provide students with an understanding that should allow them to participate fully agents in the political realm, since this realm has such important implications on all levels of life. There is a kind of variation of this understanding of the importance of study which suggests that one cannot really *positively* educate anyone to citizenship, but that rather students may only be taught critical skills which can be used to scrutinize established norms and institutions, such as in the absence of critique have a tendency to become oppressive and totalitarian.

A very classic answer to the questions formulated above states that theory is nothing more than theory and should be accepted as such. Any attempt to “apply” knowledge makes falsity of truth. Accordingly, true sciences – including “human sciences”, literature, history, political science – are to be pursued for no other end than that of extending the limits of human knowledge. The unexpressed premise behind this explanation of the importance of the academic pursuits is that knowledge is a good in itself. The idea here is that there is such a thing as the “intellectual life” which in some sense is independent of the rest of life. This intellectual side of life can easily be left to neglect since the demands of the other levels of life tend to be more obvious if not overpowering. This model of the relation, or rather absence of relation between theory and everyday life provides the material for a caricature, that of the nutty academic who has “no life” besides that which is pursued in the library of the laboratory.

Undoubtedly, all of these models contain some truth. Perhaps they might be combined; perhaps not. In any case, it is worth looking at another way of understanding the relationship between theory and life. Pierre Hadot, the great French scholar of ancient philosophy, was in his studies struck by the fact that to commentators trying to understand ancient philosophical writings in precisely the same way that we study modern philosophers, the texts of the ancients often seemed incoherent, poorly structured or poorly simply written. In a first stage of study, Hadot concluded that the ancient philosophers were generally not thinking of their texts in terms of writing but rather in terms of a sort of support for *oral expression*. Furthermore, whereas in general modern philosophers tend to construct texts which are intended to reflect a system which can be tested for consistency, Ancient

philosophers tended to think of the written text as a reflection of the spoken word. Hadot writes

The written is not written for itself, but is rather no more than a material support for spoken word which is destined to become spoken word once again, like a modern disk or cassette which is but the intermediary between two events: the recording and the listening. Opposed to the spatiality of the modern written work is the temporal succession of the ancient spoken word, stored in writing. The modern philosophical writing is like an architectural monument, all the parts of which coexist: it is possible to go from one part to another to verify their coherence. On the contrary, the ancient philosophical work is more like a musical performance which proceeds by way of themes and variations. (Hadot, 209)

Hadot goes on to describe how the ancient philosophical text is ultimately connected to the event of the oral teaching, how the texts are addressed not to abstract readers, but rather to a group of students, students who, no doubt had chosen to study with a certain master rather than another. Indeed, in many cases were those who preserved the texts. The philosopher, then, speaks not to “construct an edifice of concepts, but to form a group of students” (p. 210). Yet, the oral teaching is not simply a set of doctrines or truths but rather *exercises* which allow one to practice a method.

Moreover, in a second level of his research, Hadot finds that although the Ancient philosophers were indeed interested in practicing intellectual methods, the notion of exercise that we find exemplified in their work goes quite a bit further. As Hadot explains,

In their principles, in their fundamental choices, all of the schools of philosophy of antiquity refused to consider philosophic activity as purely intellectual, as purely theoretical or formal; they considered it to be a choice which engaged one’s whole life and soul. The exercise of philosophy was hence not only intellectual but could also be spiritual. The philosopher does not only form knowledge of how to speak, or discuss, but knowledge of how to live in the strongest and noblest sense of the term. It is the art of living to which the philosopher invites his students. (Hadot, 211)

Of course, this way of understanding education is many respects foreign to what we do in our day, certainly in large institutions, at least. Is it possible we no longer have use for the idea of an “art of living”? And if we do, it seems to be a matter to cultivated in the family, or in other such intimate circumstances. Yet, there is indeed something very appealing about the idea that theory might be profoundly interwoven with the fabric of our everyday life. In fact, it seems that many of disciplines we study at the university and the various ways that we transmit them could take into account life, everyday life, without undermining the integrity of the disciplines but rather raising their integrity insofar as they have in view at least in part the transformation of life.

### References:

Pierre Hadot, *Etudes de Philosophie Ancienne*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1998.

# Socratic Pestilence: The Campus Gadflies ask about REASON AND EMOTION

Interviews by Kristine Montgomery and Kyle Sim

In an attempt to delve deeper into the student psyche our team here at *In Medias Res* engineered a short Q&A section aimed at just that. Jokes and foolery aside, we wanted to find out the details of, well everything, from you the students. The Gadflies are not afraid to ask the hard questions; and as it turns out our readers are not afraid to answer them. Our first burning question sought out the truth behind making decisions. It can be hard to understand a students' motivation, especially surrounding things such as student loans disappearing at Louis and missing classes only to be seen in the hall shortly after. So we asked you to explain the relationship between Reason and Emotion when it comes to deciding what's best. We asked students the following questions:

*Disclaimer: The 'Gadflies' are not responsible for any corruption of youth that may or may not result from the following.*

**Do you think your reason or your emotion is responsible for your choices?**

You answered:  
REASON 3  
EMOTION 2  
BOTH 6

I don't really think it's completely one or the other, it's always a balance between the two. If you do something based solely on reasoning then your own opinions don't really matter and if you do something based on emotion then logic may as well not exist.

—Randy, History, 2nd year

I think it's a bit of both just because I've been raised in a particular religious tradition. So there's some emotion in there obviously but to me it seems rational when I make my decisions based on my emotions. So I'd say primarily for me it is reason.—Nathan, History, 2nd year

I think it's probably a combination of the two, because you can't solely work on either or, or else you end up some kind of weird Vulcan thing. There's always an interplay, it's hard to choose between the two. Sometimes it's just a gut sort of thing, like I just know that this isn't right everything tells me sort of thing. And sometimes it's more logical. For instance, when I purchased this phone, I realised that logically speaking I do not need a shiny phone. I could get this cheaper phone, but emotion tells me this is shiny, and emotion won out.—David, Drama, 2nd year

Mixture of both depending on the situation. If it's things with friends and family its based on emotion but other things might be better with reason.—Erin, Arts and Science, 1st year

That's a weighted question. I try to balance it out I think, but I think personally I'm more on the side of emotion and then sort of try to apply a rationale to it after, but I think more on the side of emotion.—Mike, English, 4th year

I think the same, balance. You want to rationalise things but if it doesn't work for you emotionally then it isn't really rational.

—Rae, English, 4th year



**Do you think other people should use their emotion or reason when making decisions?**

You answered:  
REASON 1  
EMOTION 4  
BOTH 4

I think it should be mixed. I think a lot people think reason, but if you do that you lose a lot of the morality.

—Kyle, Math and Philosophy, 4th year

I definitely think there are different ways... different people figure things in different ways than I do. I don't know if it would work for everyone. Some people don't relate well to religion. And that's fine. In that case, my kind of reasoning would not work for them.

