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EXILES from EDEN

Religion and the Academic Vocation in America

Chapter 3 – Spirited Inquiry

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3 Spirited Inquiry

I

All communities of higher learning are formed in large part by an ethos or spirit of inquiry. Indeed, all higher learning depends not simply upon the possession of certain cognitive skills but also upon the possession of moral dispositions or virtues that enable inquiry to proceed. Academies, if they are to flourish over the long run, must therefore cultivate and sustain in their members those virtues that are required for the kind of learning they hope to promote. Taken together, these virtues constitute the ethos of inquiry.

As epistemologies differ, however, so too do spirits of inquiry. I have argued that the Weberian ethos, connected as it is to a purely instrumental view of reason, exhibits its own characteristic set of motives (mastery, manipulation, and control) and virtues (clarity, honesty, diligence, dedication, and devotion to a rigorous regimen of disciplinary procedures). By contrast, communitarian epistemologies necessarily favor virtues that are less matters of purely personal integrity and more interpersonal or social in character. For communitarians, the pursuit of truth is linked inextricably to care taken with the lives and the thoughts of others. Though Weber banished charity and friendship from his conception of the academy, virtues such as these have constituted the spirit of inquiry for most of Western history. These virtues have, moreover, been spiritual in at least the strictly historical sense that they arose initially within communities that were self-consciously religious in character.

In this chapter, I propose to redescribe the present-day academy by examining the sense in which and the extent to which the conduct of academic life still depends upon such spiritual virtues as humility, faith, self-sacrifice, and charity. I offer this critical redescription as a corrective to the Weberian account of academic life, as an answer to Bok and others who are concerned about the ethical dimension of higher learning but who seem uncertain about where properly to locate the ethical within the academy, and as an effort to enrich current, communitarian accounts of learning. First, I shall mention briefly some historical warrants for and some cultural implications of linking spiritual virtues to learning and teaching. Then I shall demonstrate how and why certain spiritual virtues are indispensable to learning and teaching within the present day academy. Finally, I shall
develop briefly a conception of the academic vocation that views the self-conscious cultivation of a spiritually informed ethos of inquiry as a major aim of higher education.

II

The German Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper reminds us, in his little book Scholasticism, that the Platonic Academy was "a thiasos, a religious association assembling for regular sacrificial worship." ¹ That academy was closed, after it had existed in Athens for nine hundred years, by the Christian emperor Justinian in 529 A.D. For the next thousand years, European philosophy, indeed most higher learning of any sort, took place in the cloistered environments provided by the church. Pieper suggests that the medieval period came to a close about the time in the fourteenth century that William of Ockham "fled from the Minorite cloister to the German imperial court [and] philosophy once more took up its residence in the larger 'breathing space' of the world." ²

Few would dispute the central point here. Whether we look to the Platonic Academy or to the teachers of ancient Israel or to St. Augustine at Cassiciacum or to the medieval university or to Pico della Mirandola's disputatious Florence or even to the small colleges of early nineteenth-century America, we find learning flourishing in communities formed by the conscious practice of spiritual virtues. Over the course of the last century, the modern university has ceased, as we have seen, to attend to character formation, or it has imagined that such attention should be an "extracurricular" enterprise having little or nothing to do with knowledge. From this perspective, the current resurgence of the community question may be Western culture's way of awakening from a comparatively brief slumber induced or at least maintained by what Parker Palmer has called objectivism. If so, the "problem" is not to explain, much less to justify, the relationship between religion and higher learning: it is to account for how we could ever have lost sight of it.

This blindness to the relationship between spirituality and learning has been in part the fault of "enlightened" secular rationalism. David Hume, to take but one example of Enlightenment thinkers, concluded his Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals by contrasting the good human life, one that manifests Hume's own four moral principles, with an instance of the vicious human life, a kind of life based upon "superstition and false religion." Virtues for Hume were qualities of character that fall under four basic headings: those agreeable to oneself, those agreeable to others, those useful to oneself, and those
useful to others. On this reckoning, monasticism, the form of life that had been the context for most of Western higher learning for a millennium, was for Hume rife with vice:

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues - for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense but because they serve to no manner and purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends, stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column and place them in the catalogue of vices. . . .

Hume understood very well that the Christianity of the monasteries was not merely a set of teachings but a way of life. And he here insisted, in castigating monasticism, that virtues like humility and self-sacrifice were inimical to learning, for they "stupefy the understanding and harden the heart." Like Max Weber over a century later, Hume, in the course of criticizing the superstitious aspects of the Christianity of his day, undermined some of the virtues, such as humility and charity, that make enlightened inquiry desirable and possible.