—Nathan, History, 2nd year

No, in general people should not act on their emotion...For small things that are inconsequential, it doesn't matter as much. But... you spoke of very big decisions like between right or wrong and if you're just going based on your gut; it's like "we should we kill all hippies", but everyone has a right to exist.

—David, Drama, 2nd year

I think your emotions is probably a good guide point like if you are feeling uncomfortable with something or unsure, there's probably a reasoning to it you should probably follow. But at the same time your emotions can lead you the wrong way...then you might need to fall back on your reason. So don't think there is really a dichotomy you an make, I think they both come into play.—Nicole, International Studies, 4th year

I think reason should, you should apply it judiciously if you will, but still be true to your emotions.—Mike, English, 4th year

I think it depends on the situation, like if you're talking about relationship stuff definitely emotion wise, but if you are talking about getting school work done rational is probably better.

—Rae, English, 4th year



## Do you believe reason and emotion to be in conflict? Or are the two in some sort of harmony?

People individually use both. [Together or in opposition?] They both want different things, clearly, otherwise we wouldn't need both of them. And when they do conflict you just have to weigh it out. Which one would be more hard to do.

—Kyle, Math and Philosophy, 4th year

They are often opposed. Your emotion deals with what you want rather than what is right. Like you feel a certain way about something that you want a certain outcome so that will sway your decision. Whereas objective reason as to what will affect the most number of people and how is your decision going to effect yourself and others. I would say they can work together but often times they don't.

—Randy, History, 2nd year

They can be in harmony, although it seems like quite often...the times that they are opposed to one another I think the opposition is greater...and you can see it more...and therefore one would think that...they are way different ideas. And when they are at harmony you don't notice it as much because everything is zen and at peace.

—David, Drama, 2nd year

I think probably both apply, like...at times they are hand in hand but at other times your mind can be telling you one thing and your heart might be telling you something else.

—Nicole, International Studies, 4th year

I think they have to work on harmony. If you rely on one specifically then the decision may not be the best so I think you have to have both.

—Erin, Arts and Science, 1st year

Sometimes they can be in conflict but, yeah a lot of the time it is hard to bring them to agreement, but you have to compromise. I know that's an unsatisfactory answer...for myself. But I think you have to do your best to try to find some sort of balance if at all possibly.

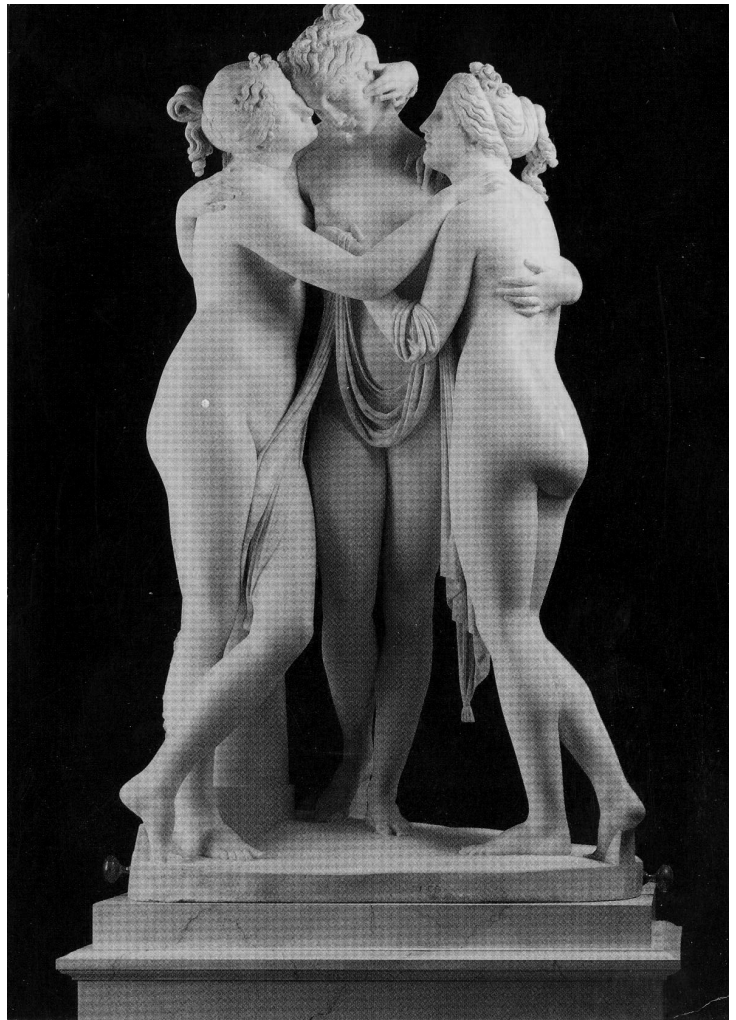
—Mike, English, 4th year

Intuition is a starting point, but reason needs to supplement it so you don't do something really stupid like date someone based on their hair.

—Kerry, Political Studies, 1st year

Reason can inform your decisions, but in the end it is your gut that should decide. You have to do what feels right. Reason should only be one factor when you make a big decision. If logically something is the best choice, but it just feels wrong that should tell you something. Maybe there is something more going on than can be quantified with a logical formula. If you ignore that little extra factor, then you'll just regret your decision.

—Jordan, English, 3rd year



I think to be happy with a decision you make it has to work for your heart because if you make just a very rational decision but you are unhappy with it because it doesn't fill any emotional needs for you but it works rationally and logically then when you get out of it...you're unhappy. But at the same time if you just make decisions emotionally and you're...satisfied, but nothing's done then than leads to like emotional kind of disorders and where do you draw the line?

—Rae, English, 4th year

Reason and emotion can be linked. You can use emotion as a reason, though it has been seen that emotion plays a contradictive role in the optimal outcome to a situation. Emotion may dictate one response that may be seen as rash or brazen when looked at logically. Emotion also tends to bring about passion, and while this may be beneficial in some situations, can lead to a lack of objectivity in evaluating decisions. If an individual is having doubt about a path of choice or there is grey area for a decision logically, then emotion can play the deciding factor, "holding the path" as it were. These situations must be viewed with candor and objectivity to ensure that a non logical choice is a suitable substitute.

—Warren, Economics, 4th year

## MY FIRST YEAR OF UNIVERSITY

STEPHEN BAGWELL

I looked forward to my first year of university with apprehension and excitement. Now I know that whatever had made me nervous just lent to the thrill of the experience. I realized that this was going to be a chance for a new beginning and I decided to make the most of it. I had dreamt that I would one day attend university, had made it my goal, and had finally attained it. Suddenly, I looked around myself and wondered, "What am I going to do now? Where am I going from here?" For a minute I paused, unsure, but it passed and I knew that I had to get involved.

I made St. Thomas More College my home and familiarized myself with its hallways, classrooms, faculty, and staff. I made new friends and joined various programs. I had, back in the spring, decided to become an STM student, mainly because I couldn't see any reason why not to. I wanted to have smaller classes, and I wanted a chance to build relationships with my professors, but in the end I received a lot more. I most certainly have had smaller classes, and indeed, it seems that they are sometimes smaller than they should be. I have had discussions in and out of class with my professors, sometimes for hours at a time, though I'm not entirely sure if this is because they're too polite to tell me to leave.

However, I wanted to give back, both to the College and to the community, and so, with the knowledge gained in my University Life Class, I joined the Service and Justice Program, the STM Pre Law Club, and, after much convincing, *In Medias Res*, the wonderful Liberal Arts journal for which I am writing this piece. In this way I have gotten to know my new city, campus, and the wonderful people who make attending university worthwhile.

Everyone at STM is hugely accommodating, and whether I have been required to send a fax, only to find the College closed but the librarian staying late and more than willing to help me, or whether I have been playing the piano in the chapel, and found everyone able to refrain from making any comments, even on those days when my playing has been less

than awesome. Fortunately, the same courtesy has been extended to me on the numerous occasions I have requested the services of the office.

I have had many opportunities come my way, some which I was notified of by friends, others by professors, and more still by STM's staff. There has been no end to the events, many of which are hosted or sponsored by the College. The hardest part is trying to fit them into my schedule, and I have yet to be disappointed. And, most importantly, I can always be sure to be able to rely on the good nature of my fellow students for help with work, last minute study sessions, or a quick game of squash.

Finally, STM allows a chance for everyone to grow in his or her own way and to develop their faith.

I may not have the slightest clue as to what the future may bring but at least I can be sure that there will be people there to help me along the way, and that I too will be able to do the same for future students, giving them one very important piece of advice: that they get involved, and that they get involved early.



## I Believe. I give.

Richard Medernach

The slogan of this year's Development and Peace Share Lent campaign is, "I believe. I give." I believe in the great work done by D&P and so I give some of my time and resources to help that work continue.

As I write this article, it is Lent. Lent is a time when Catholics and Christian from other denominations try to shed some of the excess in their lives in order to prepare for the most important day of the year, Easter. One of my favourite Lenten traditions is to use the Development and Peace Lifestyle Awareness Calendar to help me keep my life in perspective.

The calendar features daily reflections and donation suggestions that help make the run-up to Easter more meaningful to me. Some of the days are simple. February 6 reads "If you can say: I believe in justice and solidarity, contribute \$1." So I put one dollar in the Share Lent jar and so does my wife. I teach my five year old son Joseph to say it as well, so another Loonie goes into the jar. My son Sam doesn't talk yet so he's off the hook for February 6.

Other days are more challenging. March 6 reads, "Development and Peace partner YARAC in Nigeria uses sports to teach youth about development and democracy. Contribute 50¢ for each piece of sporting equipment in your house." So after some quick inventory and some lame attempts at rationalization about counting a whole set as one item versus each golf club separately, I arrive at about a \$50 total. Whoa! I was thinking the whole calendar total would be about \$50. It was time to edit the monthly budget. I can hardly complain. I had just spent fifty dollars to register Joseph in soccer. It seems fair that some child in Nigeria might also get to play soccer because of my donation.

Some of the days on the calendar don't ask for any financial contribution at all. February 24 reads, "Consider in prayer: Earth's resources must be shared in an equitable manner that allows current and future generations to meet their needs." I believe that is

**I believe**

**I give**

**Share Lent** CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR **Development and Peace** 1 888 234-8533 [www.devpo.org](http://www.devpo.org)

true, and I am grateful for all the blessings I have, so I want to share with those who face greater struggles.

For me, giving to Development and Peace is not merely an act of charity. It is one of the most important ways I have to live my Christian faith. I believe. I give. I believe the central message of the Gospels is to love God and to love God's children (that's everyone by the way). I believe I can best bear witness to my faith by working for peace and justice and so I participate in, and give to, an organization that is doing just that.

*Richard Medernach is a long time member and supporter of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. He enjoys fighting oppression and watching cartoons with his sons. Learn more about D&P at [www.devpo.org](http://www.devpo.org).*

# THE 30 OLDEST UNIVERSITIES

## 1. 859 Fes, Morocco *University of Al-Karaouine*

(Arabic: القرويين جامعة) Recognised by the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world's oldest continuously-operating, degree-granting university

## 2. 975 Cairo, Egypt *Al-Azhar University*

(Arabic: الشريف الأزهر) A degree-granting Jam'iah ("university" in Arabic) with individual faculties[4] for a Madrasah and theological seminary, Islamic law and jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, Islamic astronomy, early Islamic philosophy, and logic in Islamic philosophy

## 3. 1088 Bologna, Italy *University of Bologna*

4. 1150 Paris, France *University of Paris* Exact date uncertain, founded before 1150. Teaching suspended in 1229. Split in 13 universities in 1970

5. 1167 Oxford, England *University of Oxford* Exact date uncertain, founded before 1167 (teaching existed since 1096). Teaching suspended in 1209 (due to town execution of two scholars) and 1355 (due to the St. Scholastica riot)

6. 1175 Modena, Italy *University of Modena and Reggio Emilia* Due to the fact that it grew around the historical "Studium mutinensis" (Modena's studies)

## 7. 1209 Cambridge, England *University of Cambridge*

## 8. 1218 Salamanca, Spain *University of Salamanca*

9. 1222 Padua, Italy *University of Padua* Suspended in 1237-61, 1509-17, 1848-50.

10. 1224 Naples, Italy *University of Naples* Federico II Closed in 1435-51, 1451-65, 1474-78, 1480-87, 1496-1507, 1527-29, 1531, 1547, 1562, 1585, etc.