Blindness to the relationship between spirituality and higher learning is not, however, the result merely of the Enlightenment. The "superstition and false religion" that Hume assailed so mercilessly have persisted long after his critiques of them. At the end of the nineteenth century, at the very moment that the universities were consolidating the triumph of positivism, many of the religious were claiming that religion meant dogmatism based upon a peculiar reading of the Bible (Genesis as a geology text, for example). If the current ascendancy of the community question really does mark something of a recollection of the links between spirituality and learning, we might expect that the religious will rediscover the ethical dimension of their spirituality at the same time that some academicians rediscover the spiritual dimension of their ethos.

To speak in such abstract and exalted terms is to engage the language of hope, not optimism. For it is one thing to suggest that the life of learning will always be in some sense dependent upon the exercise of spiritual virtues in however attenuated a form, quite another to imagine that universities will return to the practice of those spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, that give those virtues meaning and strength. I do not therefore expect nor would I recommend any grand restructuring of the academy in the near future. Again I think that Parker Palmer is correct. He argues that the place to begin to counter the
objectivist epistemology that still grips the academy is in individual classrooms where teachers, disciplining themselves first, create spaces "where obedience to truth is practiced." I shall now endeavor to demonstrate how higher learning, even today, entails the exercise, by students and teachers alike, of certain spiritual virtues.

III

The founder of the Platonic Academy wrote almost all of his philosophical works in dialogue form principally for the purpose of a similar demonstration of the interdependence of moral and intellectual virtues. The dialogue was and remains the vehicle best designed to dramatize the movement of inquiry as an act of life, involving characters in conversation, not intellects in isolation. The *Meno*, Plato's only dialogue on the subject of education, features a title character whose failures to learn are more frequently the results of flaws in his character than of lapses in his logic. Meno needs to change if he is to come to know the truth, to be "obedient to it" in Palmer's terms. Insofar as the truth comes to Meno, he does change--he becomes less arrogant, more self-disciplined, more courageous -- not just in his ideas but in his way of living.

The questions that govern the movement of the *Meno* - Can virtue be taught? What is the relationship between knowledge and virtue? Is virtue a form of knowledge, or is it a gift from the gods? - are among the oldest in Western philosophy, and they are the same questions that underlie Derek Bok's worries about Harvard. Yes, the practices and the aims of education have changed many times from Plato's era to the modern university. Nevertheless, so long as the activities of teaching and learning involve communal questioning in search of the truth of matters, the exercise of virtues such as humility, faith, self-denial, and charity will be indispensable to higher education.

Consider first the virtue of humility. Much of what passes for laziness or the proverbial "lack of motivation" among today's students really involves a lack of humility, stemming in part from a lack of piety or respect for that aspect of God's ongoing creation that manifests itself in works of genius. I recently asked my students why they had not thought through a particular passage from St. Augustine on friendship and loss. I knew, because I had by that time grown to know these students very well, that they cared very much about the matters that Augustine was examining. I had not realized, however, that some of my students were easily convinced on the basis of a quick reading of the text, that
Augustine was simply mistaken or overly agitated about these matters. Others complained
that Augustine was unnecessarily obscure. All of them dismissed the passage in a
peremptory fashion.

Current educational theory would suggest, in the face of these student comments,
that I had failed properly to motivate them to want to learn about friendship and loss or
that I had not managed to make Augustine accessible to them. I had probably failed in
these ways. But my students could have overcome my failings had they been sufficiently
humble; had they presumed that Augustine's apparent obscurity was their problem, not
his; and had they presumed that his apparent inconsistencies or excesses were not really
the careless errors they took them to be. Humility on this account does not mean uncritical
acceptance: it means, in practical terms, the presumption of wisdom and authority in the
author. Students and faculty today are far too often ready to believe that Kant was just, in a
given passage, murky or that Aristotle was pointlessly repetitive or that Tolstoy was, in the
battle scenes of War and Peace, needlessly verbose. Such quick, easy, and dismissive
appraisals preclude the possibility of learning from these writers. Yes, some of these
judgments may be warranted, but the practice of humility at least prevents them from
being made summarily. Some degree of humility is a precondition for learning.

As is faith. James Gustafson has argued that "if the university is to be a fruitful
location for exploring larger issues of life, perhaps we need to acknowledge, each of us as
scholars, teachers, and students, that all our knowing involves 'faith,' human confidence in
what we have received." 4 The point seems indisputable. We all rely upon the work and the
thought of others, and we cannot possibly think well in an atmosphere of mistrust. Again,
as in the case of humility, trusting the research and the theories of others does not mean
accepting them uncritically. It means, as Gustafson has said, that we typically believe what
we are questioning and at the same time question what we are believing. Faith then is a
persistent beat in the rhythm of intellectual life. Without it, we would not be able to learn.
All of us in some sense or another really do believe in order to understand.