## 11. 1233 Baghdad, Iraq *Mustansiriya University*

(Arabic: المستنصرية الجامعة) Established by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir in 1233, the college was incorporated into the Baghdad University in 1962

12. 1240 Siena, Italy *University of Siena* Closed in 1402-1404 and 1808-14

13. 1290 Coimbra, Portugal *University of Coimbra* Founded in Lisbon and was based there in 1290-1308, 1338-54, and 1377-1537

14. 1303 Rome, Italy *University of Rome La Sapienza* According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the university "remained closed during the entire pontificate of Clement VII"

## 15. 1308 Perugia, Italy *University of Perugia*

16. 1321 Florence, Italy *University of Florence* moved to Pisa from 1473 to 1497 and from 1515 to 1860

17. 1343 Pisa, Italy *University of Pisa* There is no record of the university between 1403 and 1476

18. 1346 Valladolid, Spain *University of Valladolid* Claims continuity with University of Palencia, founded in 1212 in Palencia

19. 1348 Prague, Czech Republic *Charles University of Prague* Three of four faculties closed in 1419, joined with Jesuit university and renamed Charles-Ferdinand U. in 1652, split into German and Czech part in 1882, Czech branch closed during Nazi occupation (1939-1945), German branch closed in 1945

20. 1361 Pavia, Italy *University of Pavia* Closed for short periods during the Italian Wars, Napoleonic wars, and Revolutions of 1848

21. 1364 Kraków, Poland *Cracow Academy* development stalled

early, re-established from 1400 onwards

## 22. 1365 Vienna, Austria *University of Vienna*

23. 1386 Heidelberg, Germany *Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg* Transferred to Neustadt an der Haardt in 1576-83, suppressed between 1632 and 1652, and moved out to Frankfurt am Main and elsewhere in 1689-1700

24. 1391 Ferrara, Italy *University of Ferrara* There was no teaching in 1794-1824 and 1848-50

25. 1404 Turin, Italy *University of Turin* There was no university in Turin between 1536 and 1566 and during the Napoleonic occupation

26. 1409 Leipzig, Germany *University of Leipzig* Founded when German-speaking staff left Prague due to the Jan Hus crisis

27. 1410 St. Andrews, Scotland *University of St. Andrews* Founded by a Papal Bull

28. 1419 Rostock, Germany *University of Rostock* During the Reformation, "the Catholic university of Rostock closed altogether and the closure was long enough to make the refounded body feel a new institution"

29. 1425 Leuven, Belgium *Catholic University of Leuven* Transferred to Brussels in 1788, shut down by the French Republic in 1797, reopened in 1816, reorganized in 1834. Since 1968 split between the French-speaking Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve and the Dutch-speaking Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, still at Leuven

30. 1431 Poitiers, France *University of Poitiers* The modern university in Poitiers was founded in 1896 by merging several schools. The old university was abolished during the French Revolution

(According to *Wikipedia*)

## SUDOKU PUZZLE

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# Violence in Society

Torrie Bulmer

Violence in women has taken a new position in today's society. Women are becoming increasingly violent and are now seen as even more violent than males. *In Medias Res* spoke with Saskatoon's Social worker of the year, Mike Dunphy, to get his thoughts on this new disturbing statistic. Mr. Dunphy believes Male violence to be the root cause of most to all of female violence. "Males are not being held accountable for their responsibilities in the home and are too often walking away from wives and children. Too much harm is being left behind," says Dunphy.

The recent recipient of the Deputies Minister award for out-standing dedication in the field of Social Work is currently working on "Project Help"; dedicated to finding and dealing with the root cause of women in today's sex-trade. In order to solve the female violence issues we first need to approach their causes. In Saskatoon women alone, Mr Dunphy has found a strong paternalistic society. He strongly believes we need to break these typically male dominated ideals down and that it should start with better educating our youth. "We need to be teaching young boys how to be good young men," explains Mr. Dun-

**"[Violence] is often dismissed as A.D.D. by Doctors and the child is usually just sent home with a prescription"**

phy, "Even from a fathers point of view, there is a need to stop raising men to be bad boyfriends and bad fathers."

Social workers are using all resources available to provide services like foster homes, and adoption and protection services to aid those subjected to violence. However, this issue can and should be addressed by society, not just Social Workers and volunteers. "It's a taboo topic," says Dunphy, "and not something we want to talk about, but we need to." Educating yourself on the issue of violence is a great starting point, according to Dunphy. Knowing what exactly it is and how to recognise its characteristics is key. "Youth that have been subjected to violence usually have the same 'symptoms' of children with

Attention Deficit Disorder...fidgety, no impulse control, find it hard to focus...it is often dismissed as A.D.D. by Doctors and the child is usually just sent home with a prescription."

Mr Dunphy's personal definition of violence involves most cases of an individual taking their emotions out on another individual while still emotionally charged. "Swearing out of anger at another person,

**"We need to further our learning process in order to address the bigger issues"**

name-calling, bullying..." These may seem like small, harmless acts but each are actually the stemming points for physical, verbal, emotional and sexual abuse.

"There's a reason the strap is not used in schools anymore, we have learned from our mistakes and see how things like this cause continual violent behaviour." We need to further our learning process in order to address the bigger issues, like violence in women. Dunphy states it is important to know that severe violence always starts in children subjected to it from ages 0-5, so educating parents and children alike is necessary. "This is a big issue and will take many generations to fix, but it is possible. Definitely possible."



# A Look Back

The following is the original In medias res manifesto taken from the very first issue which was published in February 1995.

## In the Middle of Things

Kevin Corrigan

This newspaper is the result of cooperation between students belonging to four different clubs: Saint Thomas More Students Union, Newman Club, the Russian Club, and the Ukrainian Club. The purpose of the newspaper is not to be a vehicle of any one club or organisation, but rather to provide an opportunity for students and faculty to extend and develop some of the interests and debates which go on in classes across campus and which should not be restricted to class time. The title "In medias res" describes, first of all, the situation in which the newspaper is being launched, that is, in the middle of the year, or "In the middle of things"; and, second, the situation of university life as such; we did not entirely invent this life, but we find ourselves with a responsibility for participating in it and developing it, so that whoever comes after us will not inherit an empty space or a cramped planisphere.

In this we are not without significant precedent. The birth of Western literature occurred in the middle of things. Gilgamesh finds the appalling brevity of life a primary driving force in his quest for immortality and he loses the immortality he has found to a snake just as spontaneously, or in the middle of things, as his dissatisfaction with the life he had been living first arose. Homer's *Iliad*, first composed orally perhaps as much as four hundred years before it was written down, is not the tale of the Greeks' glorious defeat of Troy with Hollywood pyrotechnical effects, but an account of fifty-five fairly ordinary days in the course of a ten year war. It starts right in the middle of the war and ends not with the fiery destruction of Troy but with the temporary reconciliation between a father who has lost his son and the enemy chieftain who is responsible for his son's death. Although the story is a "Greek" story, the hero of these fifty-five days is not a Greek Warrior, but the enemy protagonist, Hector. Much later still, Dante will begin his *Divina Comedia* with the words "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita", "Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straightway was lost." This accidental quality of life and art gives us hope that our present enterprise is not inappropriate.

So the theme of our newspaper suits this time of the year and the typical situation of life which prompts reflection and intellectual growth. Consequently "In medias res" will not be a paper which attempts to cover the major news; we already have such a newspaper on campus. Our objective is to speak about what always constitutes 'news' in a university, that is, the university as a meeting place of the mind and of the multifaceted world of knowledge which the mind seeks to discover, interpret, and develop. This meeting place is not (and never should be) purely intellectual. The whole range of what we are has to respond to the traditions which the University somehow strives to represent. Several specific features have already established themselves as a part of the newspaper's format: Guy Vanderhaeghe's Classlines, News from the Ukrainian and Russian Clubs, Lyle Skrapek's Top Then, and Allan MacLeod's musical review. However, we have no pretensions to such comprehensive coverage as might burden students even further. Our policy is simple, let us start where we are as an editorial board composed of students and faculty in cooperation and let the light fall where it may.



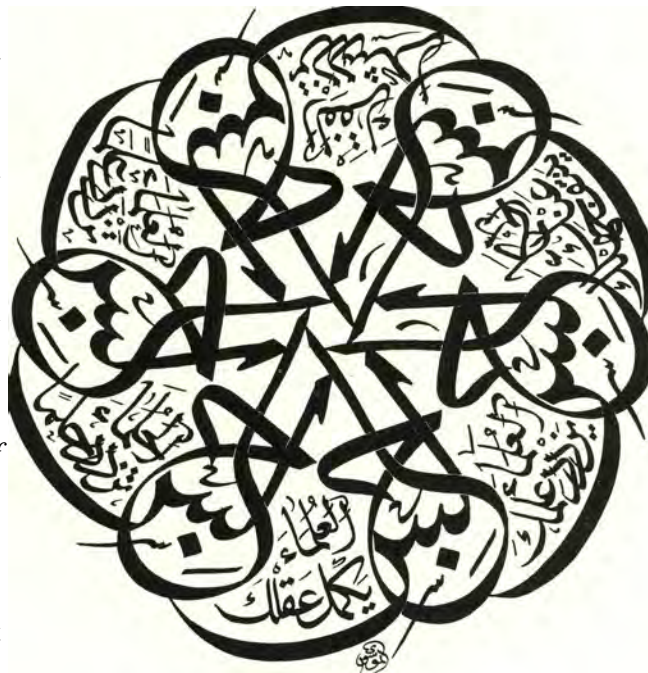


## Can We Be Mindful in a Society of Distraction?

Tom Milne

A few weeks ago I attended a public lecture on Buddhism entitled “Being Mindful in a Society Built for Distraction”. The lecture had a very simple message: “Stop doing what you’re not doing”. Now this might sound rather contradictory, for how could you possibly be doing what you’re not doing in the first place?? However, upon further reflection, one realizes that we are always “doing what we’re not doing”. As T. S. Eliot put it, we are “Distracted from distraction by distraction”, always rushing towards some unattainable goal which we have somehow convinced ourselves will be the answer to whatever gaping void we may feel in our lives, never allowing ourselves to feel the moment, the movement of air in and out of our bodies, the smell of a fresh rainfall on the grass as we walk by. One need not be a Buddhist to recognize the chasm between human beings and true human existence. Many have identified this lack of mindfulness in modern society, from Herbert Marcuse’s *One-dimensional Man*, to Charles Taylor’s *Malaise of Modernity*, and Marx’s famous concept of “alienation”, among others.

It seems at times as though there is nothing but distraction in our society. We have “advanced” in the last century so rapidly that we have forgotten why we wanted to develop certain technologies in the first place. The point here is not one of technology per se being an evil, but rather that the rapid proliferation of technological entertainment has allowed for us to circumvent existential issues by plugging into some kind of device. It has become extraordinarily difficult to spend time just being silent, focused, mindful. Whether this involves sitting under a tree listening to the breeze rustle through the leaves, or actually being fully involved in a conversation with a loved one rather than letting one’s mind wander to the score of a sports game, the text message on one’s cell phone, or who Lindsay Lohan was flashing last night.



Translation: *Spend time with the knowledgeable and wise to learn, with the poor to become modest and with the merciful to have the strength to forgive.*

The problem is not that we as a people are intrinsically narcissistic or depraved, but that the very structure of our society has seemingly *de facto* prohibited participating in a mindful life. Why is it that “value” in our society is synonymous with productivity, capital gain, and consumer demand? Should the concept of “development” really be restricted to economic growth and the ease with which one can access a Starbucks? Perhaps we need a paradigm shift where technological advancement can be redirected towards humanistic “values” such as justice, solidarity, existential fulfillment, and “development” of personal relationships, strong ethical standards in business, government, and environmental issues.

However, given a society “made for distraction” how can one possibly be at peace? I myself have felt this sense of alienation from myself and other people, hypocritically criticizing a society of consumption, superficiality, and atomism while letting myself become just as distracted in my everyday life. We need to remember that every moment we have free will, we can choose whether or not we will allow ourselves to be distracted, or lose our temper, or treat another person as an object. We can choose, each moment, to see the beauty in others, feel the profound grandeur of existence,

and be truly present in every moment. By taking even just a few moments of a day to be mindful, to “stop doing what we’re not doing” I believe that we can begin to move our world towards one free of distraction, and filled to the brim with peace and oneness.

Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don’t have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don’t have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we breathe can be a source of joy. (Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step*.)

# Bedtime Hymn



Andante

*mf*

6

12

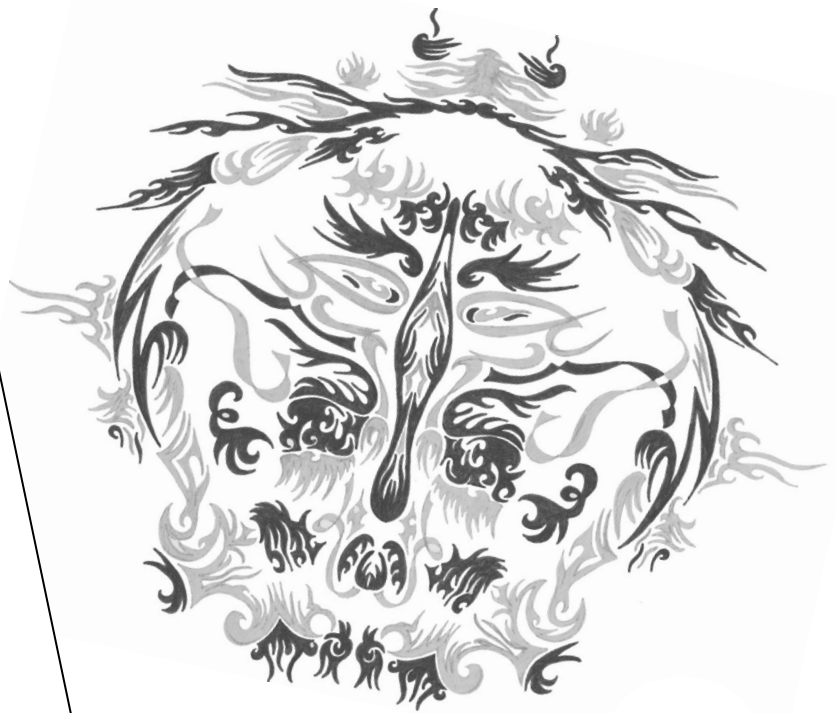
*p*

17

*pp*

Musical score for 'Bedtime Hymn' in G major, 4/4 time. The score is written for piano and features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The score is divided into four systems, with measures 6, 12, and 17 indicated at the beginning of their respective systems. The dynamics range from *mf* (mezzo-forte) to *pp* (pianissimo).