At other moments in the life of learning, we must be prepared to abandon some of
our most cherished beliefs. And we cannot do this unless we have to some extent cultivated
the virtue of self-denial, the capacity first to risk and then to give ourselves up if
necessary for the sake of the truth. The quest for knowledge of the truth, if it takes place
within a context of communal conversation, involves the testing of our own opinions. And
we must, of course, be willing to give up what we think we know for what is true, if genuine
learning is to take place. At times, this will be easy, as when we learn that we were mistaken about some geographical detail or another. But much of our self-knowledge as well as our beliefs about what is truly good for us are not simply matters of what we know but matters of who we are. We thus often risk ourselves when we test our ideas.

Again, the link between our knowledge and our character is crucial here: to change our minds is, at times, to change ourselves. Self-denial is just this disposition to surrender ourselves for the sake of the better opinion; wisdom is the discernment of when it is reasonable to do so. The "monkish" disciplines that cultivated self-denial (to return again to Hume) were to some extent a preparation for learning, a disposing of the soul toward an inner readiness to lose the self for the sake of the truth. The Italian Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola argued that the conflicts that arise within a community of inquiry are "peculiar in that here it is again to lose. Consequently, anyone very weak can and should not only not disparage them [the struggles], but also seek them voluntarily, since the loser truly receives benefit and not injury from the winner, for through him the loser returns home richer. ..." 5 I would prefer to say that truth is ideally the victor in these struggles. All participants lose, in the sense that they all surrender a part of themselves in the process of growing into the truth together.

Humility, faith, and self-denial: these practices neither exhaust the list of spiritual virtues that are indispensable to learning nor represent a list of distinctively Christian virtues. Indeed, the virtues I have thus far touched upon here did not originate from the example of Jesus of Nazareth. They arose instead from the practices and the teachings of the ancient Hebrews, a people whose deep and widely celebrated commitment to learning was and still is informed by an epistemology that is profoundly communal in character. To say, with Parker Palmer, that we must "recover from our spiritual tradition the models and methods of knowing as an act of love" is to direct us to the roots of that tradition in ancient Israel according to which knowledge and intimacy were one and the same.

As with the life of the spirit in general so too with the life of spirited inquiry: love or charity is the greatest of the virtues. To analyze fully the nature of charity and the occasions for its exercise within the academy would extend far beyond the scope of the present essay. Once again, some concrete illustrations of the fundamental importance of charity within the academy will have to suffice. And once again, I shall try to demonstrate, through the consideration of examples that the exercise of charity has cognitive, not simply moral, dimensions.
Let me first consider briefly some aspects of my own study of history. I have in mind here criticism that I have received or that I have repeatedly leveled at myself regarding my thinking about, say, William James, a figure long dead. "You have really not done James full justice in your discussion of his religious views." Or again, "You really need to be more charitable to James in your analysis of his courtship and marriage." Notice that the vocabulary of moral and spiritual virtue - here justice and charity - easily insinuates itself into appraisals of thought as well as action. If I have grown to treat my colleagues and my students with justice and charity, am I more or less likely to treat historical subjects such as William James in the same manner? I am surely more likely to do so. And would such treatment increase or decrease the quality of my historical thinking? Again, I think that the exercise of charity toward my historical subjects is bound to make me a better historian: more cautious in appraisal, more sympathetic with human failings, less prone to stereotype and caricature. And insofar as this is so, the manner of teaching others to think historically ought to cultivate, at least through force of example, the virtue of charity.

As with history, so too with philosophy: charity both enriches and enlivens the quality of thought. To see how and why this is so, let us turn to another contemporary example, the recent work of a philosopher of religion, Jeffrey Stout. Stout's work is an important illustration of the operation of the virtue of charity for several reasons. First, his writing will help us to clarify the meaning of charity within the context of philosophical work. Second, the fact that Stout is an avowed nontheist will serve to remind us that though charity is indisputably a religious virtue, it can surely be present in persons who are not themselves religious. Finally, in the work of Stout that we will consider, he is writing about matters that pertain directly to the present discussion -- the relationship between religious discourse and the secular academy.

Stout tells us in the introduction to Ethics after Babel that though he had considered "keeping the mention of other authors to a minimum," in the end he decided to engage the writings of others extensively for several reasons. He presents the two most important of them as follows: "I increasingly felt the need to test, clarify, and refine my views in extended dialogue with others who see the issues differently. And I discovered that much of what I wanted to say . . . could only be said in close readings of particular works." Thus, in Stout's own judgment, the quality of his own thinking improved in specific ways in the course of his conversation with other philosophers. Moreover, as I shall try now
briefly to show, this philosophical improvement depended to some extent upon the charitable manner of that conversation. 6

When Stout is considering the works of other philosophers, his charitable treatment of them evinces Luther's gloss upon the eighth commandment: "Put the best construction on everything." So, for example, when Stout is arguing with Richard Rorty, he strives at every point to construe Rorty's views in such a way that they represent cogent and incisive philosophical positions. He resists at almost every turn readings that would reduce Rorty's ideas to untenable dicta that could be easily assailed or summarily dismissed. "You get a charitable reading of Rorty's pragmatism," Stout writes, "if you stress passages like [the one Stout has just quoted] over [Rorty's] 'pithy little formulae'...I remain inclined toward a charitable reading of Rorty's writings on justice and truth. I therefore find it frustrating when Rorty relies excessively on pithy little formulae." 7