### Two Clichés

the phrase: her alabaster skin  
hangs like an albatross around my neck  
the tail feathers' reek  
shit and death tickle  
cross my chin, feet scaly and dry dig  
at my chest, the ass  
white as leprosy, slimy  
the grease of death deploys  
the stink of decayed words,  
lifeless lumps, stick  
in my mouth

Mitch Spray



*Kyle's*

### **I Killed my Mother**

I suppose I should confess that it was not her life that I ended,  
But her voice that droned on in my head,  
Colouring my actions a crimson shade of guilt  
No matter how much sea or land lay between us  
At the time,

I plead manslaughter, self-defense, self-preservation

Picture my joy at being unfettered  
and at liberty to roam pasture and field at will  
Imagining that I would no longer hear her frightened voice cautioning me  
cornering me into resentful submission  
The end of considering Mother's advice  
No more conflict between my brainwashed mind and my body's desires

I plead insanity. Contamination of the mind.

The day I killed my mother  
was the day I understood  
my darkest fear  
is a reality.  
In my own voice I have found Mother's

Rachel Laverdiere



Kyle  
7.13

# PRO ET CONTRA:

## SHOULD FRENCH BE MANDATORY IN SCHOOLS?

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### PRO:

Many schools in Canada are not teaching French to all students from kindergarten through grade twelve when they should be. Having the use of a second language is a benefit to everyone, no matter what language it might be. And, given that Canada is one of the only countries in the world to have more than one national language, it seems only right that the majority of the people in the country speak, or at the bare minimum should at least be able to understand both languages.

Learning a second language can be quite difficult if one starts later on in life. However starting at a young age, say in kindergarten, makes the learning process much easier. Children will retain more on a daily basis than their much older counterparts. Knowing two languages makes learning a third or fourth language down the road much easier. And, given the globalization of our world today, being able to speak more than just English is an asset whether it is in travel or business.

Language is one of the main, if not the most important aspect to a culture's identity. Learning a new language allows one access to that culture in a way that may not have been previously accessible. Canadians are very aware of their culture; however, for the majority of the Anglophone population their knowledge is limited to their own. The Quebecois, nonetheless, have a very different and distinct culture. Having students learn French would allow them to gain more of an "insider perspective" of the Quebecois culture and eventually a greater understanding of what it truly means to be Canadian.

In addition, French language skills allow for ease when travelling abroad and allow people to immerse themselves in the culture of that area. Every student in Canada would greatly benefit from the skills learned by studying the French language. This is especially obvious when the ability to understand a second language, including its grammatical structure, would give students a learning edge and improve their basic language skills in their native tongue, which is sorely lacking in many students of this generation. Because of the complexity of the French language, and of the noticeably, differently detailed way it is taught to English students, the students would gain greater comprehension and logic skills through the simple acts of composing sentences and eventually essays and reports.

### CONTRA:

French language training, while it may seem good in principle, can have drawbacks. There is the danger that children being taught both French and English at the same time will not develop a complete or correct grasp of the grammar of one or both languages. It would not take much neglect on the part of the teacher for a child to miss important pieces of one language due to emphasis on the other language's counterpart. This could lead, if not caught and corrected early on, to a lower level of literacy in French or English among young Canadians.

Having French as the chosen "second" language does not make sense in all areas of Canada. Whether this is a matter of availability for teachers — some geographic locations are less likely to acquire a teacher for French language classes — or simply the local culture and ethnicity, French may not be practical. In places like the Northwest Territories, where indigenous languages are much more common, French makes little sense as a subject for students. As well, on Hutterite colonies, where teachers are brought in from outside the community to teach the children, French may not be tolerated; preservation of Hutterite language and culture has been threatened before by the institution of mandatory English education — there may be more resistance to introducing a second foreign language.

There are financial difficulties to consider as well. The starting costs to initiate a mandatory French-language program throughout Canada would be immense. The amount of printed work that would have to be created to make up for the lack of available material would be immense, and quite possibly prohibitive, especially if the funding for such an initiative is locally based. As well, training and hiring of French teachers would be a large expense, one that would require a serious rearrangement of education budgeting across the country. Creating a bilingual nation requires that public services be available in both languages. While this is available for services provided by the Federal government, extending this service to Provincial, Territorial, and even Municipal levels would be an immense undertaking, one for which Canada is not currently prepared.




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## Faculty Files:

Sarah Powrie  
Department of English

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### Why did you choose English? Was there something in particular that interested you in the area?

I think I was drawn in by the beauty and ambiguity of literature. These are often related but not always. Some literature is beautiful for its direct simplicity: Pound's "petals on a wet black bough," for instance. Just articulating those words generates a rhythm and an image of striking contrasts in colour and texture. Some literature is beautiful as a collage of voices and perspectives. Right now I'm teaching *The Wild Duck* in my first-year English class and the play is absorbing for precisely this reason. You have the perspective of Gregers, the philosopher, and his claims of the ideal; of Hjalmar, the sentimentalist, and the illusions which sustain his identity; of Gina the dutiful wife, who is refreshingly pragmatic but who accepts the world without question. Each voice has a claim, and each voice fails. The only character who understands all voices and who carries the most inclusive vision is the young girl, Hedvig, and her confused attempt to make sense of these competing claims ends tragically. At the end of the play, you know that no one voice belongs to Ibsen and yet each is part of him and part of his internal struggle to make sense of the world. I appreciate his honesty and the fact that he doesn't force resolution but rather offers a beautiful kaleidoscope of perspectives.

### In your opinion, what do you think constitutes a well-rounded Liberal Arts Education? What kind of value do you think a Liberal Arts Education possesses in contemporary society?

I'm told that employers in major companies seek Liberal Arts graduates because they want employees who have a good knowledge base, who can think critically and who can use language persuasively. While I certainly won't contest the value of these skills, I would add my own slightly idealistic notions: I think that a Liberal Arts education nourishes a capacity for creativity, a joy in the process of discovery and, when approached with honesty and humility, it forces us to confront ourselves. That old Socratic business of "know thyself" is in some respect the beginning and the ever regressing goal of this journey. Admittedly these aren't the attributes you list on your C.V., but they have value.

### What are your current projects and research interests?

I'm interested in the interconnection of medieval literature, science and theology. My Dad, who used to teach science before he retired, would sometimes tease me about studying such a scien-

tifically backward period of time. I will admit that medieval science is disappointing for the empiricist, but for the poetically spirited, it is inspirational. Medieval thinkers used so many metaphors from music, art and mythology to describe the operations of the natural world. They described nature as God's book, encoded with a mysterious language; they described the movement of the stars and planets as expressing its own music. Personally, I think that "The Great Chain of Being" rivals Notre Dame Cathedral as a marvel of medieval architecture. These are the themes which interest me. I've just had an article accepted to *Studies in Philology* exploring the Boethian idea of "world music" and its Renaissance afterlife following Copernicus and the new science. Right now, I've got a few pieces in progress (speaking of ever regressing goals!). One explores the literary and philosophical background of Nicholas of Cusa's *Learned Ignorance* and its extraordinary notion of an infinite universe. The other addresses Chaucer's language theory.

### Outside of being an English professor, what are your hobbies and interests?

I enjoy reading *In Medias Res* and encourage all who share an interest in the life of the mind to read it! I also enjoy collecting cookbooks and cooking magazines. I have no talent as a painter and so that artistic energy is channeled into creating food with pretty colours. I love ballet, choral music and chamber music.

### If you were to teach outside of your discipline, what area would you choose to teach and why?

Ballet. I would need more training obviously, but I love ballet as an art form. It is poetry without language. I love its grace and immediacy--how it communicates a story or emotion through gesture. I would be choreographer, creating sonnets and epics through movement.

### Could you please list for me your top 5 favorite restaurants of all time?

You should really ask Carl or Fr. George this question; they know fine restaurants. It's only within the last couple of years that I've started to dine out. Even so, here are a few of the establishments that struck a chord:

*Fresh By Juice for Life*. Found on Bloor Street in Toronto. This is a health-nut's paradise. A vegetarian restaurant and juice bar where you feast on salads and rice bowls garnished with sprouts, nuts and tofu.

*MoMo's*. Found on Harbord Street in Toronto, two blocks west of Robart's Library. Middle Eastern cuisine. A spacious patio. Exceptional hummus, stuffed grape leaves and lemonade. This was once my oasis on a sweltering August afternoon.

*Pain Perdu*. Found on St. Clair Street in Toronto. A warm and welcoming Basque family runs the establishment. They specialize in quiches and pastries—not really my thing. I just like the place because the setting is intimate and the Basque family is charming.

*Caffe Artigiano*. A coffee house chain in Vancouver. Each latte is a work of art, displaying a floral or leaf design.

*Jule's*. Found in Gastown in Vancouver. Excellent French cuisine and an old-world atmosphere.

## Home is where the wind chill is -50

Jessie Best

The issue of homelessness has been on my mind lately. For whatever reason, there's something about it that's been nagging away at the back of my head, and I can't get rid of it. Whenever a subject of such annoyance crops up, the only thing I can do to satisfy my unease is to write about it.

A few weeks ago – that memorable one where the wind chill brought us to -50 degrees, or something similarly ungodly, I had a very vivid dream. I was walking home in the middle of the night in the freezing cold, when I stumbled across a bundle of what turned out to be frost-bitten human, shivering in a sleeping bag covered in snow. In a moment of pay-it-forward-esque spontaneity, I was strongly tempted to bring the poor soul home with me, even if that did require breaking the rules of my residence. However, my mind flashed to all the people who would belittle such an action (taking in a stranger would, after all, be even worse than picking up a hitchhiker), and I walked home without a backward glance. When I woke up the next morning, I felt as guilty and sick with myself as anyone might if they actually did see a person they could help and simply turned the other cheek.

That dream got me thinking. I've heard that the issue of homelessness in Saskatoon is infinitesimal compared to what it is in big city centers. I hear that you can't walk two feet down the street in downtown Victoria without being "accosted" by someone after spare change. But according to the article I happened to read in *Planet S* earlier today about the U of S students participating in a "5 Days for Homelessness" awareness campaign, there are 6400 homeless people living in Saskatoon. I know a lot of people will argue that there are plenty of homeless shelters, and that even if people are down on their luck, there is no need for them to beg unless they have ulterior motives – like drugs, perhaps – that the homeless shelters will not provide. But something about that just doesn't seem right to me. How could humanity be in such a state of disgrace and hopelessness that people are afraid to give up two dollars for "coffee" to a disheveled old man who will wish you good day if you do?

Living, as we do, in an industrialized and democratic society, brings with it certain benefits. Health care, although it certainly is suffering under controversy, is much better here than in the majority of the world, and

everyone, at least by law, has the right to equal opportunity. But that doesn't mean that people get equal opportunity. Democratic societies are set up so that anyone and everyone can move ahead at any time. It is within our rights to accumulate as much wealth as we please, spend it however we please, and buy as much we please (within certain limits, of course). Many people are doing just that – accumulating, spending, consuming, more accumulating. However, in order for this to happen, and for the economy to remain stable (and I'm not an economic student so correct me if I'm wrong), there must be something to balance out the rich people. In other words, everyone has the opportunity to become rich, but not everyone can actually be rich, lest our entire system collapse around our heads. So, as somebody must fill the role of not being everybody, homelessness would appear to be...inevitable.

Hold on – that doesn't make much sense. Homelessness – inevitable? Of course, it's been around for ages, and it's not likely to be "fixed" any time soon, but – inevitable? Of course, once you get past the initial shock of this statement, it does make sense. There has to be someone (or many someone's) who simply cannot afford to live a "normal" middle class life. Their greedy sibling inherited all the family wealth, they're supporting five kids, not to mention grandkids, and their spouse unexpectedly developed something unpleasant and can no longer work. It happens. Not to mention the fact that housing prices are at a rather insane level, and there are hardly any apartments available – this entire scenario equates to somebody ending up on the street. And when it becomes many people living on the street, well, it's no wonder that the homeless shelters are so crowded.

According to the philosopher Hobbes, human nature is basically a nasty piece of work. When left to our own devices, it's every (wo)man for him/herself, and the only reason we can get along at all is if we "sign over" our natural rights and agree to not kill each other in exchange for a bit of peace and quiet. Our homeless people have signed over all their rights to fuel a system that works for the rest of us, and they're still not getting their peace and quiet – much less a warm cup of coffee on a cold day.

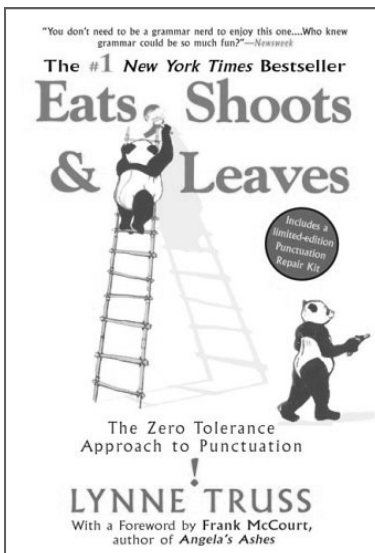


# Book Reviews

## *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is a book about punctuation. And a panda.

Lynne Truss, a British writer and journalist, has written a hilarious guide to the world of punctuation, both British and American standard. As a Canadian, occasionally one has to find the middle-ground between these two writing styles, but that doesn't detract from the enjoyment of this book. Truss, a self-proclaimed punctuation stickler, seems desperate to get the word out to all the other sticklers in the world that not only are they not alone, they have nothing to be ashamed of. So what if people mock you for your obsession with semicolons? Who cares if your friends and family constantly ignore you when you point out a grammatically-incorrect sign at the farmers' market? Sticklers unite! Rid the world of comma splices, and save the poor apostrophe from the horrific abuse it is forced to endure everyday. Join the Apostrophe Protection Society. Join the militant wing – I believe they still need balaclavas.