Indeed, in his treatment of the thinkers he considers, Stout invariably works at interpreting passages that seem at first untenable until they become both more faithful to the larger and best intentions of these writers and philosophically more worthy of serious consideration. So, for example, when Rorty, in considering a hypothetical situation, asserts that one should not insist against one's torturers that there is something beyond the practices of their totalitarian society that condemns them, Stout finds the suggestion "false, on the first reading that occurs to me, even according to Rorty's own view." But instead of resting matters there with Rorty caught in an embarrasing inconsistency, Stout proceeds over the course of the next couple of pages to offer several alternative readings of Rorty's suggestion, some of them more and some of them less flattering to Rorty, all of them together advancing and deepening the understanding of the philosophical question at issue. 8

Stout's charity is everywhere tempered by justice. He neither overlooks nor excuses culpable errors. So, for example, when he is considering the views of entire groups of people, past or present, his exercise of charity becomes at once more guarded and self-conscious. And it tends in these contexts to amount to a disposition to find ways of understanding, even though he cannot and should not share the erroneous views of others. When, on the one hand, he notes that some authors seem alternatively relativistic and nonrelativistic about moral matters, he insists that they "need not be guilty of contradiction, for we can take them, charitably, to be able to see the difference between justification and truth." 9 When, on the other hand, he excuses some of our ancestors for
holding certain false opinions, he adds that we "shall not always want to be so charitable.... At times, we will be forced to explain a point of disagreement with our ancestors' moral beliefs not by saying they were justified in holding beliefs we now deem false but rather by saying that negligent reasoning, ideological rationalization, or wishful thinking led them to hold false beliefs." 10

Charity is not the only one of the spiritual virtues considered thus far that Jeffrey Stout displays on almost every page of Ethics after Babel. Yet because he is an avowed nontheist, Stout would surely resist the notion that he owes his virtuous character to his present religious beliefs. Whereas for devout Christians and Jews the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, Stout's wisdom stems in part from a wholly secular piety that is "analogous to and even," he readily admits, "indebted to a central theme from the Reformed tradition." 11 Whereas Socrates's humility was related to the Apollonian religious tradition of the Delphic oracle, Stout's humility arises quite naturally "from observing human history and learning the facts of finitude." 12

My argument, as I have thus far developed it, allows for the presence throughout human history of many pious and genuinely virtuous secularists like Jeffrey Stout. I have nowhere argued that there is some sort of absolute and necessary connection between religious belief and the virtues of humility, faith, self-sacrifice, and charity. I have, however, argued both for a historical connection between religious beliefs and these virtues and for an epistemological connection between the exercise of these virtues and the communal quest for knowledge and truth.

I should add now, before turning to a redescription of the academic vocation, a worry. I fear that most of our present-day academies as well as many academicians like Jeffrey Stout might be living off a kind of borrowed fund of moral capital. Although they may be able to draw continually upon these originally spiritual resources for the time being, Stout and other like-minded secularists may not be able either to replenish the fund or to transmit it intact to the next generation.

Why does Stout himself ignore altogether this worrisome possibility? He does note that we "live in a society where economic and other forces seem increasingly to produce people who lack the virtues needed to use their freedom well...." 13 And he chooses to analyze the contemporary relationship between moral and religious language in part because he acknowledges what I have insisted upon here the powerful historical connection between ethics and religion. He nevertheless underestimates the possibility
that a decline in religious piety might be directly related to the decline in virtue he discerns, and he resists all attempts, such as the present one, to restore religiously informed practices and vocabularies to a prominent place within our public institutions. 14 This resistance does not derive from the mere fact that Stout is a nontheist, for he concedes that "it would indeed be fortunate for all of us, including atheistic fellow travelers, if... a form of biblical tradition essentially continuous with republican virtues began to flourish and enrich public life." 15 A brief effort to understand Stout's reasons for his suspicion of religion will help us to understand further the cultural resistance that my religiously informed redescription of the academic vocation must address and seek to overcome.

Stout opposes efforts to strengthen the public influence of religion in part because he remains even today traumatized by the religious wars of the seventeenth century, events that constitute the crucial episode in the formation of the academic conscience of the West. Thus, for example, Stout characterizes our society's recognition that the good life must allow for our inability to agree upon any one model of the good life as phronesis "forged in the religious strife of early modern Europe." 16 He argues that theology has lost credibility among intellectuals largely because it "was unable to provide a vocabulary for debating and deciding matters without resort to violence." And he often thinks of contemporary religion in terms of Belfast and Beirut, Teheran and Lynchburg, places that give him "ample reasons for concern." 17

I have already indicated part of my trouble with this line of argument. Stout's sense of history from early modern Europe through most of the twentieth century is highly tendentious at best. I do not think he would accept my mention of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, or of the gross ideological terrors inflicted upon huge populations by wholly secular but altogether autocratic regimes, left and right, as prima facie arguments against secularism per se. They would be at best facts that warrant resistance to particular kinds of secular ideologies and leaders. So, to be charitable to Stout, we must look for the sources of his resistance to religion in places other than his highly selective recollection of the past.

Stout reveals one of these sources in the following recommendation: "Until theism proves able to gather a reasonably broad rational consensus around a specific conception of the good, an eventuality that now seems remote, we probably should not follow advice like [Basil] Mitchell's [to revive certain theological presuppositions]. The risks of reviving religious conflict like that of early modern Europe are too great." 18 Remove the notion that theism should seek to achieve consensus about the good, and the spectre of reviving
religious conflict largely disappears. Suppose instead that I am correct: suppose that
theism has been and will continue to be responsible for cultivating and sustaining the very
virtues that make productive study of and conversation among rival conceptions of the
good possible. To the extent that this is true, the risks of weakening the great religious
traditions are too great. I can agree with Stout that, in view of the traumatic religious
conflicts that he remembers so well, religion needs Enlightenment. To the extent that my
analysis is correct, however, he should agree with me and against Hume that
Enlightenment needs religion.

Another source of Stout’s underestimation of the importance of religious virtues is
the eclectic and hyperrational aspect of his own ethics, a strain that manifests itself most
vividly in his penchant for what he calls bricolage. By bricolage, Stout means the creative
synthesis of vocabularies and practices borrowed from different, sometimes competing,
moral and religious traditions into an ethical discourse that is flexible enough to meet
emergencies and surprises yet steady, humane, and principled enough to provide for
human flourishing. I agree with him when he concludes his book by insisting that "the
intellectual task of every generation... involves moral bricolage." 12 Indeed, I intend the
present book as my small contribution to that task.

Individuals, as Stout has shown us through precept and example, can practice
bricolage readily and with impressive measures of success, but bricolage works less well --
much more slowly for one thing -- as a program for institutional reform or evolution. I
may admire, learn from, and easily adopt Hindu dietary practices, absorbing them with
only minor adjustments into my own stock of established practices and beliefs. But I
cannot imagine that these practices could in the same ready manner be adopted on a mass
scale within the United States. Peoples cannot add and subtract practices and virtues as
they add and subtract ingredients in a recipe. In other words, you can change the
inventory, even the configuration, of your beliefs much more, easily than you can the
configuration of institutional practices. The more deeply Hindu dietary practices are
embedded within a system of religious observations and beliefs, the less likely that we can
extract them for use as building blocks for our own polycultural bricolage.

In what I judge to be his more typical and better moments, Stout seems to realize all
of this. He often reminds his reader that morals are much more a matter of feelings,
attitudes, inclinations, and character than they are a matter of some thinly described
rational deliberation, even presumably a deliberation informed by an eclectic set of beliefs.
And he does argue that we need "the virtues required to live out our lives well from beginning to end and to leave the next generation with a network of practices and institutions worth inheriting and continuing." On the basis of his writing, I have little doubt that Stout himself possesses the requisite virtues, and I would guess that he can and does transmit these to the next generation if only through force of example. I do wonder, however, what devices, such as stories, rituals, practices, and other forms of institutional support, Stout has in mind for the transmission of the virtues he exemplifies to the next generation of Americans who are already, in his judgment, less virtuous than the previous one. The four spiritual virtues I have sketched out here have been nurtured and sustained over hundreds of years in part by the religious affection of piety. I therefore very much doubt whether they can be sustained over the course of several more generations absent the affections, practices, and institutions as well as the network of beliefs that gave rise to them originally. Stout can be comparatively complacent about this matter, in part because, as I have suggested, he has a sometimes overweening confidence in bricolage.

Consider once again, however, the spiritual virtue of humility. Stout's humility is related in part to his own "secular piety" and in part to his "observing human history and learning the facts of finitude." When compared, however, to the piety of a Socrates, a philosopher whom Stout admires deeply, or of a James Gustafson, a contemporary Christian ethicist whom Stout holds in very high esteem, Stout's secular piety does not seem particularly robust. It consists of his feelings of "wonder, awe, and even gratitude... for the powers that bear down upon us, for the majestic setting of our planet and its cosmos, and for the marvelous company we keep here." One wonders how such feelings first arose in Stout and how he came to construe and appreciate the world in just this way. It cannot be the case that simply to behold the world and to contemplate the facts of finitude and human history invariably lead to these affections and thence to the virtue of piety. If these impressions were enough to instill piety within the human soul, virtue would prosper everywhere, and education as character formation would be a comparatively easy task.

On the contrary, however, some human beings are first formed in such a way that they become disposed to respond in a pious manner to the wonders of the world and human history and thence to practice humility. In Socrates's case, according to Plato's account in the Apology, this disposition arose in the course of a lifetime of pious struggle to obey the injunctions of the oracle at Delphi. The inscriptions on the wall of the temple of
that oracle convey very well the spiritual virtues that it favored: "Know thyself; Nothing in excess; Curb thy spirit; Observe the limit; Hate hubris; Bow before the divine; Fear authority; Glory not instrength." Thus Socrates tells his judges that the entire manner and purpose of his life were shaped by the worship of Apollo, who had ordered him "to lead the philosophic life examining myself and others." 

James Gustafson's Christian sense of piety is informed by an especially rich religious tradition extending from St. Augustine through John Calvin and Friedrich Schleiermacher to the present. Gustafson strenuously maintains that "morality and religion are, for those of religious consciousness, inextricably intertwined." And for him the constitution of religious consciousness just is piety, meaning an "attitude of reverence, awe and respect . . . evoked by a powerful God who is the ultimate condition of possibility for human action and the ordering of life. . . ." Stout complains that the God who evokes Gustafson's reverence is too bleak and severe a deity to "seem worthy of worship." He nevertheless shows a keen appreciation for other aspects of Gustafson's piety, especially for its "cognitive commitments" and its basis within "the context of a religious community, with its first-order religious language, its liturgies and symbols, and its procedures for transmitting a heritage." When I say that Stout's secular piety, by comparison to the religious piety of Socrates and Gustafson, does not seem terribly robust, I mean that it lacks anchorage within just these kinds of communal practices and is hence not likely to be readily transmitted over time. Insofar as the spiritual virtues, such as humility, are strengthened by religious affections, their continued vitality would seem to be in some jeopardy under wholly secular auspices.

IV

This concern about the long-term vitality of the spiritual virtues brings me directly to the need for a redescription of the academic vocation as a calling informed by a sense of piety that is minimally Stoutian and maximally Gustafsonian. It was, of course, the vocabulary of Gustafson's variety of Protestantism that Max Weber transmuted during the course of his description of the academic calling in "Wissenschaftals Beruf." And it was this same Reformed tradition that led directly to Stout's version of secular piety with its feelings of awe toward, wonder at, and gratitude for powers that are not of our own making but that bear down steadily upon us.

As I have indicated, any compelling reconception of the academic calling will have
to reckon seriously with Weber in part by recovering some of the more venerable notions of
the nature and purposes of academic inquiry that his celebrated address so thoroughly and
effectively undermined or ignored. To imbue the academic calling with secular or religious
piety is already to change its Weberian character by redirecting its moral trajectory. For
Weber, the point of academic life was making knowledge; under the present reconception,
it is seeking the truth of matters. Instead of Weberian mastery of the world through
calculation and control, academics ought primarily to seek understanding of the world
through communal inquiry. This latter endeavor follows quite naturally from the affections
of awe, wonder, and gratitude that together constitute piety. Finally, the means-end
rationality that defined the academic mind for Weber must be absorbed into a far more
capacious epistemology that views qualities of character, mind, and spirit as integrally
related to one another.

Under this description, the principal task of academicians will not be to enable
students to master life technically but to enable them to achieve a kind of academic
excellence that harkens back in some respects to the Platonic Academy. That model of
excellence, as we have seen, fully integrated moral and intellectual virtue. Leon Kass has
cast this same objective in a more contemporary idiom by saying that colleges and
universities ought to provide education "in and for thoughtfulness." The word
thoughtfulness conveys, as Kass has noted, both the notion of being filled with reflections
about important matters of human concern and the notion of being considerate of others.
The same double meaning applies to the corresponding vice: to be thoughtless is to be both
foolish and inconsiderate. My analysis has, I hope, persuasively deepened Kass's insight
here. For I have been suggesting that one cannot be truly thoughtful in either of the two
senses Kass has specified without being thoughtful in the other as well. 22

This reorientation of academic life entails at least three radical revisions of the
Weberian conception of the academic calling. First, teaching, not Wissenschaft, becomes
the activity in terms of which all others --publication, collegiality, research, consultation,
advising--are to be understood, interpreted, and appraised. Second, the cultivation of those
spiritual virtues that make genuine teaching and learning possible becomes a vitally
important aspect of pedagogy. Finally, both charity and philia, the loves that Weber
banished from the academy, become once again central to its self-conception and to its
overall mission in the world.

To maintain that teaching becomes the activity in terms of which all the others are
to be understood is very different from saying merely that teaching should be more important than each of the other two members of the proverbial academic trinity - research, teaching, and collegiality. The former claim represents a conceptual shift, the latter a minor rearrangement of established priorities. So, for example, to construe writing as a fundamentally pedagogical act means, among other things, that the scholarly monograph becomes but one of several genres of writing honored by the academic community. General rhetorical and pedagogical principles, not simply the more narrowly defined disciplinary conventions, provide the standards by which written work is assessed. We could, under this dispensation, eventually come to see a day when Stephen J. Gould would be promoted as much on the basis of his splendid popularized (in the best sense of that term) essays, such as those that are collected in works like The Panda’s Thumb, as on the basis of his highly technical and specialized monographs on aspects of evolutionary theory.

Under this description, the question of how to weigh publication relative to teaching in evaluating a colleague simply cannot arise. Instead, one might ask whether or not a given colleague has achieved a desirable balance between written and oral modes of pedagogy. And one might insist that all academicians display as keen and considerate a sense of their audiences, both inside and outside their classrooms, as they do of their subject matters. Clarity about whom one is writing to and for will come to be as important as clarity about what one is writing about. Again, the warrant for releasing academicians from the exclusive dominance exerted upon them by their respective professional guilds is the replacement of Wissenschaft as the informing purpose of the academic calling by the more encompassing aim of educating a variety of publics in and for thoughtfulness.

Reconceiving the academic vocation in this manner involves, of course, retrieving some of the ideas that were part of the German tradition of Bildung that Weber was rejecting, but it also entails revivifying conceptions of the life of learning that were for millennia embedded in religious communities. The idea that teaching ought to be the activity in terms of which all academic pursuits should be interpreted and valued was, for example, very dear to the heart of monastics like Bernard of Clairvaux. "There are many," St. Bernard wrote over seven hundred years ago, "who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity. There are others who desire to know in order that they may themselves be known: that is vanity. Others seek knowledge in order to sell it: that is dishonorable. But there are some who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love [caritas]...."
Though this way of writing might seem to readers of the present time like a word from a vanished world, I have tried to demonstrate that the connection drawn by Bernard between edification and charity resonates with certain contemporary cultural preoccupations. From secular thinkers like Rorty, we have seen renewed emphasis upon edification as the aim of philosophy, broadly understood; from religious thinkers like Palmer, we have seen accounts of knowing as a kind of loving. From both secular and religious thinkers, we have seen a recent resurgence of interest in communitarian epistemologies. These contemporary movements support the second radical revision of Weber's understanding of the academic vocation: the conception of academics as persons who cultivate in themselves and in their students the spiritual virtues that make genuine learning possible.

To "teach" these virtues means first to exemplify them, second to order life in the classroom and throughout the academic community in such a way that their exercise is seen and felt as an essential aspect of inquiry. Jeffrey Stout has served us here as a model of considerate and judicious appraisal of the thoughts of others. And when he celebrates the ideal of human beings "caught up in a conversation that leads to unexpected self-understanding," he has in passing noted one of the many ways in which classroom activity can achieve cognitive purposes through the cultivation of spiritual virtues. 29 The teacher must, in other words, submit herself to the disciplines and the arts of inquiry that enable communities to grow together into new understandings. This will be no easy task, because the temptations to self-promotion will recur in numerous guises throughout the course of any teaching career. Still, modeling the spirited conversation in the classroom is the surest way to shape the direction and enhance the quality of each student's thought processes.

Cardinal Newman certainly made these points, as he made so many others, more eloquently than anyone else before or since.

The personal influence of the teacher is able in some sort to dispense with an academical system, but that system cannot in any sort dispense with personal influence. With influence there is life, without it there is none; if influence is deprived of its due position, it will not by those means be got rid of, it will only break out irregularly, dangerously. An academical system without the personal influence of teachers upon pupils is an arctic winter; it will create an ice-bound, petrified, cast-iron University and nothing else. 30

It is an eerie coincidence perhaps that Weber's last works were filled with similar images
of cold, darkening loneliness: the future of German politics in the immediate aftermath of World War I he called a "polar night of icy darkness"; the modern university in the twentieth century, an outpost of exiles, not unlike the ancient Hebrews, inquiring of and in the night; the dwelling place of the "specialists without spirit," an iron cage of their own making.  

But these images should not really surprise us, for, as we have seen, Weber quite explicitly banished all forms of love from the academy as well as from other realms of life such as the state and the economy that were governed purely by means-end rationality. I have already examined how and why the greatest of the spiritual virtues, charity, is essential to the process of communal inquiry. But charity is not the only form of love that belongs properly and centrally to the life of learning. "Thoughtfulness, in both senses, is," as Kass notes, "the core of the best friendships." I should like now to conclude my redescription of the academic vocation by addressing more fully the suggestion that academies at their best can and should become communities where the pleasures of friendship and the rigors of work are united.

Many students and faculty sense this possibility at the level of their most rudimentary impressions. Perhaps most of the students who remain deeply attached to their alma mater do so not so much out of gratitude for the range of cognitive abilities they acquired as out of appreciation for the quality and endurance of the friendships they formed. Faculty speak regularly and solemnly about the critical importance of "collegiality," a quality that seems unfortunately as crucial to possess as it is impossible to define. Most faculty members are, however, deeply suspicious of friendships with students, for they instantly reduce all such relationships between persons unequal to one another in some respect to a kind of chumminess that is demeaning to both parties.

On this matter, the students' sentiments are a surer source of insight into the character of academic community than are the faculty's thoughts. We need, however, Aristotle's rich conception of philia to render the thinking that accompanies the students' feelings articulate and precise. For Aristotle, friendship or philia was the crowning virtue of the good life for human beings, "for without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods." Philia was, moreover, an elastic concept that embraced an enormous range of human relationships, including those of rulers and ruled, parents and
Aristotle, a much broader and richer category than our contemporary notion. Moreover, once Aristotle began to distinguish carefully the various kinds of friendship, he could and did capture the singular strengths and limitations of, to give two examples, friendships among those who are unequal with respect to age, experience, and training, and friendships among those who constitute together a large intentional community. On Aristotle's account, friendships between teachers and students as well as friendships among the many academics at, say, UCLA would be both possible and desirable.

Of the several kinds of friendship, the highest and best was the friendship of virtuous human beings, equal to one another, who live a life together "sharing in discussion and thought." The deepest intimacy between human beings arose in this process of conversation, because, for Aristotle, human beings were most fully and truly themselves when they were thinking together. And so for him, as for so many of the other writers we have mentioned or studied, thinking and speaking together were expressions of a kind of love.

We need not enter here into all of the important discriminations that would be required for a complete analysis of the various kinds of friendship that can and should exist in a flourishing academy at any given time. We can, however, surmise, on the basis of what we have seen regarding the cognitive significance of the spiritual virtues, that without the virtue of friendship, academic life threatens to become a mere technological project. The converse also seems to be the case. Once the academy is conceived to be an enterprise governed exclusively by the practice of means-end rationality, once the academic vocation is construed exclusively in terms of Wissenschaft, the virtue of friendship will soon disappear from any account of those virtues essential to its highest aspirations.

These contrasts cannot be more stark. For Weber and others, making knowledge is a solitary and lonely, often a competitive, process. Human beings' wishing one another well, a crucial aspect of any community of friends, may in fact be linked from time to time to the process of making knowledge, but the connection is not an essential one. By contrast, just as and just because, for Aristotle, practical wisdom and the moral virtues mutually implicate one another, so too thinking well and living well are mutually implicated at the conceptual level, in the very definition of human excellence. And because the highest form of friendship is a friendship between virtuous human beings, phila and inquiry, love and the pursuit of truth, enrich one another. It is no wonder that so often he most durable of the friendships that human beings form arise in the context of learning together.
The literary critic Wayne Booth has sought to extend the Aristotelian notion of friendship to include as well a reader's relationship to the implied author of a text. Insofar as this project succeeds—and I believe that it does succeed to a great extent—we can extend the boundaries of the academy to include the living and the dead, those who speak to us face to face and those who address us from across the centuries through the printed word. Booth recognizes the limitations of efforts to construe books as friends, but he nevertheless makes a persuasive case for his more general claim that we are formed to a great extent by the "company we keep." By inviting us to consider implied authors as friends he further reinforces the cognitive importance of spiritual virtues such as humility and charity, both of which are suggested by Booth's golden rule of hermeneutics, "Read as you would have others read you; listen as you would have others listen to you." To construe the academy contra Weber as a community of friends is paradoxically to stress at one and the same time loyalty to particular places where human beings can inquire together over long periods of time and the need for a company of very diverse books from lands remote in space and time whose authors constitute, at least potentially, the loved ones we hold in common as part of our intellectual tradition.

We have seen in this chapter how and why the spiritual virtues are indispensable even today to academic inquiry and in any case how and why they should be central to alternative conceptions of the academic vocation. We are left simply to wonder whether any cultural resources other than religious ones can counter the technological tendencies with in the academy that Weber both analyzed and advanced. We are also left to wonder about many practical matters, and we shall turn to these in the next chapter.

Notes


7. Ibid., 246.
8. Ibid., 259-60.
9. Ibid., 30.
10. Ibid., 31.
11. Ibid., 182.
12. Ibid., 25.
13. Ibid., 232.
15. Ibid., 223.
16. Ibid., 238.
17. Ibid., 223.
18. Ibid., 222-23.
19. Ibid., 292.
20. Ibid., 291 (emphasis mine).
21. Ibid., 181.


25. Ibid., 164.

27. Leon Kass, "The Aims of Liberal Education," unpublished address delivered in Rockefeller Chapel, the University of Chicago, September 25, 1981.


Stout, Ethics after Babel, 194.