Truss' book is a wonderful read, and an excellent guide to the



proper use of most of the common punctuation marks. She goes through, often in great and amusing detail, the places where one should and should not use an apostrophe, a comma, a colon, a semicolon, a dash, a hyphen, and more. Readers looking to improve their punctuation will find Truss' book a helpful guide that has the added benefit of not boring them to tears. Those readers with an already impressive grasp of the period, or full stop as Truss calls it, will still likely find a point of clarification here or there, enough to illicit

a pause, and perhaps a small, "Aha!" in recognition and understanding. For the sticklers, this book is nothing less than confirmation that your lives have not been wasted, and that all you have to lose in being a stickler is, and I quote, "your sense of proportion, and arguably you didn't have a lot of that to begin with."

If you enjoy reading, writing, editing, or complaining, this book will likely put a smile on your face, and give you a good chuckle or two.

Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. Toronto: Gotham Books, 2004.  
ISBN: 1-592-40087-6

## *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar*

The accessibility of philosophy to a modern audience, even a generally academic one, is a complex matter. On the one hand, the raw information is far more prevalent now than in any age past. It is easy to find it, if one cares to look. Simultaneously, the domain of philosophy is understood to be both elitist and unnecessary in the day-to-day life of an average individual (which is not to say that they are correct, only that this is the perception). This is, of course, in error, and it is made clear in the text of *Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar...* that philosophy, and all its subdomains, is pervasive in our modern context.

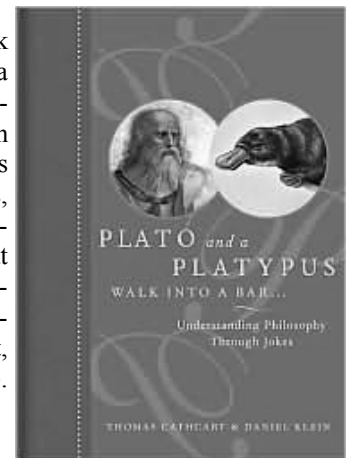
Thomas Cathcart & Daniel Klien put forth a valiant effort to dispel the mystique of philosophy, bringing it down from its lofty heights, and putting complex ideas into humour that is itself amusing on the surface yet clearly possessed of philosophical depth. Though occasionally the jokes they use to illustrate a point simply aren't that funny, they remain relevant, and by and large the parallels drawn are quite amusing.

Of particular interest are the characters of Dimitri and Tasso, who provide a form of running commentary on the various specializations of philosophy. They are the beginning and end of each chapter, and their dialogue highlights the area of inquiry found on the chapter. They represent the dialogue of the average philosopher (Tasso) with the average man (Dimitri). The use of common Greek references lends character to these two, but they certainly could be as easily represented in a modern manner.

The eponymous joke of the book is found at the very end, part of a longer stream of jokes. The culmination of Tasso's wit, this section of stand up comic type patter is only really funny to philosophers, or those who have actually understood what they just read; try it out as a test. If it's still not funny, philosophy may well not be the discipline for you (or perhaps it might, and you just need to loosen up).

*Plato and a Platypus Walk Into a Bar...* is an excellent and funny

text, easy to read, and extraordinarily informative despite the manner in which it presents the content. Bad jokes aside, this book is more than worth the time spent a perusal of it.



Cathcart, Thomas, and Klein, Daniel. *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar*. New York: Abrams Image, 2006.  
ISBN: 13: 978-0-8109-1493-3  
ISBN: 10: 0-8109-1493-X

The moon, huge and yellow, perches on the horizon, tries to look her in the eye. It floats on the water, kisses its own reflection to meld the two. She raises her arms to the potent spirit of the grandmother moon, welcoming, submitting.

"It's time," the old woman whispers.

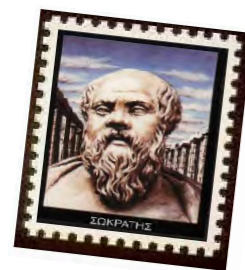
At last, she breathes, her words carried away on the air, even though there is no breeze and she has not spoken.

She steps to the water and releases her song. She sings in the language her own mother gave her as a gift. The language that couldn't be cut from her tongue with sharp words and boarding school straps. The language that survived smothering closets and retching brown soap.

Alerted, the grandmothers join their voices with hers, fill her with astonishing desire. She moves to the great moon, the spirit of the grandmothers; joins them there, in the water. She spreads her self wide only to find she is no longer a single being, but connected, within and of, both the earliest women and those yet unborn. She teems with ancient song and is surrounded by the stroking, seductive sacraments of the grandmothers. She cedes her earthly body and dissipates among the foam. *Here she is, they murmur, astum, my girl.*

From the shore the old woman watches the tiny waves that ripple the surface. The heavy moon has begun to rise in the sky where she will take her place to watch, tranquil and unrepentant, over those she's left behind.

Lisa Wilson



In Medias Res

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STM ST. THOMAS MORE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

## Postcard Stories

What's a postcard story? A postcard story is a condensed piece of storytelling in no more than 250 words. Use drama, poetry, humour, dialogue to write one. Anything goes, there are no restrictions except the word limit. Stretch yourself by writing short. —Guy Vanderhague

She's done it. In the ensuing silence, she can hear the jackrabbit trapped in her narrow chest. The stone path she kneels on is jagged and painful, but she is powerless to move. She is locked in this position until he responds. The garden around her should be soothing, but it sours with her tension. She must breathe through her mouth to keep her supper down.

She waits, but he does nothing. The box in her outstretched hand weighs a ton. She struggles to control her shaking. She tries to meet his gaze, but her stomach revolts and she fears again that she will be sick. Sweat all over her body makes her cold, even as she grows hot with fear.

Still he does nothing. How long will this torture last? This is madness. What is she doing here? She never imagined this could be wrong, but it is. He is taking too long. She wants to crumble into a ball and hide from his silence. Then he smiles and says yes. The waiting ends. Her muscles spasm free and she drops the ring before she can put it on his finger.

Darci Speidel



In Medias Res

St. Thomas More College

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STM ST. THOMAS MORE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN