Homecoming at Middle Age
David C. Yamada

Can Christianity Save the Humanities?
Douglas Jacobsen & Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen

The Polyvalent Potentiality of Vocation
Stewart Herman

Four Things an Alien Civilization Would Learn about the West
If All They Watched Was HBO's *Westworld*
Christina Bieber Lake

C. Christopher Smith's
*Reading for the Common Good* and
Will Schwalbe's
*Books for Living*
Todd Ream

Nunc Dimittis
*Bill Stadick*

Mid-November
*Barbara Crooker*

Via Negativa
*Chelsea Wagenaar*

Parking Lot Poem at the Edge of Things
*Matthew Lippman*

On "Saint Francis Adoring a Crucifix" by Guido Reni
*Cameron Morse*

Susan Carr was a Chicago-based photographer who, in addition to enjoying recognition in the fine art realm, was also a successful commercial photographer and a published authority on professional photographic practices. In her Personal Spaces series, to which she devoted many years of her career, Carr photographed the interiors of homes where the residents had lived for forty years or more. The homes, in their varied details, reflect the identities of their longtime inhabitants and also speak to the passage of time. In this photograph, through the knickknacks on the windowsill, a light shines onto objects on the kitchen counter—a light that bathes the everyday and transforms it into something sacred. Carr’s sensitive eye identifies the magic in the commonplace and in her settings captures endurance and devotion.

On the back cover: Dan Keck. Oak Grove Cemetery, Logan, Ohio, 2017. Image made available under via Creative Commons, original at www.flickr.com/photos/140641142@N05/24375142498.

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whatever is **TRUE**

whatever is **NOBLE**

whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy

—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8
IN LUCE TUA

In Thy Light

The Terrible and Beautiful Panorama

This issue marks the eightieth anniversary of the Cresset. One wonders if founding editor O. P. Kretzmann would have imagined his nascent publication reaching such a milestone. The grand, sweeping language in his inaugural column suggests that he might have: “Between us and the final trumpets,” he wrote, “lies the terrible and beautiful panorama of human passions, of sadness and laughter, of beauty and horror, of eternal sameness and never ending change—all of which the Pilgrim purposes to survey...” Indeed, from the column’s first appearance in November 1937 until its final one in June of 1972, “The Pilgrim” succeeded in surveying a vast span of that terrible and beautiful panorama.

The never-ending change he speaks of—or even simply the change between 1937 (or 1972!) and today—is so apparent that it can sometimes be difficult to see much else. From advances in science and technology to the diminishing role of the church in American life to the rise of multiculturalism to developments in commerce and communication to shifting views on family, gender, race, disability, the environment, and so much else, we are truly in a different world than when the Pilgrim penned his first column.

It behooves us, however, to remember the “eternal sameness” of the human condition that he also cites. Perhaps the Pilgrim was speaking in a spiritual key. Like those before us, we humans in 2017 struggle to respond to each other in courageous, humble, and loving ways. We need forgiveness and hope and grace. But even if he had been speaking about the eternal sameness of more mundane things, the truth of his words would bear out. A surprising number of headlines from 1937 sound as if they could appear in news tickers or social media posts this fall: in late August, a massive forest fire killed fifteen firefighters in Wyoming; a few weeks later, a catastrophic typhoon took the lives of 11,000 people in Hong Kong. News reports from October of that year describe a surge of violence in Palestine that resulted in the death of four Arabs and three Jews. (On a purely superficial level, the website onthisday.com compiles a dizzying list of 1937 movie premieres, sporting events, and pop-culture crazes that rival today’s saturated media landscape). The first few pages of that first issue of the Cresset address current events that deal with bigotry, crime, and the relationship between science and religion—topics that are just as relevant today as they were then.

All of this is to say that despite the never-ending change, there is a through-line of consistency worth contemplating. Several contributions to this issue do just that. In his essay “Homecoming at Middle Age,” David C. Yamada (VU ’81) takes a closer look at his college years—both how his own experience at Valparaiso University in the late 1970s and early 1980s shaped him, and how certain political, economic, and social developments during that time continue to shape our world today. Stewart Herman’s “The Polyvalent Potentiality of Vocation in Net-Zero Construction” tells the story of a massive home renovation project, one which aimed to preserve the beauty, charm, and livability of their 1907 Victorian cottage while introducing twenty-first century green technology. And although the poem “Mid-November” by Barbara Crooker focuses more on never-ending change than eternal sameness, it captures a feeling that our ancestors would surely recognize:

We’re talking about time, how rapidly it’s pulling away / from us, slippery as a silver fish. How we want to slow things down, / to press the pause button here.

Pause for a moment, then, and join me in gratitude for the Pilgrim and the many other editors, writers, readers, and benefactors whose dedication to this enterprise over these past eight decades allows us to meet here today.

—HGG

Michaelmas 2017 3
Homecoming at Middle Age

David C. Yamada

For many years after my 1981 graduation from Valparaiso University, I regarded my student days as spanning one of the duller stretches of U.S. history. As a late Baby Boomer, I had missed out on the Sixties experience, and the decade that followed seemed comparatively tame and banal. The overall state of politics and public affairs fueled much of that impression, but so too did popular culture (Captain & Tennille, anyone?) and the everyday experience of campus life.

Often it felt like not much was going on. After all, this period overlapped with Jimmy Carter’s famous 1978 “malaise” speech, in which the president articulated what he saw as a crisis of American confidence that had sapped our sense of direction and resolve. (He never actually used the word malaise in his televised national address, but such is the power of media labeling.)

This feeling could extend to the VU student experience. Valparaiso had witnessed at least a modicum of student activism during the ’60s, but campus life was much more subdued by the time I matriculated in 1977. Richard Baepler, in his insightful history of the University, quotes Torch student newspaper editor Dan Friedrich’s contemporary lamentation of a campus climate featuring “dull days of inactivity,” fueled by “carelessness, blind acceptance, and shallow critical thought.”

The gift of hindsight, however, reveals a period of significant transitions that anticipated major things to come—for my own life, for VU and higher education generally, and for national and international affairs. This epiphany crystallized for me during an extended visit to Valpo last fall to participate in Homecoming-related activities and to work on a book project as a visiting scholar at the School of Law. As a creature of nostalgia, an amateur student of politics and history, and a long-time denizen of higher education, all systems were primed for a flood of collegiate memories and mid-life reflections. To the extent that such a retrospective may invite others of my age group to consider the times of our lives, I share some of it here.

VU Circa 1980

My 2016 return to VU was an unlikely reunion, at least from the vantage point of my original departure. True, even as a callow undergraduate, I knew that Valpo was providing me with a quality education. It also offered meaningful extracurricular opportunities and a chance to study abroad. However, I was given to sharply criticizing the institution, especially in my role as a department editor and reporter for the Torch. By the time of my graduation, several critiques had hardened into grievances. I left VU smugly assuming that I had outgrown the place.

Led by a perceptive group of editors-in-chief whose voices were honed by deep immersion in VU’s Christ College honors program, the Torch editorial board of the time was committed to taking VU to task for the institution’s supposed inadequacies. Among other things, the paper criticized the steady creep of vocational influences that threatened the liberal arts, called out the behavioral excesses of campus fraternities, and pressed the school to be a more inclusive place for women and various diversities. Looking back, it’s clear that we were digging into early editions of
topics that continue to challenge and shape higher education today.

As for my contributions to the paper, I mixed some good reporting and commentary with several sophomoric, over-the-top salvos, the latter of which remain quite horrifying to read now. That said, those of us who spent significant time in the Torch's offices benefited greatly from the experience. We learned a lot about good writing, we frequently debated the condition of VU and the school's possible future, and we engaged in spirited discussions about our responsibilities as student journalists. One might not imagine working on a student newspaper as being an intellectual endeavor, but it served that role for us.

On the whole, the Torch of that period blended hard-nosed coverage of campus events and university life with an editorial voice that could be spot-on when it wasn't undermined by a self-righteous tone. Many of the sharper commentaries were aimed at a school that was wrestling with its self-identity. VU circa 1980 featured a faculty deeply committed to classroom teaching and undergraduate education, despite heavy course loads and modest pay. However, the school didn't know where it stood in the landscape of American higher education beyond its Lutheran constituency, and it lacked a presence in national circles.

I would internalize some of that institutional insecurity. During my semester abroad at VU's study center in Cambridge, England, I met students from schools such as Brown, Johns Hopkins, and UC Berkeley, and I assumed that everyone who attended such elite schools were brilliant thinkers and writers. These self-doubts followed me when I decamped for law school at New York University, where many of my classmates had earned bachelor's degrees from elite colleges and universities. Not until I returned to NYU as an instructor in its legal skills program would I understand, by reviewing the work of first-year law students, that my Valpo education compared very favorably to that of tonier undergraduate schools.

As for the social options, Greek organizations pretty much dominated the scene, with fraternity behavior inspired (if that is the word) by the 1978 hit movie Animal House. In a 1989 Cresset remembrance sharply critical of the quality of campus
life during that time, former Torch editor-in-chief Jeff Smith lambasted a fraternity culture rife with “street fights, screaming matches and joint public displays of urinating,” along with serious instances of sexual harassment and violence. Smith’s regard for VU was distinctly bifurcated. He held certain VU administrators responsible for overlooking these behaviors, tagging them “the Lackeys.” But he praised the university’s teachers for their instruction and mentorship and hailed the Christ College core curriculum for its intellectual content.

Race relations, always a hard topic in a predominantly white northwest Indiana community, became prominent in a terrible way. One night in December 1979, two male students at VU, one African American, the other white, got into a vicious fight near the latter’s fraternity house. It was the latest in a series of racially infused antipathies between them, culminating in the stabbing death of the white student. An eventual trial would result in a murder conviction.

I covered this event and its aftermath for the Torch, and it affected me deeply. I learned that during the night of the stabbing, some black students feared for their safety; a number of them sought refuge with faculty members. I interviewed others who expressed anger and sadness over the general climate for minority students. While I did not condone the criminal act, I began to view the underlying circumstances against the backdrop of VU’s overall record on diversity. I resented the school for not doing more to address racial tensions on campus.

Had I been more confident and constructive about pursuing these matters, I might have discovered possible resources for that potential “more.”

Although I would argue that the U.S. News rankings have had an overwrought and often negative impact on higher education, for Valparaiso their appearance served a validating purpose. Many years later, for example, I would learn about the work of professors Andrew Schulze and Karl Lutze, whose leadership of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America during the 1950s and 1960s supported racial inclusion and civil rights on campus and in the broader Lutheran community. This led me to wonder what stronger initiatives could have been taken to help the VU community heal and grow in the aftermath of this tragedy.

In any event, I opted to leave Valparaiso from afar, spending my final semester in Cambridge. This deeply formative experience would positively shape my worldview, intellectual base, and personal culture for a lifetime. It also brought together students whose paths were unlikely to cross on the VU campus, often with unexpectedly gratifying results. Our group included members of the very Greek letter organizations that I had roundly criticized as a Torch staffer. Several forgave my standoffish attitude and kindly invited me to travel with them during our various breaks. Their outreach opened the door to friendships that have continued to this day.

Two events later in the decade would help to enhance VU’s self-esteem and provide it with overdue national recognition. First, in 1987, U.S. News & World Report published the first of its annual rankings of colleges and universities, and Valparaiso began its continuous run of being ranked among the top regional schools in the Midwest. Before the advent of the U.S. News rankings, questions of institutional prestige were left largely to conjecture and self-promotion. While occasional surveys attempted to rank or identify the nation’s most prestigious colleges and universities, everyone else was left to guess as to where they stood in the remaining hierarchy. Although I would argue that the U.S. News rankings have had an overwrought and often negative impact on higher education, for Valparaiso their appearance served a validating purpose, soothing some of the self-doubts about its standing among peer institutions.

A year later, the American Scholar, the journal of Phi Beta Kappa, would publish an essay by VU alumnus, faculty member, and Cresset editor James Nuechterlein, “Athens and Jerusalem in Indiana,” which examined VU’s history under Lutheran
We were not aware of it at the time, but those of us attending college during the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the emergence of national and international megatrends that would endure through our adulthoods.
Machine was showing its age, and no longer would it provide a robust supply of well paying, union-secured jobs in the manufacturing sector.

The major unanticipated societal transformation was the coming digital age, even though it was right on our horizon. For most VU students, computers remained a novelty, housed in huge mainframes. Across the campus, handwritten drafts of papers followed by final versions painstakingly typed out the night before they were due made for a widely shared student ritual. Communications were similarly in analog mode. When we parted company for summer and semester breaks, we kept in touch via snail-mailed letters and occasional phone calls.

As domestic politics and economic policy bubbled anew, so did the global scene. The Cold War remained the dominant foreign affairs paradigm during our Valpo years, with the Soviets regarded as America’s main adversary. However, in November 1979, young Islamic revolutionaries seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took several dozen American hostages, thus starting what quickly became known as the Iranian Hostage Crisis.

The Middle East, long on America’s radar because of its oil supply, was now an active conflict zone. Every weeknight, millions of Americans watched ABC’s Nightline news program, hosted by Ted Koppel, to learn of the latest attempts to free the hostages. In our Valpo dorm rooms, we tuned in nightly for updates on small black-and-white televisions and then debated the impact of these developments on the upcoming election.

The captors released their hostages in January 1981. I was in Cambridge by then, and some of my classmates hung a marked-up cloth sheet proclaiming “God Bless Our Freed 52” outside a bedroom window. Of course, we were babes in the woods in terms of comprehending the future of terrorism. We still presumed that whenever American hostages were taken, they very likely would be freed. And if gunmen were to hijack a commercial airliner, we assumed that a forced landing in another country was the worst thing that could ever happen.

When I jump to today, I see a world more divided and unstable than it was around 1980, with the twist being that the current state of affairs has roots in many events of that time. My extended visit to VU overlapped with an ugly and vulgar presidential campaign; watching the debates in my Valparaiso hotel room was a distressing and depressing experience. The international scene overall is an angry one that makes me wonder if we learned much from the suffering of the last century. And while it is premature to suggest that we add Sparta to O.P. Kretzmann’s Athens and Jerusalem in terms of framing our earthly existence, I fear that some who hold power would be happy if occurrences compelled us to do so.

**Homecoming**

I now understand that VU and I were more of a matched pair during my undergraduate years than I ever could have guessed. While Valpo was dealing with its identity crisis, I wasn’t all that sure of myself, either. My political and social beliefs were in a state of flux, and for all my criticisms of VU’s record on diversity, I wasn’t very worldly in my own right. My collegiate years felt heavy, as if I were carrying the weight of the future on my shoulders, fueled by a growing desire to explore life outside of my native northwest Indiana and anxiety over where I would end up and how I would fare once I got there.

When I returned to campus last fall, I encountered a university that was more cosmopolitan, inclusive, and comfortable in its own skin, while still holding true to its Lutheran heritage. The student body appeared more visibly diverse, and the university had built an array of much-needed new facilities. Moreover, the City of Valparaiso felt more like a college town, as opposed to being a town simply abutting a university. I came away believing that VU has good reason to be optimistic about its future, a distinction that many
schools cannot legitimately claim these days. It has not escaped all of the major challenges facing modern higher education, but it is greeting them with a confidence not necessarily evident during my student days.

On this point I can relate. While I, too, remain a work in progress, thankfully I am more confident at middle age than I was as an unsure undergraduate. Questions about the future that beset me in college have been largely supplanted by a strong sense of purpose in my life. Maybe that explains why, during a visit to the alumni hospitality tent at the Homecoming football game, I remarked to VU President Mark Heckler that it felt very light to be back on campus—a stark contrast to my emotional heaviness back in the day.

When I informed friends that the VU Alumni Association would be honoring me with an Alumni Achievement Award during Homecoming, several noted the humorous irony of the critical Torch writer returning to campus decades later as an appreciative award recipient. Many of them—mostly fellow sojourners from our wonderful semester together in England—would join me for the awards ceremonies, including a Sunday service in the Chapel of the Resurrection and a luncheon in the new student union. Our impromptu reunion reminded all of us that lasting friendships have been among the continuing gifts of our college experiences.

This Homecoming assemblage and other get-togethers with fellow VU alums have clarified another epiphany for me. Currently the higher education industry is positively obsessed with "assessments" and "outcomes," educational jargon for figuring out what students learned. Well, here's a longer-range outcome for colleges and universities to consider: How are your graduates turning out in life?

Today I am grateful for this renewed and positive relationship, which includes a quality education of lasting impact and a cohort of treasured, lifelong friends. After all, in a world more uncertain and fractured than it was some thirty-five years ago, we need these healthy human and institutional connections to help us navigate it.

David C. Yamada is a professor of law and director of the New Workplace Institute at Suffolk University Law School in Boston.

Works Cited


NUNC DIMITTIS

But first another check of the sports scores,
Another walk around my favorite mall,
More purchases at all the swanky stores
And one more game of pickup basketball.
No, wait. There’s more. I’ve only but begun.
Please let me watch another B movie
(I’m thinking maybe *Tremors* or *Top Gun*).
I’d love to drive a Vette that isn’t me,
Suck down a sinful, triple-chocolate shake,
Then listen to that silly country tune
That teaches breaky hearts just how to ache.
More grandchildren? Tomorrow’s dawn? Next June?
The more I mull, the more desires increase.
It’s not so easy to depart in peace.

Bill Stadick
Can Christianity Save the Humanities?

Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen

In 1995, the book How the Irish Saved Civilization became a best-seller by boldly claiming that Western civilization was preserved from utter destruction when the Roman Empire collapsed only through the holy resolve of heroic monks like Saint Columba and his collaborators in Ireland. Historians have questioned the grandiosity of the book's claim, but the book's provocative title provides an apt metaphor for the potential relationship that exists between Christianity and the humanities in contemporary American higher education. In a time when the values of the humanities are being questioned, might Christianity offer a way to "save" the humanities from academic oblivion?

The status of the humanities is undoubtedly in decline in the contemporary academy, at least in comparison to the burgeoning STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) that are perceived as promising greater employment opportunities and future earnings while also contributing to national strength and security. On many campuses, courses in the humanities are under-enrolled, and departments and majors in the humanities are being eliminated. For many families, forking over tuition dollars to pay for classes about poetry, philosophy, literature, history, and the arts—disciplines that might seem like nice avocational pursuits for some people later in life, perhaps as hobbies in retirement, but which may not appear to provide young adults with the skills and knowledge that will lead to a lucrative professional trajectory—can seem like an expensive and unnecessary diversion from the core goal of preparing a student for profitable employment.

In their attempts to defend the humanities, some professors and administrators have suggested that acquiring a little seasoning from the humanities makes graduates more attractive as potential employees. Reading Shakespeare, learning how to appreciate art, and thinking deep thoughts with Plato can make a job candidate better attuned to the "human factors" involved in business relationships with coworkers and clients. Similarly, the abilities to read intelligently and to write clearly are handy when trying to craft public announcements or decode company memos. Furthermore, exposure to the humanities may save people from becoming isolated misfits in the workplace. The hope is that the humanities will help to humanize people, giving them the kind of affective self-awareness and understanding that employers find advantageous.

All of this may be true, but in some sense these arguments sell the horse to repair the barn—and if the horse is gone, who needs a barn? They buy into the notion that the humanities are peripheral to the real work of higher education, and they are usually offered as arguments to maintain some remnant of humanities graduation requirements. It is not clear that this is a long-term winning strategy for keeping the humanities alive either at American colleges and universities or in American culture at large. In contrast, Christianity has historically valued the humanities not for their instrumental benefits, but because the kind of thinking that the humanities inspires is necessary for the maturation of faith. At this moment in American higher education, we believe that Christianity also offers the kinds
of values and virtues needed by the humanities themselves if they are to survive and flourish.

What Are the Humanities?

In order to save the humanities, the humanities first need to be defined. Currently, there is little agreement about how the humanities should be delineated. The Oxford Dictionaries, the online incarnation of the old Oxford English Dictionary, classify the humanities as "learning concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy." This definition, while adequate, seems rather terse and limited. To arrive at a fuller understanding, it is necessary to look at how the term is actually used both in the academy and in contemporary public discourse today.

A quick Google search shows how different groups define the humanities in varied and sometimes conflicting ways. Not surprisingly, Google first leads us to Wikipedia, where the humanities are largely defined by what they are not. Wikipedia contributors have posited that the humanities are not the "natural, physical, and sometimes social sciences [or] professional training." Instead, the humanities focus on "subject matters that the experimental method does not apply to—and instead mainly use the comparative method and comparative research." This definition is inelegant, at least, and anemic, at best, and it will undoubtedly depress anyone actually engaged in the humanities. While other people in the academy are experimentally discovering things or offering sage advice to practitioners, scholars in the humanities merely compare things and express their opinions.

Google also directs searchers to several university websites. Stanford University’s Humanities Center defines the humanities as "the study of how people process and document the human experience." It continues:

Since humans have been able, we have used philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history, and language to understand and record our world. These modes of expression have become some of the subjects that traditionally fall under the humanities umbrella.

Yale University’s website offers a more succinct but also more encompassing definition, describing the humanities as the "pursuit of fundamental insights into the human condition as they arise in literature, the arts, history, philosophy, and the sciences." At the University of Chicago, the humanities are described as happening whenever "interdisciplinary research and collaboration" occurs. At Princeton, the humanities are presented as generally synonymous with study of the Western intellectual tradition. These university websites add depth and nuance to the definition of the humanities, but they do not articulate an academic consensus about precisely what the humanities are.

The College Board’s College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), which institutions of higher education use to award humanities credits to matriculating undergraduate students, also makes an early appearance in Google search results. The CLEP definition of the humanities is clear and narrow, emphasizing "general knowledge of literature, art, and music and the other performing arts... with questions on all periods from classical to contemporary and in many different fields: poetry, prose, philosophy, art, architecture, music, dance, theater, and film." Half of the questions cover literature and half cover the arts, including visual and performing arts, architecture, and music. Many subjects typically included in the humanities—language, philosophy, history, religion, cultural studies—are absent from CLEP’s list.

Outside the bounds of higher education, a number of states have established humanities initiatives for their residents. California Humanities is [A] non-profit that promotes the humanities in California in order to help create ‘a state of open mind.’ Through our work,
we inspire Californians to learn more, dig deeper, and start conversations that matter among our dramatically diverse people.

The state's diversity is underscored, and "a state of open mind" also reflects California's laid-back culture. The Pennsylvania Humanities Council, by contrast, assumes a more pragmatic stance: "We believe the humanities inspire people to make a difference and come together to advance cultural diversity, economic vibrancy, and an equitable society." The Kansas Humanities Council is even more direct, declaring:

Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens, and the humanities provide a way to gain both. Healthy communities depend on the humanities to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and viewpoints about historical and contemporary topics, opportunities to deepen understanding of our shared heritage, and encouragement for innovation in civic life.

Similarly, the Alaskan Humanities Forum says its mission is "to connect Alaskans through stories, ideas, and experiences that positively change lives and empower communities." In the rhetoric of public humanities programs, the ideals of democracy and community development tend to replace more traditional definitions of the humanities.

The National Humanities Center, a private, nonprofit institute located in Durham, North Carolina, has a more expansive definition of the humanities. The Center hosts fellows who are expected to "generate new knowledge and further understanding of all forms of cultural expression, social interaction, and human thought." The Center's website states that

[I]n addition to scholars from all fields of the humanities, the Center accepts individuals from the natural and social sciences, the arts, the professions, and public life who are engaged in humanistic projects.

Here, studying any subject in a "humanistic" mode is the criterion for having one's research included in the humanities.

However expansively defined, a traditional humanistic (that is, human-centered) approach often overlooks the degree to which humanity is subject to forces beyond human control and simultaneously underestimates how much human actions impact the non-human world. Posthumanist and antihumanist scholars have accordingly developed new methodologies for the humanities that question the validity of traditional, anthropocentric views of reality. From their perspective, human experience can be properly understood only by emphasizing humanity's limitations, faults, obliviousness, and blindness to the destructive impact humans have so often had on other forms of life. A prominent purveyor of this posthumanist approach is the Humanities Without Walls consortium that links the humanities centers at fifteen research universities in the central United States. One of the consortium's recent initiatives focuses on climate change, studying how the "fictions and visual cultures" of humanity have produced different "material consequences" for the planet as a whole.

The great diversity in these definitions of the humanities informs our own working definition:

The humanities seek to understand human existence, and especially human creativity, in all of the different times, places, cultures, and circumstances in which people have lived. The humanities explore how human beings have suffered, survived, prospered, thrived, and influenced the non-human world around them, seeking to identify and encourage better ways of being human while acknowledging that what constitutes "better" will always be contested.

This working definition is somewhat cumbersome, but it describes a zone of academic activity within which most scholars in the humanities can locate their work. It distinguishes the humanities from the arts, which focus much more directly on the process of being humanly creative; from the sciences, which seek to understand the world in much more objective and much less anthropocen-
tric ways; and also from professional studies that prepare individuals to provide personal and social services. When scientists, artists, or professionals outside the academy reflect on the meaning and significance (as opposed to simply the content) of their work, they step away from their disciplines and use the lens of the humanities to examine their efforts. Thus, within the world of higher education, the humanities exist both as a distinct zone of inquiry and as a general approach to study and reflection that is open to people in all fields and disciplines.

The Relationship between the Humanities and Faith

Faith is the way people orient themselves to the complex realities of life. The word “faith” refers to how people respond to what they see as the deepest and most important truths about the world. Faith involves beliefs, but it is more than that. It is a holistic life stance that includes affectivity and action alongside beliefs and convictions.

Study in the humanities involves the constant, ongoing, repetitious exposure of students to “the other.” It is the steady drip, drip, drip of engaging other people, other cultures, other languages, other stories, other historical epochs, and other ways of thinking. Understood this way, faith is never either fully present or fully absent. Faith can be stronger or weaker, more robust or less. It can be more comprehensive and coherent or less so. It can also be healthier or less healthy, with healthiness defined in terms of both personal sanity and flourishing, and the positive or negative influence of the individual on the people (and other living things) with whom that individual interacts. Finally, faith can be either more or less firm, more prone to doubt and possible revision or less so, at any given point in time. Faith has this dynamic character because faith is part of being human, and faith ebbs and flows alongside other experiences over the course of a lifetime.

Most individuals initially inherit their faith from other people—from their parents, teachers, and other mentors—and the result is that childhood faith is typically naïve in the sense that the person has little or no self-consciousness of having any faith at all. Part of maturing as a human being and as a person of faith involves becoming self-consciously aware of one's faith. This awareness allows ownership of one's faith in a way that is not possible when faith is merely taken for granted.

The humanities can play a crucial role in this process of dawning self-awareness and maturation of faith, because the humanities seek to introduce people to the full diversity of human experience. People discover who they are by encountering people who are truly and genuinely different from themselves, and this is precisely what the humanities do so well. Study in the humanities involves the constant, ongoing, repetitious exposure of students to “the other.” It is the steady drip, drip, drip of engaging other people, other cultures, other languages, other stories, other historical epochs, and other ways of thinking that slowly changes people over time, making them more open to new ideas and to new relationships with individuals who are different from themselves. At times, the encounter with otherness can be disorienting, and this kind of shock can be a necessary step toward self-awareness of the particularity of one's own faith.

We use the term “critical unsettling” to describe this disorienting engagement with the other (Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2012: 129-32). It often occurs in tandem with “critical thinking,” and it can be used purposefully within undergraduate education to raise doubts about students’ convictions so that they are forced to discard ideas and beliefs they find inadequate or unworthy. When individuals experience this unsettling through systematic questioning or exposure to new and different ideas, it can be painful. If the inadequacies of existing beliefs and commit-
ments are exposed and nothing emerges to fill the void, then the end result can be cynicism or even despair. This is certainly not the desired outcome of critical unsettling, since the educational goal is for students to develop deeper and more robust ways of making meaning in their lives. The intention is for exposure to new ideas and experiences to prompt learners either to modify or to reaffirm their prior convictions, but with greater self-awareness, more nuance, and heightened respect for alternative ways of thinking and living.

Critical and creative thinking, rational reflection, awareness and understanding of the other, acceptance of diversity, appreciation of paradox and ambiguity, and self-awareness—all hallmarks of robust education in the humanities—are sometimes seen as antithetical to faith and to simple trust in God, and when students internalize these dispositions it can sometimes become difficult to feel at home in the churches where they have been raised. Consequently, some church-related colleges and universities, at least during the admissions process, seek to assure potential students and their parents that nothing students learn at their school will push them to question or reconsider anything about their faith. “Whatever ideas or convictions you bring with you into this college will be respected by its professors and staff,” they seem to say; “Your faith is safe from challenge here. We will help you to grow as people of faith, but you can graduate as exactly the same kind of person you are when entering this school.”

Responding to concerns about faith with this kind of promise is not only bad for the humanities, it is also against any respectable understanding of higher learning and it is ultimately bad for faith. Most American educators (and especially those in the humanities) would argue that the core purpose of higher learning is to make students more self-aware, more aware of and more understanding of others, more inquisitive, more reflective, and ultimately more grounded in their own sense of who they are, how they think the world is put together, and what they may or may not be called to do in life. These are precisely the same skills and dispositions required to become a faithful, mature Christian. Higher education, and especially Christian higher education, should change people. The humanities play a special and necessary role in that process of growth and transformation.

Critical unsettling is not, however, the only way that study in the humanities can encourage individuals to reexamine their current faith orientations and open paths toward greater maturity. Perhaps even more powerful and effective are moments of “transcendent unsettling” that occur when a student encounters another person, perspective, or posture in life that seems not just different but in some ways better. Think perhaps of the words and lives of Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai, or the first responders who ran into the burning World Trade Center in 2001. The courage and compassion of their words and actions inspire us and simultaneously shame us by starkly revealing our own relative self-interestedness and moral hesitancy. Transcendent unsettling challenges faith in a way that is far different from critical unsettling. It is not so much a shaking of foundations as an exposure of moral and spiritual smallness, a revelation that can compel individuals toward becoming less small and self-focused in their faith and convictions. This is the kind of unsettling that the saints have long played in the Christian tradition, underscoring humanity's cramped and self-focused tendencies and highlighting pathways for becoming more fully alive and more deeply engaged with God and others.

While the humanities can play an important role in helping an individual mature in his or her faith, resources from within the Christian tradition (as well as other religious traditions) can also serve as a corrective to some unhealthy predilections of the humanities. In particular, an engagement with faith can help the humanities to remember to ask genuinely “big questions” about the human condition. A recent article in The...
Chronicle Review about Michelle Alexander, author of the highly acclaimed book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness*, illustrates the point. Alexander explains her move from the secular academy (a position at the law school of Ohio State University) to a religious setting (Union Theological Seminary in New York City) in this way: “I'm shifting my focus from questions of law to questions of justice,” and Union seemed like a better place to do that. “[I]n my experience, in policy roundtables, in legal conferences, even in law-school classrooms, it’s relatively rare to have deep, searching dialogues about the meaning of justice” (Kafka, 2016: B11).

What is true about discussions in law-school classrooms is also true about discussions in many humanities classrooms. Rather than grappling with the really big questions presented in a particular text or raised by a particular historical event, discussions in humanities classes may focus instead on more controlled questions about, for example, fine points of literary structure or the many different historical factors that have shaped a particular event or development. In the process, the big questions that could have been addressed are sometimes obscured.

**Big questions of human meaning and purpose have gone missing not only from many humanities classrooms, but also from much of the scholarly work in the humanities.**

They are left unasked and unanswered. Giving new attention to faith, not as a body of doctrine but rather as a mode of being in the world, is a potential remedy. Faith is a life orientation that focuses specifically on big questions of human meaning, purpose, values, and life choices. Approaching the various topics that are studied in the humanities through the eyes of faith is one important way of keeping the core purposes of the humanities alive and of avoiding their captivity to the endless examination of peripheral minutia. Detailed study is incredibly important, but detailed study can also sometimes be a distraction from basic humanistic questions.

**Christian Virtues and the Humanities**

Big questions of human meaning and purpose have gone missing not only from many humanities classrooms, but also from much of the scholarly work in the humanities. Look at the programs for any of the regional or national academic meetings of the major humanities organizations—the Modern Language Association, the American Academy of Religion, the American Philosophical Society, the American Historical Association—and it is readily apparent that miniature frames of reference and tiny differences of methodology or ideology are characteristic of many sessions. The current system of academic rewards is partly to blame for this tendency, where “least publishable units” ensure the thickest vitae for tenure reviews. Scholarship in the humanities undertaken by Christians may at times focus by necessity on specific and even narrow topics, but Christians will likely find the bigger questions surrounding those topics harder to ignore. Christianity does not give Christian scholars in the humanities an intellectual leg up on anyone else involved in the field, but Christianity may help all scholars in the humanities, not just Christians, remain in touch with the methodological virtues that have traditionally made the humanities so important within higher education and human history generally.

Every academic field of inquiry has its own distinctive methods for ensuring scholarly excellence, and every discipline has its own distinctive academic virtues that must be internalized by its practitioners if they seek to do good work in that area of study. For example, artists and musicians need to develop the virtue of patience, the ability to slowly and methodically master techniques that will eventually allow them to express themselves in ways that would otherwise be impossible. It takes years of working with paint, stone, wood, or fabric to become an accomplished artist, and it takes
years of practice to master any musical instrument. In the sciences, the chief virtue perhaps is accuracy, the ability and willingness to measure the world in a manner that is as precise and replicable as possible. If accuracy seems too mundane to be considered a virtue, consider its opposite. Clearly sloppiness of measurement is the greatest of all scientific sins, and if sloppiness is a sin, then accuracy is almost by default a scientific virtue.

The virtues that inform study in the humanities are varied and complicated because the focus in the humanities is on human existence itself. This means that almost every human virtue has a potential role to play in the humanities. Being intellectually empathic, kind, hospitable, and generous can help scholars in the humanities to engage their subjects in ways that are appropriately respectful. But there are three particular virtues that are undeniably crucial to scholarship in the humanities: honesty, humility, and hope. These three virtues are also essential elements in maturity of faith. There is deep consonance between Christian faith and study in the humanities at its best, because faithful scholarship is built on the virtues of honesty, humility, and hope.

_Honesty:_ Honesty is a virtue in the humanities because the humanities are always to some degree confessional. Scholars in the humanities are not disembodied observers or objective analysts of the people and cultures they study. The humanities involve people studying other people, and the particularities of those on both sides of that equation—both the observers and the observed—need to be taken into account. This requires a kind of self-honesty on the part of humanities scholars that is different from what is required of artists or scientists. The experiences, perspectives, propensities, and preferences of scholars in the humanities affect how they view others and how they interpret the words and actions of other people, so scholars in the humanities are always simultaneously seeking to understand themselves and others, and that requires an honest assessment of one's own analytic lenses and biases.

The work of Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara focuses on honesty and confession in the Christian life, but everything she says applies equally to the humanities. Gebara argues that any decent attempt to understand the lived experience of another human being must necessarily begin with awareness of one's own experience of "burdens, suffering, difficulty, hopes, and joy" (Gebara, 2002: 45). That kind of transparent self-awareness includes acknowledging one's own faults and inner contradictoriness. She says each of us has a "wound deep inside" (91), a distance between who we are and who we want to be, and an internal discord of ideals and impulses, that makes all of us hypocrites to some degree. "We human beings," she explains, "are always this mixture of greatness and pettiness, of good and evil, of hot and cold" (178).

The honesty required in the humanities (and in mature Christian faith) is not, however, merely about our fallibilities. It also involves a candid recounting of privileges that have come to each of us through inheritance (both biological and social), in the form of unearned social capital, and via sheer luck. There is a human tendency to downplay these privileges. People are attracted to the myth that one can always, with enough hard work, pull oneself up by the bootstraps. Gebara reminds us that there is an undeniable "interdependence that exists between and among all things...similar to a spider web, but at the same time more open, more interlinked, everything connected with everything else" (Gebara, 2002: 133). In reality, we all depend on the help and kindness of others, and Christians add we all depend on God's grace. Good work in the humanities (and maturity of faith) requires honesty about these advantages in the same way that it requires honesty about the disadvantages that may place limits on us or others.

_Humility:_ Scholars in the humanities readily admit that a full comprehension of the subjects
they study is forever beyond reach. Christians similarly affirm that everything we know about ourselves and others we can know only in part. Full knowledge of self and of others remains inaccessible in this life. No matter how carefully people are observed and interrogated, the full being of other people remains shrouded in mystery.

The humility required in the humanities is not, however, limited to the realm of perception. It includes acknowledgement of our inability to fully articulate even those limited insights about others that we do possess. T.S. Eliot is the unofficial poet laureate for this kind of humility. In his *Four Quartets*, he repeatedly voices his frustration that words are inadequate to convey what he wants them to say. They "strain, crack, and sometimes break under the burden" (Eliot, 1943: 19). They slip and slide and "will not stay in place" (30). Words "decay with imprecision"; they are "shabby equipment"; every attempt to understand the world is a new "raid on the inarticulate" (31). Eliot concludes that the only life that makes sense is one of unending exploration. The goal is not knowledge, but a deep and ever deepening sense of humility: "The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility" (27).

Eliot’s *Four Quartets* were, of course, not written to explain the humanities. They were written to describe the human condition from a Christian perspective. All human efforts to improve the world, including even the best work in the humanities, are limited by human fallibility. Any success will be merely a small step forward, an adjustment of nuance, a tweaking of interpretation, a little correction here or there. Today’s breakthroughs and triumphs are often largely undone or overthrown by the next generation.

The humanities remain essential because they remind us over and over again of that human reality. However grand and insightful one’s thinking might be, much of it will be either ignored from the start or eventually discarded as misguided and obsolete. But each person’s contribution to the conversation still matters. Humility is the soil in which the persistence and perseverance required for scholarly work in the humanities must germinate and survive. This same kind of patience is also a prerequisite for maturity of faith, for learning how to live faithfully in the gap between the expansiveness of spiritual ideals and the often limited results that our efforts produce.

Hope: A third virtue of scholars in the humanities is hope. This may seem odd at first. The humanities typically are not action-oriented, and their primary goal is not to change the world. Instead, the humanities are descriptive and analytic, trying to make sense of human experience in all of its present and historic diversity. The humanities do not tell people who they ought to be. They reflect on who people are, and a good bit of that story is tragic. Many studies in the humanities seem almost totally devoid of hope, cataloging and criticizing the different ways that individuals and groups have been oppressed, repressed, and depressed. Nonetheless, hope is the hidden fuel that keeps the humanities going, and without hope the humanities would die.

The mid-twentieth century French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel ruminated in his book *Homo Viator* about how to describe the virtue of hope. Like many authors who have written on the topic, Marcel makes a sharp distinction between optimism and hope. Optimism, he says, is the belief that things almost always turn out better than we expect. Based on empirical assessments, the optimist genuinely believes that facts point in the direction of better outcomes rather than worse outcomes. For Marcel, this reliance on facts puts optimism in the same category as despair. If facts irrefutably point in the direction of a negative outcome, the only realistic response is to accept the inevitability of that undesirable outcome. Both optimists and pessimists study the facts and see the logical flow of events. Optimists expect something good and pessimists expect
something bad to happen, but for both the outcome is predetermined.

For Marcel, hope is different. Hope is a matter of faith, not facts. Hope is the refusal to capitulate “before a certain factum laid down by our judgment” (Marcel, 1962: 37). It is a denial of the accumulated wisdom of past experience that says certain outcomes are inevitable, that nothing can be done other than to accept the inevitable. Rather than acquiescing to this locked-in, cause-inevitably-leading-to-effect manner of thinking about the future, Marcel says that hope has the power to open up the future in new ways. Hope “make[s] things fluid” (41), and what seemed inevitable becomes merely one option among many. When facts seem ineluctably to point in a less than optimal direction, hope springs into action. In the language of the New Testament, hope is linked to faith, and the two together provide the “assurance of things unseen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Marcel says that the main work of hope is to change the present so that the future has the possibility of being different. Hope reweaves “experience now in process” (52). To despair in the face of threatening facts actually makes the reality of that negative outcome more likely, while hope creates space for alternatives to emerge. Marcel is not naive. He knows that changing expectations does not automatically alter history. And yet, hope matters, not only for our own existence, but for the existence of humanity as a whole. Genuine hope refuses to accept the fact that the “darkness” which seems inevitably about to fall on some particular group or individual is permanent. Instead, hope declares this to be “only an eclipse” (48). Light will eventually dawn again even if the eclipse is devastating. This, of course, means that true hope exceeds the reach of any single life. Hope knows it may not see what it desires, but hope carries on nonetheless because hope believes it is tapping into “a certain creative power in the world” (52) that ultimately (to borrow the gospel-drenched language of Martin Luther King, Jr.) bends the world toward justice rather than evil and toward life rather than death. Hope expects results in the long-term, but does not necessarily expect to see results in a lifetime.

It is this kind of deep, almost eschatological hope that nurtures and sustains good work in the humanities. The humanities study human existence in all of its breadth and depth. Many of these dimensions of being human are good and ought to be celebrated, but other dimensions of life are painful, oppressive, and evil. The humanities are called to study both with equal honesty. This means there can be no downplaying of negatives, no turning away from life when it becomes too awful to observe, no sugarcoating of the horrors that befall some individuals and groups, and no masking of despair with cheap optimism or false hope. And yet, the motivation for remembering,

**Without hope, the humanities can easily become nothing more than intelligent voyeurism.**

recovering, and examining these horrible experiences of life is itself positive. The goal almost always, and even if unacknowledged, is to help nudge the world in a direction that will make it less likely that these kinds of terrible things will repeat themselves.

The humanities do not engage in the disinterested study of human existence. To the contrary, the humanities seek to encourage and sustain human flourishing in all of its diversity. In this task, the virtues of honesty and humility may be necessary, but it is the virtue of hope that gets humanities scholars out of bed in the morning and that sustains them in their work. Without hope, the humanities can easily become nothing more than intelligent voyeurism. Informed by hope, however, scholars in the humanities have the power little by little, one person at a time, to remake the world.

And, of course, the same virtues apply to Christian life. Christian faith demands honesty in evaluating personal strengths and weaknesses (and the strengths and weaknesses of others), and it requires humility about what Christians claim to know. Apart from authentic hope, Christianity can easily become nothing more than escapism that has little if anything good to say about the world as it presently exists. When Christians lose
touch with honesty, humility, and hope, history has shown that Christianity can easily become inauthentic, oppressive, and even evil.

By embracing the virtues of honesty, humility, and hope and displaying these virtues in their scholarship and teaching, Christians in the humanities—and Christian scholars outside the humanities who take time to reflect on the human meanings and implications of the subjects they study—provide a great service to their students, their institutions, and the world in general. The service they provide is not immediately translatable into post-graduation employment, and it is not designed to protect students from moral, religious, or intellectual challenges. Instead, engagement with the humanities is an invitation to become more fully human, and becoming more fully human is in turn a prerequisite for becoming more deeply Christian. Scholars of faith who embrace the humanities with honesty, humility, and hope are accordingly doing two things at once: They are deepening their own faith (and the faith of the students they teach), and coincidentally they just might be saving the humanities for generations to come.

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Works Cited


VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY SEeks to Fill ITS JOHN R. ECKRICH Chair IN RELIGION AND THE HEALING ARTS

The purpose of this endowed chair is to investigate and reflect upon the message of the Lutheran Confessions as they relate to religion and the healing arts. As complex social issues emerge from scientific advances, this chair will examine the relationship between faith and healing with appropriate constituencies. The chair will bring together University resources in health care, biological sciences, political science, philosophy, ethics, law, theology, and economics systematically.

Letters of application, CV, and three letters of recommendation can be submitted electronically at apply.interfolio.com/44588. Questions may be sent directly to George C. Heider, Ph.D., professor of theology and chair of the search committee, at eckrich@valpo.edu. Review of applications will begin on December 15, 2017, and will continue until the position is filled. More information is at https://www.valpo.edu/provost/files/2017/09/Eckrich-Chair.pdf
MID-NOVEMBER
for Marjorie Stelmach

*Time wears us down and away.* —Charles Wright, “Buffalo Yoga”

We’re walking on the back road, over the trestle, past the kudzu-covered trees, where, around the bend, the mixed hardwoods are blazing, a gaudy bonfire, and the long muscled Blue Ridge stretches out beyond. This is a pause in the year’s frantic spinning, before the glitter and fizz of the holidays. We’re talking about time, how rapidly it’s pulling away from us, slippery as a silver fish. How we want to slow things down, to press the pause button here. We know that unbearable losses are waiting up ahead, and that practicing anticipatory grief stays nothing. The sky is every shade of gray: cinder, charcoal, ash. A blue jay squawks a rosary of repentance. Mother of Sorrows, Mother of Woe, have mercy on our hearts, which have been cracked, mended, and cracked again. Our lives are little matches: a brief strike, a flare, and then they’re gone, small strips of cardboard, gritty bits of sulfur, so much litter on the ground.

Barbara Crooker
The Polyvalent Potentiality of Vocation in Net-Zero Construction

Stewart Herman

As a youngster, I waited impatiently—and in vain—for my pastor to preach about the material world, the world I inhabited. He addressed the domain of the spirit, while I was fascinated by cars and model airplanes. I wanted to build, to make something. At about that time, H. Richard Niebuhr popularized (for theologians) the term “man the maker,” identifying the urge to create as a powerful human drive. I recall during my early adolescence standing at the crude workbench in our basement, racking my brain for an idea of something to build, and frustrated by my lack of skill. Perhaps Jesus with his years as a “tekton” could have imparted a suggestion, but not likely. The Jesus I heard about was far too busy with the more spiritual callings of healing and preaching—activities superior and irrelevant to my fascination with the material world.

For almost forty years, I honored the hierarchy of spirit over matter by pursuing my chosen vocation of learning, writing, and teaching in graduate school and at a small liberal-arts college. I resisted the siren call of the material world of construction, permitting myself only occasional trips to the hardware store for house repairs. My hands were far busier processing words than fabricating things, even though my ears paid as much attention to the creakings of our old house as my mind paid to Parker Palmer. However, with retirement and an impending move from Fargo, North Dakota, to the Twin Cities, my half-hearted suspension came to an end. My wife and I needed to arrange a nest for this new phase. We contracted with an architect and a builder for the “total gut rehab” of a very ordinary 1907 house in Minneapolis, and that plunged us into the very material world of renovation.

This immersion lasted more than two years and produced a delightfully livable house. All along, I wondered whether this was simply a natural nest-building impulse, or if it could be described in terms of vocation. Vocation, in Frederick Buechner’s famous epigram, is “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” We certainly had first base covered. My singular and indeed obsessive passion was to produce a living space that generated more energy than it used (“net zero”) and to bask in the glory of being among the first in the nation to do so with a 100-year-old house—in the chilly upper Midwest, no less. My wife, Linda, for her part, wanted a home that would be traditionally attractive and comfortable rather than an angular, modernist box requiring environmental asceticism of its inhabitants. He wanted a modern kitchen and hot water, instantly!

Where in these complementary passions was evidence of “the world’s deep hunger” being alleviated? Where was the good of the “neighbor,” a value so cherished in Lutheran social teaching? After all, building one’s own house is inexpugnably self-centered. No one else but we were going to live in our new old house—in strong contrast to houses built for others via the organized altruism of Habitat for Humanity. Still, Linda and I felt a modest calling. We had a mission and a message for the wider world. As (retired) teachers, we wanted to demonstrate that an ordinary old house on an ordinary, small, urban lot could be purified of fossil fuel and accommodate all the technology
needed to achieve net zero. More ambitiously, we wanted the house to demonstrate to skeptics that a comfortable lifestyle and environmental sustainability need not clash, and that carbon emissions could be lowered drastically without any sacrifice in comfort or convenience. In other words, we thought we weren’t just building for ourselves.

Even with this higher aim, the project raised troubling questions about human vocation in the Anthropocene. To be sure, the house is making a measurable if infinitesimal contribution to slowing climate change. Finished a year ago, its thick insulation, solar electricity, and geothermal heat has already offset more than twelve tons of carbon, all while generating about 20 percent more energy than we use. We have the daily, delicious experience of feeling that we are part of the solution rather than part of the problem. However, the “problem” doesn’t go away that easily. The renovation incurred an environmental debt that will take years to pay off. I burned through 700 gallons of gasoline during my trips from Fargo to monitor the project’s progress. A long parade of subcontractors used uncounted gallons more in long commutes in their large pickups. Fossil fuel was required to fabricate the materials we used as well as the process of building. At one point, I gleefully cut the line to the gas company, but not before burning a winter’s worth of gas to heat the gutted shell during reconstruction.

Then there was waste. Old plaster came out before new materials went in—enough rubble, scraps, and wrapping to fill a dozen large dumpsters. Moreover, not all the materials we used were local: insulation came from Texas; bluestone from Pennsylvania; tile from Italy. Even the solar collectors arrived with an environmental deficit. They will have to generate three or more years of electricity simply to pay off the energy debt incurred in their manufacture. Just as there is no such thing as a free lunch, vocation reset in an ecological key uses no 100 percent squeaky-clean action.

Second, in this era of widening inequality, I was chagrinned to discover that our experiment in renovation is not nearly as replicable as we had hoped. Older houses dominate American cities; there are far more than could ever be replaced, so renovation should be the first priority. We wanted to show how older houses could be reborn from leaky caterpillars to net-zero butterflies. To this end, we loaded our project with every new technology our architect could find: a porch finish
uncompromising quality, which liberated our workers and subcontractors to meet the highest standards of their trades. Our builder had to appraise the characters of those who worked on the house. Would they adhere to the standards of their craft? They were creating an artifact from raw materials rather than assembling prefabricated pieces. They had to be able and willing to deal with uneven subfloors and crooked walls. Some proved incapable or unwilling, and had to be let go. Most did beautiful work and deserved recognition and gratitude. Once the renovation was far enough along that we had moved in, Linda celebrated this community in the daily brewing of coffee and baking of treats. These contributors left their signatures in materials that I hope will endure through the house's second century.

I have had to look elsewhere to see my constructive urge as a vocation. Fortunately, some signals were revealed as the project went along. The young boy who ached for something to build got his wish, but that wish was transformed in the process of its fulfilment. Linda had forbidden me to renovate the house myself—my original plan—so we hired the architect, engineer, and general contractor, who had his own staff of carpenters and a stream of subcontractors to handle the ductwork, wiring, plastering, tiling, flooring, cabinetry, insulating, siding, painting, and other specialties needed to transform our house.

To my surprise and eventual delight, the necessity of involving so many people attached other social goods besides net-zero energy to the project. Our house became a node around which a distinct—if temporary—community took shape: a community centered on quality craftsmanship. Our architect and general contractor, excited by the ambitious aim of the project, came to expect that hardened the wood and will never blister or peel; a ventilation system that captures heat from outgoing air as it is replaced with incoming, fresh air; insulation that reduced the global warming impact of its manufacture by a thousand times and resulted in charming, wide windowsills; earth surgery that insulated the basement without disturbing the flowerbeds; interior wallboard that promised to ‘eat’ formaldehyde for ten years...the list goes on. Still, our pedagogical purpose eroded as the constantly rising costs of the renovation put our project beyond the financial reach of most people. We modeled a transformative path forward, but it is not clear that others might do more than emulate individual parts of what we accomplished. Indeed, our builder concluded that the project would have cost less had we simply torn down the 1907 house and built from scratch.
on and what the standards of quality were. Most piquant was the vocabulary of fine carpentry, whose quaint terms surely must have been borrowed from some nineteenth-century sermon. As Jesus the tekton might have said: if a window casing stands too "proud," overshooting the expected "reveal," it would be better for it to "die into" its neighbor.

I was fortunate that the architect and builder welcomed my active involvement, for it contributed to the benign circle of rising expectations regarding the detail and quality of work. My role—and obligation—was to encourage and reinforce the norms already in place. As Dorothy Sayers wrote in her 1942 essay, "Why Work?: "God is not served by technical incompetence.... The business of the worker is to serve the work." And I had to measure up to the expectations I placed on everyone else. Fortunately, my labor was relatively unskilled: recycling the birch woodwork of the house and salvaging maple flooring from three houses being demolished. This work involved cleaning, stripping, and refinishing. I also chased down door and cabinet hardware and took responsibility for tasks not recognized in the initial contract. Indeed, I developed a keen appreciation for the complexities of scheduling and ended up handling it when our affable, unhurried general contractor was distracted by other projects. For me, the social good of a community centered on craftsmanship became a personal good. There were small openings for risky agape here and there, but mainly my task was to pitch in and keep the process going.

A grittier social good became evident early in the process. It became overwhelmingly clear that no matter how fascinating I found the craftwork, my primary responsibility was to cut checks. I was proud that three-quarters of the project cost went to wages and salaries rather than materials, proving Aristotle wrong on the lifelessness of mere money. Our temporary community had to be sustained, and that required the reliable disbursal of contracted remuneration. I was tempted to joke about developing carpal-tunnel syndrome from writing so many checks, but did not allow myself a quip of the lip. Paying the suppliers and subcontractors was no laughing matter. One day the master carpenter, flush with his wages, pulled up on a massive new fossil-fueled motorcycle. Again, I bit my lip and simply savored the irony.

As I signed off on expenditures month after month, I began to wonder whether the act of spending money itself might be a calling, particularly in contrast to saving and hoarding. I recalled Clement of Alexandria's second-century claim that the possession of wealth itself is less of a threat to salvation than the disposition its possession engenders. My own disposition changed. I became comfortable with using money to leverage action. Of course, a modern-day Clement might still see a danger. Using money as power invites neglect or abuse of those who depend upon being paid. (Perhaps nothing bothered me more about Donald Trump during his 2016 campaign than the fact that he bankrupted his ventures to stiff his contractors and suppliers.) Yet I felt a moral duty to ensure that subcontractors performed what was asked of them. I gingerly rode herd on the exchange of labor for pay that had been agreed to. This still-uncomfortable exercise of power gave me a fresh appreciation for justice in its commutative rather than distributive dimension.

Now that the house is finished, our economic leverage is spent, and Linda and I are in debt, financial as well as environmental. A large mortgage insures our residence in the house until we actually own it or our natural lives come to an end—whichever comes first. Our architect, builder, and subcontractors all have gone on to other jobs; our evanescent community has evaporated, leaving what we hope are pleasurable memories for its members.

I learned that the process as well as the goal rendered by net-zero construction counts toward vocation.
For Martin Luther, vocation reliably, if distantly, echoes crucifixion, thanks to what he experienced *coram hominibus* as the inveterate cussedness and ingratitude of human creatures. While our adventure in renovation was generally happy, there were moments of brokenness. Our noisy work and one overly zealous, missionizing worker alienated our next-door, non-Christian neighbors, and the damage ricocheted for months through the project, eventually landing me in civil court on a trumped-up and quickly dismissed charge. This misunderstanding shredded what was left of my innocent happiness at modeling radical carbon reduction, and I was reminded that the crooked timber of humanity will not be straightened by simply pulling fossil fuels out of the equation of life. The material may not yield to the spiritual, but neither can it survive without some animating force of regeneration and reconciliation.

Overall, the experience has moved me toward seeing vocation as a shape-shifting adaptation to circumstances. My inborn urge to build found an outlet after decades of inaction, but not as directly as Niebuhr’s man the maker striving toward a single, overriding telos. Rather, the project moved in the direction of what might be called polyvalent potentiality—or polyphonic, to borrow Niebuhr’s more comprehensive image of humans as responders. Linda helped me focus on a wider set of criteria than mere carbon reduction. The scope of the project required dozens of contributors, calling me to renewed learning and enriching the social good. The finance aspect grounded me in the exigent imperatives of exchange, tracking and influencing the expectations of the contracting parties. Vocation may be less a single river than a branching and braiding of tributary streams, with no obvious terminus.

With the renovation now complete, Linda and I are back to being regular homeowners. My childhood hunger to build has been sated, at least for the time being. Indeed, it is time for me as an aging baby boomer to think of when I no longer will be able to shape the material contours of my life. (Perhaps H. Richard Niebuhr might have added a fourth type—retiree—to his famous trio of maker, citizen, and responder.) The house is now a material artifact that gives considerable shape to our lives. It has been fitted with the technologies that will facilitate “aging in place.” The warm woodworking and comfortable amenities embody beauty. It offsets carbon at the rate of twelve tons per year, and we hope to continue living here until both the environmental and financial costs have been paid off. Until then, we remain in debt to the future. Yet for those who come after, its sturdy structure should provide comfortable shelter for a second century. Good construction creates beauty and hope, and perhaps that provides a sufficient as well as satisfying frame for a useful calling.

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Four Things an Alien Civilization Would Learn about the West If All They Watched Was HBO’s *Westworld*

Christina Bieber Lake

The original film *Westworld* is a campy delight. Produced in 1973, it can’t help its Cheez-Whiz feel. But the story, written by Michael Crichton, has a gold-mine of a premise that was just begging for an upgrade. It was no surprise that Jonathan Nolan teamed up with HBO to produce a new series by the same name. And it is fun, fun, fun.

In both versions, “Westworld” is an Old West theme park for wealthy adults. For $40,000 a day, guests arrive to luxurious accommodations, put on cowboy attire, and enter an enormous outdoor arena full of androids (indistinguishable from humans) who have been programmed to respond to the guests as they might in a game. There is a saloon with prostitutes, local family ranches, bandits on the loose, and a seemingly endless frontier to explore. Guests are enticed by these androids—called hosts—to enter into a number of infinitely flexible storylines. They can go on a search for lost treasure. They can ride with the sheriff to hunt for an outlaw. Or they can just stay in town and see what happens. In every case, the guests can abuse the hosts at will without concern about being harmed in return. Hosts can be killed, guests cannot. At the end of the day the dead or damaged hosts are gathered up by a discreet clean-up squad, transported underground, and repaired, reprogrammed, and returned to service.

This is domestic sci-fi at its best. But as a fan of both the movie and the series, I couldn’t help but wonder: what would an alien civilization think about the West if all they saw was HBO’s *Westworld*? Here are my thoughts.

1. *We like having our basest desires pandered to.*

   This is both a primary theme of *Westworld* and a deliberately ironic part of its appeal. HBO is known for pushing the boundaries when it comes to sex and violence, so the network is a fitting venue for a show that appeals to these impulses. Viewers are turned into voyeurs as guests fulfill their wildest fantasies: a night of drinking and whoring; a violent bar fight with quick draw action; a heroic rescue of the girl from savages.

   HBO knows its audience. In the first episode alone there are three bared-breast scenes. The characters often make remarks about how all the guests want to do is shoot and/or screw the hosts. For creator Dr. Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins), gratifying these impulses is just fine. He unapologetically works to make the hosts seem more realistic so the guests enjoy the illusion even more. And so it might be for us, too, as we look on. We are implicated.

   But *Westworld* is a smart twenty-first century production, not a vulgar peep show. And so our aliens would quickly learn that we are also nervous about these cheaply-won thrills. While there may be nothing more American than the desire to enjoy the pleasures of sex and violence without taking any responsibility for our actions, there is still some leftover Calvinism in us somewhere.
Deep down we know that habitually seeing other beings as existing solely for our amusement isn’t good for our souls. In the pilot, an older host, playing the role of Peter Abernathy (Louis Herthum), starts to glitch. Although he was supposed to have been wiped clean of previous programming, he reverts to some lines from the professor he had played in a prior storyline. Just before he is decommissioned and removed from the park he whispers into the ear of his “daughter”: “These violent delights have violent ends.” His daughter Delores (Evan Rachel Wood) is Westworld’s host protagonist and the first android who begins to gain self-consciousness. She doesn’t know what these words mean, but Nolan knows we know—or at least that we can Google with the best of them. They are from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and are spoken by Friar Lawrence right after Romeo basically tells him that “I don’t care what happens to me as long as I get Juliet”:

*These violent delights have violent ends And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,*  
*Which, as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey*  
*Is loathsome in his own deliciousness And in the taste confounds the appetite.*

Therefore love moderately. Long love doth so.  
Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.

At the very least, Friar Lawrence is pleading for Romeo to be moderate, patient, and aware of the consequences of his actions. If you let your desires burn hot and fast they will burn you up with them. Abernathy is predicting the ultimate doom of the theme park, of course, but he is also issuing a warning against the game itself, its power to spiritually deform the guests. Just as honey that is too sweet “confounds the appetite,” so the cheap delights of Westworld will make it less possible to live well in the real world. As if to prove this point, Abernathy himself goes nuts with destructive impulses in part because he had for many years inhabited the role of professor-leader of a desert cult that had become cannibalistic (a clear nod to Cormac McCarthy’s infamous Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*). If you lived out this role again and again and again, killing (nearly real) people, when would you reach the point of no return?

These violent delights have violent ends because it’s all fun and games until someone gets an eye poked out. It turns out there are a lot of ways to get your eye poked out in *Westworld*—and the supposedly insentient hosts are doing the
poking. We all know what happened to the star-crossed lovers of Shakespeare's play. Stay tuned, alien watchers.

2. We have become completely posthuman.

In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles explains that we became posthuman the moment we accepted the Turing test as the measure of sentience. The test is basically as follows: hidden from view, a machine and a human communicate with a human questioner. If the human questioner cannot tell the difference, the machine has achieved a measure of artificial intelligence. *Westworld* echoes this test right from the start. In the pilot's opening scene, a programmer asks Dolores: “have you ever questioned the nature of your reality?” Hayles argues that our acceptance of this test means that we now define sentient life in terms of information patterns and data—not things like embodied experience.

This question of artificial intelligence and the measure of sentience is a core question in the HBO remake, and not the peripheral one it was in the 1973 version. The central character known only as the Man in Black (Ed Harris) becomes obsessed with figuring out the deeper levels of the game. Those deeper levels are signified by a maze, and the maze is meant to say something profound about the nature of consciousness itself (fully explored in “The Bicameral Mind,” the final episode of season one). It's not spoiling much to reveal that Arnold, one of the original founders of the park, wanted the machines to gain consciousness and become independent and free, and ultimately to prevent the park from opening. He thought consciousness was a pyramid involving steps upward to the top. But he was wrong, he tells Dolores, because “consciousness isn’t a journey upward but a journey inward. Not a pyramid but a maze. Every choice could bring you closer to the center or send you spiraling to the edges, to madness. Do you understand what the center represents? Whose voice I've been wanting to you to hear?” The voice Arnold wants Dolores to hear is her own voice. This would mean she is alive. At this point I'll let you decide whether what is said is actually profound or just sounds that way. (The Nolan brothers sometimes have this problem).

Regardless, the show's premise requires that we see life as posthuman even as it questions the larger moral ramifications of this move. Ford’s speeches show him to be completely unbothered by a thoroughly posthuman world. “We've managed to slip evolution's leash,” he says, seemingly delighted to become the next step in humanity’s control over the evolutionary process. He could be an android himself, of course, which would make him only the latest iteration of the productive and revelatory confusion between Dr. Frankenstein and his monster. When a younger guest, William, arrives and meets his first host (the beautiful flight-attendant type reminiscent of those in the original film), she urges him to ask what she knows he is wondering. So he asks, “Are you real?” And she responds: “Well, if you can't tell, does it matter?”

The Nolan brothers have gone down the “what does it mean to be human” path many times before (*Memento, Interstellar, Inception*), and *Westworld* reveals why the question is increasingly relevant. What does accepting the terms of the Turing test to define life say about us? Do we think that it is just fine to see our lives technologically, as an effort to perfect our human existence and thereby become gods? Furthermore, if we accept that there is no important difference between human beings and AI, how will that impact how we take ethical responsibility for others? I love how the show is working out this question through the Ed Harris character. More on him below.

3. We fear losing control of technology.

At the beginning of the 1973 film, as guests are ushered into the park, a Siri-like voice assures them that “nothing can go wrong.” This means, of course, that everything will go wrong. Crichton's original *Westworld* was defined by the well-traveled horror motif of machines going haywire. At least since Shelley's *Frankenstein*, when men become like gods their creations are going to come for them. Yul Brynner, the steely-eyed robot gunslinger of this *Westworld*, is a clear model for Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator. (Fascinatingly, Warner Brothers cast Schwarzenegger for a remake of *Westworld* Michaelmas 2017 29
in 2002, but he left the project to be governor of California and the film was never made).

HBO’s *Westworld* clearly picked up on this machines-gone-crazy motif in the pilot. When Abernathy glitches, he delivers a chilling speech to Ford, full of literary references.

Ford: What is your itinerary?
Abernathy: To meet my maker.
Ford: And what do you want to say to your maker?
Abernathy: By my most mechanical and dirty hand I shall have such revenges on you both. I will do such things...what they are yet I know not, but they shall be the terrors of the earth.

In true postmodern style, Abernathy splices together quotes from two different Shakespeare plays: *Henry IV* and *King Lear*. The effect is chilling. But after this first episode, the plot widens to indicate that this *Westworld* is going to be more about terror than it is about horror. The difference between terror and horror is subtle but important. Horror is turning around to face Yul Brynner as gunslinger burned to a crisp, his hand still reaching out to grab you. Terror is the slower build-up of more existential types of fear: what is it that we have done in this park? Are these machines alive?

**What I love about Westworld is what I love about everything that the Nolan brothers have worked on: it’s all about the power and importance of story.**

If they are, what does it mean to be alive? Am I one of Ford’s machines? How would I know it if I were?

Losing control of our machines has become such an important theme of our twenty-first century fiction precisely because it represents the inverse of the goal of technology, which is to gain maximum control over our environment. If the point of technology is to limit contingency, when contingency bites back, it means double the hurt.

4. **We are worried that we might be here by accident.**

What I love about *Westworld* is what I love about everything that the Nolan brothers have worked on: it’s all about the power and importance of story. For story itself is a key access point to the question we all face: do our lives have greater meaning provided by a creator, or are we just the result of an evolutionary accident?

The series keeps this question in view by the use of its introductory sequence. With the haunting theme music playing, we watch as a 3D-printer spins together sinews of a moving horse and its western rider, who is half flesh and half skeleton. Then we cut to two skeleton hands playing the theme music on the piano, only to have those hands lift off the keyboard with the keys still moving. Player pianos (pre-programmed to play music from perforated sheets) became increasingly popular at the end of the nineteenth century. In *Westworld* the image works constantly to foreground the question: are we making our own music, or are we pre-determined by genetic code? Are we really writing our own stories, or do we just think that we are? This question has become a twenty-first century staple in disciplines from neuroscience to philosophy to psychology. An increasing number of scientists and science popularizers, like Antonio Damasio and Daniel Dennett, are telling us that we aren’t writing our own stories because free will is an illusion. The power of *Westworld* derives from ethical urgency of precisely that question.

This is where the story of the Man in Black, the guest protagonist, comes back in. The Ed Harris character has been visiting the park for thirty years. He saved the company from bankruptcy. He has become increasingly obsessed with figuring out the game because he believes that it, unlike real life, has an end, a purpose. As he says to one of the hosts: “You know why this place beats the real world? The real world is just chaos. An accident. But in here every detail adds up to something.” The Man in Black wants a life of purpose. He wants his choices to mean something to
someone, to work toward some meaningful end. What he doesn't fully understand is that fiction is the only place where "every detail adds up to something"—which is precisely why we turn to it. When Ford intones that "the guests don't come looking for who they are; they already know who they are. They're here because they want of a glimpse of what they could be," he is giving one of the main reasons why we read fiction. We read for the possibility of and hope for a redemptive shape to our lives. Not all fictions are equal to the task, however, and ritual exposure to some can be toxic. We need to be discerning readers. At their worst, novels are an empty escape into a fantasy world. But at their best, novels give us a picture of the risks and rewards of the everyday choices we make that are turning us into the people we are. We do well to heed their warnings.

But this theme park is not a good novel, and the Man in Black is not a discerning reader. By the end of season one he is clearly degenerating. Addicted to the choose-your-own-adventure escape the park provides, he has grown increasingly cynical, callous to others, and closed off to love. Ritual exposure to this game has damaged him. It has failed him as badly as any addiction to porno-violence can. It has not provided him with salutary ways to think about his own life. It has not provided him with a storyline he can actually enter, with virtues he can emulate. Instead, it has taught him to try to beat an ultimately meaningless game by destroying everything in his path. There is evidence at the end of season one that his regular visits to Westworld contributed to his marital troubles at home, and the ultimate suicide of his wife. These violent delights have violent ends. Stay tuned—season two is going to be all about violent ends.

After learning these four things about us from Westworld, an alien civilization might acquire a still more troubling bit of insight. Even two hundred years after Mary Shelley warned us about it, arrogant, spiritually-malformed white guys (or androids made in the image of the same?) are still running the show here on planet Earth. In episode eight, Dr. Ford quotes Frankenstein in a way that illustrates that he missed the point of the novel—unless he meant to quote it ironically, which remains to be seen. Having just killed off one of the human employees to cover up his larger actions, he intones: "One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire." If I were an alien, that might give me cause to give planet Earth a skip, at least for now. ¶

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VIA NEGATIVA

She opens a book
& with her tongue
makes a kind of repetitive
L sound, though this is
only partly true, since
her sounds are still free
& wild, unscaffolded
by alphabets. It is like
L, but not. What does
a dog say? I ask her,
though at the same time
I wonder who decided
babies should learn
animal sounds
right away, before even
belp or yes. She replies
with something like
thwack. She points out
the window & blurts
a sound that starts
with b & somehow rhymes
with push & mirage.
Her babbles are little mirages of words:
they shimmer with meaning & substance
but disappear into the ether
between her mouth & my ear. Her mirage language will one day very soon be lost, word for word replaced with my imperial coaxing: *dog, milk, book.*

Some say silence is the truest form of prayer, but I think it is this: she speaks and does not mean to mean. She knows her voice will turn my face to her.

Chelsea Wagenaar
A Decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind

Peter Meilaender

It is something of a truism that travel teaches one as much about one's own country as it does about foreign lands. This was driven home to me when I spent the first several months of this year teaching in London, followed by a few weeks visiting relatives in Germany. I left the United States with my family in early January, and our students followed shortly thereafter, arriving in the U.K. on Friday, January 20—as it happened, the day of Donald Trump's inauguration.

It did not take long for us to discover that Trump's election was of as much interest abroad as at home. On Saturday, their first full day in the country, a colleague and I planned to take the students on a walk through central London, helping them orient themselves and see something of the city where they would spend the next semester. But lo and behold, it turned out that a protest march was scheduled to take place—the "Women's March on London," expressing opposition to Trump's presidency—with almost 100,000 people converging on Trafalgar Square at precisely the time we intended to finish up there with our students. We modified the time and route of our walk to avoid the protesters. But it was a surprising beginning to our stay in Britain.

I soon learned, however, not to be surprised, because wherever I went, Trump was on people's minds. The students told me that when they went through immigration control at Heathrow, the officer jokingly asked them, "So, are you fleeing the country?" As soon as anyone discovered I was an American, the first question was always about Trump. At the small grocer just down the street, a pair of friendly Syrian refugees wondered, only half in jest, whether we would want to return home. The other store where we often shopped was also run by immigrants, but the owner—from Uganda by way of India—was more inclined to withhold judgment. Trump might turn out to be okay, he told me; you never knew, perhaps he would turn out to be a good leader.

A few days after we arrived in Germany, I was invited, along with my teenage son, to join my father-in-law and half a dozen friends for dinner. Mostly retired, these men had all been professionally successful, and many of them were politically active. To be invited to their monthly dinner was an honor I had never before received; clearly, the opportunity to talk with an American political scientist in the wake of Trump's election was a temptation too strong for them to resist. For about forty-five minutes they interrogated me in rapid-fire fashion. I answered one question after another about how Trump had been elected, whether he could be successful, what his foreign policy would be, whether he might be impeached. The conversation was friendly but also serious and intense. Their skepticism was palpable. At one point, the fellow who seemed most hostile to Trump, and who had appeared to be biting his tongue during much of the conversation, finally cut loose with his true opinion: "The man is just so utterly primitive!" he exclaimed.

Some of this, I must admit, I found merely annoying or self-righteous (or both). The march on London, for example, struck me as rather silly. When we arrived there, after all, the United Kingdom was itself coming to grips with the consequences of the Brexit vote to leave the European Union. Traffic in London is impossible. The British newspapers seemed to carry daily stories about the horrors of the country's health care system. As if Londoners had so few problems of their own that they needed to protest Americans' choice of a president!

Nevertheless, I found myself thinking while I traveled, and also in the months since return-
ing home, that a dismissive reaction of this sort is too hasty. The march may have been foolish, but surely the opinions of other people, in particular when the opinions are widely shared, ought to carry some weight in our thinking? When they sought independence from Great Britain, the American Founders famously asserted the importance of international opinion: “When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.” To be sure, the authors of that sentence were seeking support for a revolution, and they therefore had ample motive to explain themselves to others. Still, they chose words claiming that humankind is divided into distinct peoples, all of whom by nature possess equal status. Just as citizens possess equal standing before the law, peoples possess equal standing before the court of international public opinion. Respect of some sort is presumably due to them and their deeply held convictions. In the wake of Trump’s election and the reactions I encountered to it in other countries, therefore, I have been wondering just what it means to pay “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.”

At a minimum, I suppose, it means that we should take those opinions seriously. By taking them seriously, I mean that these opinions are a factor to be considered as we form our own judgments. They should carry some weight in our own deliberations. This is not to say merely that prudence dictates that we pay attention to others’ opinions. It is true, of course, that strategic considerations might often induce us to show respect for others’ views, to assure them that we value their opinions, and to avoid even the rhetorical appear-
ance of condescension or disdain. But we can go beyond this strategic perspective. That numerous other people—especially when they are intelligent, or like-minded, or sympathetic—hold a certain belief supplies at least a *prima facie* reason why we might adopt that belief ourselves. Their opinions are among the evidence we must consider in forming our own.

That we recognize the truth of this is evident in our behavior. People routinely seek out friends, family members, clergy, mentors, confidantes of all sorts, in making important and difficult decisions. This is not simply a prudential or strategic move to assure those people that we respect their opinions. Rather, we think that others who know us well, share our values, and have our interests at heart may see things that we miss and thus help us make wiser decisions.

The point is not that majorities, merely because they are numerous, are always right. This is obviously not the case. In the field of education, for example, I am confident that much of what these days passes for received wisdom—that children require extensive exposure to computers at an ever younger age, that humanistic learning is increasingly irrelevant in the global economy, that quantitative "assessment" of teaching improves student learning—is mistaken. The value of others' opinions for us derives less from the number of people holding those opinions than from other characteristics I smuggled into the preceding paragraphs. When those whose opinions we confront are not only numerous but also intelligent, like-minded, and sympathetic, when they know us well, share our values, and have our interests at heart, then their disagreement with us becomes a matter of consequence. Then "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" means not merely rhetorical expressions of esteem, or prudential regard for the sensitivities of those whose support we seek, but a willingness to ask whether their disagreement with us might itself supply a good reason for changing our own mind.

If we ask why we should grant this weight to the opinions of others, the answer, I think, is that doing so acts as a kind of guard against hubris, a check on excessive confidence in our own judgment. Many of us, for example, thinking back to our high school days, will remember a friend who fell hard for a particular romantic interest despite all the warnings of friends and family that this other person was "not right." Love is of course blind, but the same hubris takes many forms. At the college where I teach, the question occasionally arises of whether or to what extent we should be concerned with "excellence." A surprising (to me) number of colleagues are leery of such a concern, claiming that it requires us to become preoccupied with our reputation. Christians, they say, should not seek reputation, but rather should aim simply to do their work faithfully and well. The latter is surely true, but if we are to do our work well, one might suppose that we should even try to do it excellently! And how are we to know that we are doing it excellently if we pay no heed to our reputation—that is to say, to others' opinion of our performance? Here we see hubris, an unwillingness to submit our work to the judgment of others who know the craft, posing as humility. "A decent respect for the opinions of mankind" would counsel instead showing concern for their opinions of us and our work.

Edmund Burke, in a passage near the end of his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, expressed very nicely this idea that we should take others' opinions seriously—intelligent and informed opinions, at any rate. "All the great critics," he says, have taught us "one essential rule."

It is this, That if ever we should find ourselves disposed not to admire those writers or artists, Livy and Virgil for
instance, Raphael or Michael Angelo, whom all the learned had admired, not to follow our own fancies, but to study them until we know how and what we ought to admire; and if we cannot arrive at this combination of admiration with knowledge, rather to believe that we are dull, than that the rest of the world has been imposed on.

It is a sentence I like to read to my students.

This explains, I think, why we ought to pay a decent respect to the opinions of mankind, and what it might mean to do so. Nevertheless, we must also recognize the limits to this argument. For while we should give real weight to the opinions of others, so that they influence the judgments we reach, those opinions do not necessarily—Burke’s counsel “rather to believe that we are dull” notwithstanding—provide sufficient reason to change our mind about specific actions or policies when (a) we are convinced of their rightness after careful consideration, or (b) when those who disagree with us lack some of the important relevant qualities, such as like-mindedness, sympathy, or a concern for our well-being. This latter point in particular is helpful in understanding the sharp differences of perspective over President Trump. Many Trump supporters believe precisely that European countries have lost the qualities that would merit respect—that they are no longer truly committed to freedom but instead have succumbed to a creeping statism, that they are unwilling to defend themselves against threats such as Islamic terrorism, that their demographic collapse reflects a loss of cultural and religious confidence. To paraphrase a character from Jane Austen’s Persuasion, the Trumpist is likely to feel that the praise of Europeans is censure, while their censure is praise. Despite the undeniable kernel of truth in these accusations against Europe, they do not, in my view, negate the potential value for us of European public opinion. It remains the case, after all, that Europe shares with the United States the heritage of Western civilization, the cultural amalgamation of Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem. The bonds that unite us remain deep and wide, and it is unclear how we could even imagine “the West” without Europe. Still, acknowledging this critique of Europe, whatever its limitations, helps us see why some disagreements about Trump are likely to remain stubbornly persistent. Our judgment of those holding an opinion inevitably will, and should, affect the weight we are willing to grant it.

Similarly, we cannot and should not deny the force of point (a) above: if we have thought about an issue carefully, giving due weight to the differing views of others, and have reached a decision on a specific course of action, then presumably we ought to follow our best judgment rather than abdicate responsibility for our choices by shifting the burden of decision onto others. If a president, for example—to remain close to the case at hand—decides, after appropriate deliberation, that a treaty will not achieve its goals and is harmful to American interests, and that the matter is too important to sacrifice those interests merely in order to assuage the concerns of allies, then he presumably ought to withdraw from the treaty. Whether this describes President Trump’s thought process in deciding to withdraw from the Paris climate accord, I have no idea. But the point stands. Just as we cannot avoid our own judgments about those who disagree with us and the value of their opinions, we also cannot avoid ultimate responsibility for our choices, especially when the lives, liberties, or sacred honor of others may be at stake. We should indeed seek to admire what all the learned have admired, but in the realm of political action there is ultimately no avoiding the need for individual judgment.

Which may be a good reason to end by remembering the exhortation of 1 Timothy 2: “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

Peter Meilaender is professor of political science at Houghton College.
"All We Did Was Survive": Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk*

Charles Andrews

Visitors to England’s Dover Castle may experience historical whiplash. Not only is the castle itself surprising, with its brightly colored interior meant to replicate an original paint scheme rather than the drab preservation we expect at such sites, but also, the castle grounds boast additional museums that commemorate later centuries when the site was used as a defensive outpost. English Heritage, the agency responsible for preserving and promoting locations like this throughout England, has transformed an underground lair near the castle into an immersive, interactive, multimedia “experience” that recreates the brain center of Operation Dynamo, the 1940 evacuation in which British military and civilians ferried hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers facing certain death or capture in Dunkirk, France, across the channel to safety in England. For a few quid—group rates available!—tourists can go below ground, stand in the very tunnels where Dynamo was planned, hear vintage BBC radio clips in accents posher than the Queen’s, look at some real desks where men planned the escape, and finally emerge into a gift shop selling coffee mugs emblazoned with Churchill’s head and “Keep Calm” T-shirts. All items bear the English Heritage logo, and proceeds help support the restoration of additional sites. For educational purposes, naturally.

The recent film *Dunkirk*, written and directed by Christopher Nolan, is a similarly compelling piece of historical propaganda—no travel to southeast England needed. Taut and tense with virtually no letup in suspense across its 106-minute running time, *Dunkirk* strives every bit as hard as English Heritage to create an immersive experience, even for viewers who do not opt for the IMAX version. Nearly every frame is packed with urgency, and its fervid camerawork puts us smack into the action—in a shaky Spitfire during a dogfight, on a “little ship” during an oil fire, under many capsizing vessels as men thrash for air. It is very much history as rollercoaster, bolstered on either end by lightly informative intertitles about the evacuation and its aftermath. And, for good measure, a few decent slugs of heart-stirring patriotism evoking both civic virtue and pathos.

If this combination of summer blockbuster thrills and pious nationalism, alluring audiences with excitement-plus-enrichment, sounds a bit like the cinematic realm of Steven Spielberg, you would not be far off. With *Dunkirk*, Nolan seemingly makes his bid for becoming the English Spielberg, parlaying his success with big-budget properties such as the *Dark Knight* trilogy into the Spielbergian territory of weepy sci-fi like *Interstellar* (2014) and, now, a period piece with ambitions as a national epic. Nolan’s take on the *Dunkirk* evacuation plays like a feature-length version of Spielberg’s famous D-Day landing sequence from the beginning of *Saving Private Ryan*, full of visceral shocks and virtuosic camera movement. And, like Spielberg, Nolan creates an aura of reverence around images of valiant men in uniform, defending the nation.

Where *Dunkirk* differs significantly from the Spielberg formula is its relative lack of plot, at least as plotting is typically handled by Hollywood storytellers. (During production, Nolan even flirted with eliminating a script altogether and letting the action set pieces speak for themselves.) The film concentrates on four key areas of the operation: English troops escaping the northern French city of Dunkirk using every possible vehicle and route; Royal Air Force pilots engaged in aerial combat as they zip above the fracas; a sagacious commander (Kenneth Branagh) on a pier coordinating the escape; and, most heroically, civilian boatmen res-
Fionn Whitehead as Tommy in a scene from Dunkirk.

cuing the stranded. These main areas flow together in clever and sometimes surprising ways, as characters from one area emerge in another, revealing that events we thought were sequential were actually simultaneous. Nifty tricks with chronology abound in Dunkirk despite its basically linear course, and this playfulness with time is especially characteristic of Nolan's style, reminiscent of his temporal hijinks in The Prestige (2006) and Inception (2010). Trusting his audience not to be confused, or at least to be okay with some confusion, puts him in a different league than Spielberg, who always keeps a heavy hand on his audience's feelings.

Most un-Spielbergian of all is Nolan's avoidance of a love story or other conventional route to a final resolution. After the famous opening sequence in Saving Private Ryan, that film spent its remaining three quarters unspooling a cliché-filled hero's quest. By contrast, Dunkirk stays focused on the central action, delivering just enough background for its many characters to keep us emotionally engaged, but never cutting to flashbacks or deviating much from its urgent present tense. I could imagine some viewers finding this minimalism off-putting, and, indeed, there are no major female characters to speak of, which might limit its appeal, but I appreciated Nolan's willingness to stick close to the main event without veering off into any storylines geared to satisfy test audiences.

Perhaps because of the unrelenting suspense sustained throughout most of the film, its few moments of emotional grandeur are particularly noticeable. The arrival of a civilian fleet of rescue boats bobbing on the horizon gets a swelling musical underscore that slightly overplays what is already a very affecting image. This hodgepodge flotilla—with its flapping Union Jack flags and crusty old salts at the helm—rallying to aid the otherwise doomed troops is a stirring display of civilian defense. And, in a more understated scene near the film's end, the rescued men pass by villagers in Kent who hand them blankets and soup. One elderly man congratulates a soldier who responds that he deserves no cheers, because "All I did was survive." The other man nods, and replies, "That is enough."
This small grace may be the film's shining moment, and I would suggest that it functions as its thesis. A voiceover from Churchill announces that though he is glad so many men lived, the Dunkirk operation was a retreat, not a victory, and "wars are not won by evacuations." Dunkirk's rejoinder might be that while Churchill is correct according to strict military strategy, in human terms this successful retreat was enough.

In its ambition and subject matter, if not its particular style, Dunkirk should take its place alongside the classic World War II epics that studios churned out in the decades following the war. Star-studded fare such as The Longest Day (1962), Battle of Britain (1969), Midway (1976), and A Bridge Too Far (1977) capitalized on our seemingly boundless fascination with World War II stories plus a military-grade deployment of famous actors. There is certainly a charm to this style, but the fleet-of-stars approach can also be distracting, a disruption to the purported realism of the piece. Dunkirk runs this risk somewhat. Branagh's turn is a bit stagey, and Cillian Murphy as a shell-shocked captain occasionally seems like bravado acting rather than the documentary portrait the film aspires to. Tom Hardy's face is mostly obscured by his RAF mask, a device Nolan also used with Hardy's Bain in The Dark Knight Rises, a trick that helps keep us focused on character over movie star. Former One Direction teen idol Harry Styles makes his big screen debut in a perfectly serviceable performance, and Mark Rylance plays a central role as captain of the Moonstone, one of the civilian "little ships" whose name nods to the popular Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins. Overall, though, Dunkirk avoids entirely devolving into the ensemble casting game of spot-that-actor that plagues the war epics of the 1960s and 1970s. Its pacing and surprising minimalism make it unique among such epics; despite an enormous budget and cast, Dunkirk feels refreshingly restrained.

This restraint, and its message of heroic stick-to-itiveness, praising mere survival rather than grandiose exploits, will keep the film an intriguing anomaly in the war-epic pantheon. The older epics often make their stories clearly celebratory in a mode stretching back at least as far as Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854), a poem that renders in heroic verse a British military debacle during the Crimean War. Something of this mentality persists in Dunkirk, but its tone is more complex than, for instance, the quintessential British propaganda film London Can Take It! (1940) that portrayed the indomitable English spirit repelling bombshells during the Blitz. The men who survive the evacuation are brave and determined, but they also bear survivors' guilt. Their mixed emotions chasten the triumph of the film's ending, which alludes to several more years of warfare yet to come. The outlook is bleak, but tinged with hope because this incredible trial is over. Survival, in Dunkirk, is not everything—but it may be enough.

Charles Andrews is an associate professor of English at Whitworth University.
A friend of mine asked recently, "Is there a line for you beyond which a sound is no longer music, but something else?" Good question. As someone who has sung along to dot-matrix printers and criticized the technique of the neighbors' windchimes, I try not to be too doctrinaire on the subject. Like many questions, this one is more interesting for its implications than for any answer I could give. What makes something music? Is there a gray area through which "something else" becomes "music," maybe by factoring in the intentions of its creators or listeners? Say a toddler intentionally starts messing around with an accordion—does that count? Can people or things make music by accident? If I say my favorite public musical performance of 2008 was the stately twenty-minute crescendo of fire sirens up a hill, from distant chirp to all-encompassing squawl, that kicked off the local homecoming parade, how insufferable does that make me?

Someone once asked La Monte Young, the New York-based avant-garde composer, a similar question. Young, now 82, grew up in a remote corner of Idaho, fascinated by the buzzing of crickets and the hums of power transformers and lathes. "As a child, I don't think I thought of the power plants and the crickets as music," he told his interviewer, the composer William Duckworth. "Later, when I was older—by the sixties, let's say—I made tapes of Marian [Zazeela, his wife] and me singing with crickets, and by then I was very much thinking about them as drone-based music. The lathes, I guess, I would just sort of find the key of it, and sing in that key" (Duckworth, 1995). There are more sounds in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Western music theory, and La Monte Young has invented a few of them.

The boy from Idaho would go on to become one of America's visionary composers. His 1958 Trio for Strings was the first notable work composed entirely of long, sustained tones, ground zero for the style that would become known as "minimalism." He was also an early part of New York's experimental Fluxus movement, in 1960 organizing a series of concerts in Yoko Ono's loft apartment. During hours-long performances with his Theatre of Eternal Music in the mid-1960s, Young played rapid-fire sax solos over droning chords produced by ear-splitting amplified instruments. (Among those supplying the drones was another composer, John Cale, who would disseminate such sounds through his enormously influential rock band, the Velvet Underground.) Throughout his career, Young has absorbed various ideas—from European serialism, John Cage's chance-based compositions, jazz, and Indian raga—and distilled them into pieces with an apparent simplicity that belies a wealth of underlying theoretical work.

Case in point: the Dream House, an installation on the third floor of 275 Church Street in Lower Manhattan, above the apartment where Young and Zazeela have lived for decades. The idea is simple. This converted loft houses several of Zazeela's light sculptures and a loud electronic drone. Produced by a Rayna synthesizer and fed into the apartment through four speakers, the drone never stops playing; the volunteers who oversee the installation simply raise or lower its volume to mark their shifts. Zazeela's work consists of red and blue lights bathing the white walls and carpet in a magenta hue, with a few objects—a symmetrical wooden structure on the wall, four identical hanging mobiles—separating the magenta light back into its component frequencies. The smell of incense fills the air, and a shrine to the Indian singer Pandit Pran Nath, Young and Zazeela's late teacher and houseguest, sits against...
one wall. The only furnishings are a few white cushions. Nothing moves except fellow visitors and the occasional lazy drift of a mobile, its red and blue shadows warping in kind.

Within the drone, though, lies a world of motion. Entering the house is like walking into a movie spaceship; you become engulfed in a jumble of sci-fi chirps and buzzes. As long as you stand still, the chirps and buzzes maintain their consistent thrum; move your ears even an inch, and the thrum changes. Certain tones abruptly disappear behind other tones and then reappear at various places around the room. Upon contemplation, you discover several things. The drone is actually a complex chord, built of a series of pitches—thirty-five in all—from very low to very high, with a bunch in the middle. Certain places in the room render the chord especially resonant in your body, while other positions make it feel distant or incomplete. Inside the chord-filled room, everything slows down. The pitches themselves seem to take on physical presence; you can explore them as you might a virtual reality jungle. Since all Dream House visitors find themselves in the same otherworldly space, there's no shame in making a fool of yourself. Meditating, stalking around the floor striking curious poses, or waving your hands slowly through the light are not just acceptable, but expected.

The drone is a chord, but one impossible to produce on acoustic instruments. Without different tone colors to muddy things up, the synthesizer's pure sine waves keep listeners focused on Young's pitches, all individually tuned to specific microtonal intervals. Most of these pitches would fall into the spaces between keyboard keys. Biographer Jeremy Grimshaw describes the Dream House chord this way: "Ring the G string and then the B string on a guitar. Now imagine thirty-five microtones crammed in between them and then redistributed over seven octaves. That is approximately what the sound played at the Dream House is like" (Vadukul, 2009). For those looking to amaze friends and family by re-creating the installation at home, the title of the piece is a recipe made up of 107 eye-glazing words and numbers: The Base 9:7:4 Symmetry in Prime Time When Centered Above and Below the Lowest Term Primes... It gets a bit more detailed from there.

Is The Base 9:7:4 Symmetry music? Well, yes: it's a chord, composed by a human being for other humans to listen to. We might waffle and call Young's piece a "sound sculpture" or something, but only because it doesn't do things we typically associate with Western music. It doesn't relay any sort of narrative; in fact, it doesn't develop at all. Young's drone eschews most elements that give music a sense of forward motion: melody, rhythm, contrasts—landmark moments listeners want to hear over and over. Furthermore, the piece must be heard under certain acoustic conditions to make any sense. Illicit recordings, sheet music, or charts of numerical pitch relationships simply can't convey the sensation of sound waves resonating in the body, of a thicket of tones becoming tangible in space. The piece literally demands listeners come to it. "I could have sworn I heard the Benny Hill theme song," one college student told Rolling Stone magazine. Personally, somewhere among the beats of the sine waves I thought I heard a woodpecker.

For all those differences, the music at the Dream House isn't a completely foreign experience. After all, its composer is an American, raised on jazz and twentieth-century modernism, who's just spent more time than most of us thinking about the exact frequencies of the electrical grid. Young composed The Base 9:7:4 Symmetry with intention, care, and a familiar goal: he wanted his tunings to create something new under the sun. As he wrote in the program notes to a previous drone installation, "not only is it unlikely that anyone has ever worked with these intervals before, it is also highly unlikely that anyone has heard them or perhaps even imagined the feelings they create." Besides that, La Monte Young just enjoys
listening to drones. Though he chooses pitches using mathematical guidelines, Young has admitted to bending the rules and choosing a different pitch because he “liked the way it sounded” (Gann, 1996). Despite its fixed quality, Young’s music hints at a spirit of improvisation and play, the wonder of tinkering in ways no one has tinkered before.

Think of a musical moment you particularly love. For the sake of discussion, let’s pick Igor Stravinsky’s riot-inciting chord from The Rite of Spring, the one that pounds open “The Augurs of Spring” section. Now imagine you want to focus people’s attention on the notes that make up that chord. You remove the chord from its context, stripping it of its syncopated rhythms and suspending its pitches indefinitely. True, much would be lost, including the rhythmic drive, the jolt of forgetting where the next accent will land, and the excitement of envisioning a pagan dance ritual—all elements that depend on the passage of time. In exchange, your listeners would gain all the time they could spare to savor this group of pitches; and while they’re savoring, you might decide to change the pitches, adding new ones to exaggerate their resonances and better fit this new, weird listening situation. Besides being musically interesting, the resulting chord might even inspire listeners to reflect on concepts given short shrift by most time-dependent music—those aspects that exist independent of time’s inexorable march. It might not be what we normally consider music; but then, how much time do most of us spend thinking about eternity?

Josh Langhoff is a church musician living in the Chicago area.

Works Cited


PARKING LOT POEM AT THE EDGE OF THINGS

I am at the edge of things.
You know that place
when there are too many carnivorous dinosaurs
walking across the road
and all you've got is a little red scooter
to scoot you across the land
but it never goes fast enough.
I can't tell if their teeth are pure gold or stinky white.
It does not matter.
Either way they are coming for me.
Or, am I just going mad?
My little red scooter and I
pull into a 7-Eleven to hide,
suck down a blue Slushie
but nothing tastes right.
If I were a little kid the dinosaurs would be real.
Of course, they are the dinosaurs in my mind.
In the parking lot at the edge of things
my lips and tongue get blue
and I wag them at the edge of things,
scream little words at the edge of things to shoo it back—
tungsten, I say, and gotcha—
but I've got nothing that the world can't give me back 2 times.
At the edge of things,
in the parking lot of the 7-Eleven,
I imagine the seat of my scooter as a Wurlitzer.
I try to play the funk but Bernie Worrell is dead
and for that matter so am I.
That's not fair to say to the dead people
because my Slushie goes down smooth and cool and gives me a charge.
So, I imagine my scooter as a king sized bed
and lay down in it until the cops come.
They want to taze me for vagrancy
but I won't let the color of my eyes get their trigger finger happy.
I don't care what color your eyes are
it's the whole world's problem at the edge of things.
When I look in the rearview mirror my scooter laughs at me,
not because I am fat or short
but because it knows something I don't.
The dinos are real, their teeth are stinky white
and it's not me they are after.

Matthew Lippman
Pulling Apart the Myth of Motherhood

Rebekah Denison Hewitt

KATIE MANNING'S first full-length collection, Tasty Other (Winner of the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award), explores motherhood from a variety of angles and offers a perspective that is often surreal and strange. Manning uses fairy tales, biblical stories and characters, pregnancy-related texts, and dreams as vehicles to explore the mental and emotional landscape of becoming a mother. The poems are braided together in a way that reflects the paradigm shift of becoming a parent. The dream poems (indicated by titles that begin with the word “The”), in particular, note the strange movements of the mind as the body prepares to have a baby. In this book, Manning presents an unsentimental look at the physical and emotional processes of becoming a mother.

Manning begins the collection with a poem entitled “Week by Week,” which catalogs the baby growing larger, being compared to coins and sports equipment and “increasing in value.” The final line reads, “This week/baby is the sky now a hemisphere. Now a blurry word.” This is an apt opener for the collection because the reader experiences literal comparisons turning into a metaphorical description of what this baby is to the mother. In the abecedarian “What to Expect,” Manning again plays with literal descriptions of pregnancy and childbirth by exploring the index of the popular pregnancy tome, What to Expect When You’re Expecting. As the poem unravels, it becomes a frenetic and sometimes humorous list of juxtapositions: “Expect nicotine patches, noise, and NutraSweet. Expect on-line drug shopping. Expect optimism. Expect organ donation and organic produce.” The poem carries itself with its unique rhythm and succeeds in enacting the anxiety and information overload that often bombards new mothers.

The collection hangs together with a poem that has been broken into parts. Manning takes the phrase, “Once upon a time, there was a mother,” and examines each word with a footnote. She literally and figuratively pulls apart the myth of motherhood, trying to get underneath it, to unearth and understand it. The phrase appears throughout the book, and each time the next word in the sentence is explored and defined. This structure serves the book well and shows Manning’s discomfort with many of the fables concerning motherhood.

To continue the theme of fairy tales and fables, Manning works with several ancient stories to explore themes of motherhood. In one of the more gruesome poems, “Baba Yaga’s Answer,” Manning imagines Baba Yaga, a figure from Slavic folklore, conceiving a child and miscarrying. Her desire to have children turns into her desire to eat children, and at the end of the poem she writes,
"I consumed them both, raw, in one sitting,/felt their beating hearts slide down to my belly. I placed my hand/upon my stomach and smiled." In “Sleeping Beauty’s Mother,” Manning gives readers a humorous and sympathetic twist on the familiar story. Here we have the perspective of a mother who is worn out, with “swollen breasts,” and whose husband is “too friendly with fairies.” She envies her daughter’s good fortune, to be promised a century of sleep and a young prince.

Manning also engages biblical stories and popular Christian tropes. “What Wisdom” is her response to 1 Kings 3, the story of King Solomon and the mothers fighting over a baby. Manning’s version demonstrates empathy for the possessiveness and strange thoughts that can accompany new motherhood. Her poem questions Solomon’s wisdom, and the view of a mother’s pure, right love. She ends the poem by stating, “If another mother says,’Neither of us/shall have him. Cut him in two!/’she sounds like a new mother/no less.” And in the book’s final poem, “God in the Shower,” Manning deals with an image sometimes used by preachers on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday: that of a train conductor sacrificing his child on the tracks so that he can lower the bridge to save a train full of people from what otherwise would be certain death. I have also been troubled by this metaphor and sympathize with Manning as she ponders it and leans “against the shower wall, sick now.” Manning confronts her own feelings as a mother, whether or not they are Christian, whether or not they are correct. In her story of mother-as-train-engineer, the train and all the people on it crash into the water. She envisions a different outcome: “My son, safe in my arms every time.”

Many of the poems in Tasty Other emerged from the vivid dreams Manning had while pregnant. These dream sequences are often humorous, such as the poem “The Dream Job,” in which the speaker has a job as an “egg warmer at the local police station.” Others are terrifying, such as the poem “The Fall,” in which the speaker dreams of dropping and killing her baby. Still others, like “The Flight Delay,” reflect the panic a new mother feels when she cannot get to her nursing baby. In “The Interview,” Manning writes about a dream in which she is interviewing for a job. For the interview, the speaker has to ride a horse through the mud, but the baby calls on the phone, “I want to look professional./My left hand holds/the reins. My right/picks up the phone. You are crying.” The poem illustrates the frequent tension between career and motherhood. The dream sequences in Tasty Other clearly evoke the anxiety new mothers face, while exploring the phenomenon of vivid dreams during pregnancy. (As someone who had dreams of giving birth to worms with teeth and jumping on a trampoline while pregnant, I could relate to the strangeness of these dream poems as well as many of the fears that the dream poems explore.)

The dream poems work particularly well because they are interspersed with other poems that are grounded in the realities of pregnancy and birth. “Surprise Ultrasound” takes the reader to a doctor’s visit where, at first, the doctor cannot find the baby’s heartbeat. “What I Remember” is a memory of the poet’s aunt having a baby and a recollection of her understanding of childbirth as a young girl. In one of my favorite poems in the book, “Parturition” the poet describes giving birth with a voice that interrupts itself and shifts from scene to scene to reveal not the narrative of birth, but the nature of birth, the jerky, out-of-body experience. Manning writes, “The baby is weighed, measured, inked,/placed in a glass bowl,” and in these lines, the reader feels the mother’s detachment as she watches medical staff take care of the necessary procedures. Manning expresses the relief the mother feels at the end of labor, but also the initial detachment in the moments after the birth. For now, the baby is behind glass, but the mother...
has become "something new" and not yet understood. This is one of the most honest and grounded poems in the book. The speaker does not shy away from her experience, does not transpose the sentimental gooeyness of new motherhood onto the birth of her child. Instead she reports it, almost seemingly in real time, to give the readers a glimpse of her reality.

Adrienne Rich writes in Of Woman Born, "I was effectively alienated from my real body and my real spirit by the institution—not the fact—of motherhood." In Tasty Other, Manning seeks to find her real body and her real spirit amidst the challenges and fears of motherhood. She works to find the "facts" of motherhood and divorce them from the fables, cultural expectations, and institutions of motherhood. Hers is a brave and important work for mothers and those who love them.

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With Whom We Read
A Review of Reading for the Common Good and Books for Living
Todd C. Ream

No trip to Missoula, Montana, is complete without a visit to Fact & Fiction. For thirty-one years, this independent bookstore has provided books and, perhaps even more important, a venue for conversation for this college town sitting at the junction of three of the West's great trout streams—the Bitterroot, the Blackfoot, and the Clark Fork.

Barbara Theroux, the driving force behind Fact & Fiction, had a vision in the store's early years of it drawing Western writers and their readers together in a common place. Over time, noted authors such as Ivan Doig, William Kittredge, and James Welch have made visits to the Missoula store as part of their book-signing tours.

So far, Fact & Fiction has survived the challenges posed by online sales and e-books that have led to the closure of so many independent bookstores. When asked by the local newspaper on the eve of her retirement what her career meant to her, Theroux said, "I'm not a rich person in financial ways, but I'm very rich in other kinds of ways." She walked away from the store at the end of July 2017 with an impressive collection of signed first editions and an even more impressive collection of friends.

While reading is often perceived as a solitary practice, Theroux's legacy points to the fact that the people with whom we read are just as important as what we read.

At the beginning of Reading for the Common Good, Smith argues, "Reading is a vital practice that can—if done carefully and well—ultimately contribute to the health and flourishing of our communities" (p. 21). In order to do so, he recommends choosing books "intimately tied to our communities" (p. 20). While any number of communities could benefit from this reading practice, the ones Smith has in mind are "our church communities" (p. 20).

In Books for Living, Schwalbe starts in a different place from Smith. He contends, "Reading is the best way I know to learn how to examine your life" (p. 7) and "Every book changes your life. So I like to ask: How is this book changing mine?" (p. 7). Reinforcing the essential relationship readers...
have with their books, Schwalbe boldly claims, "I believe that everything you need to know you can find in a book" (p. 11). Despite Schwalbe's absolute language and focus on the individual nature of reading, we also learn that there's more to reading than that for him. For example, in his introduction he acknowledges that "most good books are not tackling big questions in isolation" (p. 6), and great authors whose works stand the test of time "have been engaged in dialogue with one another that stretches back for millennia" (p. 6). Books thus carry with them "traces of some hundreds or thousands of books the writer read before attempting the one at hand" (p. 6).

The bulk of Schwalbe's book, and the manner in which he organizes it, highlights the impact that various books have had on him. In most chapters, he also sprinkles in details about writers who influenced him. As a result, his accounts of twenty-seven books that made diverse yet profound impacts on him fill the pages of Schwalbe's larger effort.

In three short, early chapters of his book, Schwalbe mentions a range of titles that have been important to him, from Stuart Little to The Girl on the Train to The Odyssey. In terms of its enduring value, Schwalbe views Stuart Little as a narrative exploration of the importance of searching even when the "search is inconclusive" (p. 37). He appreciates The Girl on the Train because "you don't know for sure whether you are being told, in whole or in part, the truth" (p. 47).

Finally, Schwalbe's discussion of The Odyssey illustrates how he discovered that whom we read with is just as important as what we read. In this case, the "whom" is his high school Latin teacher, Mr. Tracy, who guided Schwalbe through The Odyssey and introduced him to a character who was "deeply fallible" yet, like Stuart Little, perseveres (p. 55). Woven into the fabric of that realization was the ability of "great teachers" to "help us see ourselves in the broadest possible perspective" (p. 59)—flawed, prone to mediocrity, yet not sentenced to lives of failure.

In contrast, the nine chapters of Smith's book provide interlocking points in his larger, normative argument concerning the value of reading in community. The early chapters are just as much an exercise in philosophical anthropology as they are in the value of reading. Before Smith makes his claim, he works to convince us that "Our experience of life is shaped by our social imagination: the collective ordering of reality through experience, language, and culture" (p. 37). If correct, one never reads alone but only as part of the fabric woven by countless others.

While Smith could turn his attention to the value of almost any community when it comes to the practice of reading, he focuses on the church community. There, a common faith and the ongoing participation in worship practices unites people. Smith's own community, for example, is part of the Restorationist movement and thus places a high value on the practice of baptism, weekly communion, and the rightfully preached Word of God.

By the end of chapter three, "Reading and Our Congregational Identity," Smith has persuasively argued that the purpose of the practice of reading is to "understand our times in order that our church communities might be able to live faithfully in them" (p. 67). By the end of chapter six, "Deepening Our Roots in Our Neighborhoods," he is able to press his point concerning how "the practice of reading will draw us deeper into the shared life of our neighborhood" (p. 107).
Smith’s text harbors a variety of philosophical and theological sources fueling what might be labeled as his post-liberal perspective. As a result, the works of Charles Taylor and Willie Jennings, among other philosophers and theologians, play important roles. In addition, Smith draws from the literature of management and, in particular, the work of Peter Senge. From Senge, Smith then offers that organizations such as churches can act as learning organizations.

Schwalbe’s primary influence in Books for Living is twentieth-century Chinese writer and translator Lin Yutang’s 1937 book, The Importance of Living. Yutang’s work, one that emphasizes “the need to slow down and enjoy life,” is the focus of Schwalbe’s first chapter and appears in subsequent chapters, as well (p. 256). For example, in the chapter about Xavier de Maistre’s A Journey around My Room, Schwalbe frames his effort around Yutang’s approach to travel that is “to open yourself to seeing what’s in front of and all around you all the time, not just when you are on a special trip” (p. 237).

Despite their differences, both Smith and Schwalbe indicate they believe that with whom we read is just as important as what we read. Smith succeeds in persuading his audience of that point and ends his book by offering batteries of practical ways to pay attention to the “who” piece. Schwalbe implicitly comes to a comparable conclusion. By detailing books that have served as companions for him, he challenges readers to remember and articulate their own reading genealogies.

In “A Final Word,” Schwalbe notes that he “used to say that the greatest gift you could ever give anyone is a book” (p. 255). He has since revised that logic and claims a book is the second greatest gift he could give anyone. Now he believes that “the greatest gift you can give people is to take the time to talk with them about a book you’ve shared” (p. 255). Even with earlier hints that Schwalbe might come to such a conclusion, one has to wonder who is more surprised by that understanding, Schwalbe or his readers.

If offered the chance, both Schwalbe and Smith would undoubtedly enjoy a visit to Fact & Fiction. Walking the aisles with each one of them and talking about how they sized up the offerings on Barbara Theroux’s shelves would be a rewarding way to spend an afternoon. And both authors would likely agree that the store in the heart of Missoula is most valuable in the way Theroux had envisioned: as a place that brings writers and readers together for conversation and fellowship. To read the works of Ivan Doig, William Kittredge, and James Welch is of great value. To talk with them about their work and to do so in the company of others is a gift humans, by their very nature, yearn to receive.

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Work Cited
ON SAINT FRANCIS ADORING A CRUCIFIX BY GUIDO RENI

Last night, at Inklings’ Books and Coffee Shoppe,

when you asked if I am ever going to stop writing cancer poems

and pursue other subjects, I thought of Saint Francis tonsured

at the Nelson-Atkins, his cadaverous hands folded

over his breast like wings, how the right hand rests upon the left, as if
to perform CPR on his own stopped heart, the breath sucked out

of his lungs, his eyes flung open at the moment of arrest, the moment

arrested, and may you never know what it’s like to be transfixed,
to don a stitched cassock and waft like a dove in the updraft, caught

in the representation of a death which is also your own.

Cameron Morse
I was first introduced to Wendell Berry by a college mentor, and, like many who have read his writing, I have been grappling with the call to live differently—to live better—ever since. Having read quite a bit of his published work, I had mixed feelings when I learned of the recent documentary, Look and See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry, because a film seems at least partially antithetical to Berry’s central message. As an attempt to deal with this cognitive dissonance, I chose to watch the film in the chapel of my alma mater, Mount Vernon Nazarene University, at the only public screening in Ohio. The film went to Netflix a few days before the showing, yet it seemed right to watch it in a community, especially the one that had introduced me to Berry. (And although he would certainly advocate that “there are no unsacred places,” I was happy to watch it in that particular place on earth.)

According to the subtitle, Look and See is a portrait of a man, Wendell Berry. There are some striking things about this: for one, it isn’t all that common to watch a biographical documentary about a living individual. More striking still is the fact that the entire perspective and tone of the film is that of a historical documentary. Filmmaker Laura Dunn uses no original video footage of Berry himself. There is original audio in the form of Berry answering some interview questions, as well as video footage of his wife, Tanya, and his daughter, Mary. There is also a grainy video of Berry speaking at a panel from many years ago, and many pictures of him, though none recent—all of which give the impression that the film’s subject might be dead. (I suspect the filmmakers would have gladly included original video, which would have changed the whole tone, but this would have represented a moral compromise for the technology-eschewing, simplicity-loving Berry—and he isn’t a man who has made an impact by compromising his morals.)

Most of the film’s footage, though, is none of the above. Instead, we see long shots of rural Kentucky, the fictional and actual location of Berry’s literary and life focus. These long shots, which intend to portray the beauty of the land, do certainly create an ethereal sense as one watches the movie, and the pastoral shots are often paired with thoughtful axioms spoken by Berry. This structure creates a somewhat slow pace; even though the film is just eighty minutes long, it feels much longer. Slowing down is something Berry would advocate for as a means to notice more of the world, or simply as an end unto itself, so I didn’t mind this at all.

The film carefully attends to the vision that Berry laid out in his 1977 book, The Unsettling of America, and has been writing about ever since. It includes interviews with farmers old and young,
a discussion of organic and community-based farming, some criticisms of the modern agricultural economy, and Berry’s thoughts on these subjects and more—some in the form of old audio and video snippets and some in recent recordings. The film does not include a formal call to action, but it provides enough examples of contemporary problems plaguing American farms that the viewer is compelled to consider what steps must be taken to improve the situation.

And yet, I feel as though something was missing from the project. Despite my own mixed feelings about the appropriateness of a Wendell Berry film, I conceded before watching it that In What Are People For?, Berry calls himself “a farmer of sorts and an artist of sorts.” Look and See is primarily about the farmer; I was hoping for more of the artist to shine through.

In What Are People For?, Berry calls himself “a farmer of sorts and an artist of sorts.” Look and See is primarily about the farmer; I was hoping for more of the artist to shine through.

any incongruity between Berry’s message and the medium of film would probably be worth it if it introduced more people to his writing and work. I’m not sure if this film will do that or not. It certainly has a wide enough distribution to do so, and a trio of A-list producers—Robert Redford, Terrence Malick, and Nick Offerman—may be a draw for some unfamiliar with Berry. Offerman is a longtime fan of Wendell Berry and has spoken publicly of wanting Berry’s writing to be more well-known. I imagine this was the impetus for creating Look and See, but to me it still feels like a film by Wendell Berry fans, for Wendell Berry fans. I was inclined to like the film because of how much I already admired Berry, but it is hard to imagine that it will hold the attention of someone who is not yet converted.

Additionally, eighty minutes seems hardly enough time to create a true portrait of a man who has done so much across many genres and decades. I am challenged by Berry’s writings on farming, ethical land use, and food production, but those aren’t the primary draw for me—I like him as a poet of beautiful language, an essayist of clarity and wry humor, and a creator of characters both simple and complex. In What Are People For?, he calls himself “a farmer of sorts and an artist of sorts.” Look and See is primarily about the farmer; I was hoping for more of the artist to shine through. Further, the spiritual elements of Berry’s writing cannot be understated, and yet the film manages to nearly ignore this aspect. Berry is a writer whose works point to the goodness of God and His created earth; for a film about this writer and this earth, I found it odd not to hear about this.

Despite all this, I did like the film. Much of Berry’s writing about culture and agriculture has been with the objective of bringing more attention to the problems of his people, which this film will almost certainly do. It reminded me as well of my own need to be accountable for how I live and, especially, how I eat—something I understand every time I read Berry but something that is still hard to keep in mind. Finally, Lee Daniels’ cinematography is excellent. The footage of idyllic American landscapes paired with truly beautiful words by one of my favorite authors was at times enough to bring tears to my eyes. Whatever the film’s faults, I found myself at the end thankful for the images given by the film and its underlying vision—and for the vision stirred within this viewer, at least, of this world made whole once again.

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The Funny Thing about Idols

David Heddendorf

I. Devisings

Why do the biblical writers talk about idols the way they do? In the Psalms, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, a number of similarly worded passages describe idols as helpless, immobile images that human beings foolishly worship:

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them. (Ps. 135:15-18 ESV)

These familiar phrases end up coloring the way we think about "idol worship," so that we picture Israel’s neighbors bowing down to artfully devised images, trusting in chunks of carved stone or cast bronze for the necessities of life.

But if we shift our perspective a little, and recall photographs of ancient statuary in, say, our college history textbooks, we find ourselves regarding these images differently. They obviously represent gods—invisible beings to whom people ascribe influence over natural conditions like fertility and weather. The stone or metal images stand for absent deities. Contemplating these pieces in our history books, we would no sooner imagine adherents treating the images themselves as gods than we’d think of people confusing shrine images with Hindu divinities—or, for that matter, than we ourselves would confuse a crucifix or the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with Christ or God the Father.

Yet the Old Testament writers insist on deriding the blind, deaf, and dumb “idols” that their contemporaries worship. Are the writers simply being obtuse? Are they, in a way, more naive and unsophisticated than the idolaters they lampoon? Or is their scorn a kind of chauvinism or unfairness, a willful failure of imagination?

What’s happening here might best be understood as a kind of elaborate joke. Since in fact, as the writers would contend, no gods exist “behind” the carefully crafted images, the images themselves remain the sole objects of worship, and the writers pretend that people trust in them. No matter how much the faithful or their solemn clergypersons might protest otherwise, they’re essentially bowing down to their own symbols. In an ironic charade, the writers play dumb in order to ridicule an empty religious practice.

The most famous example of such mockery comes, of course, in 1 Kings 18, where Elijah taunts the prophets of Baal. Why won’t their god “answer by fire,” and consume the offering they’ve prepared? Perhaps, the man of God sarcastically suggests, the deity they depict and serve is neglecting their sacrifice because he’s asleep, or away on a journey. Or maybe he’s just in the bathroom. Even by the Bible’s earthy standards, this last crack is a surprising bit of low comedy; but any notion of Elijah as an irrepressible kidder is dashed when he personally executes the 450 prophets of Baal. Humor in the Bible rarely leaves us laughing very long.

II. Devices

“Devices” we call them, the cunningly wrought objects we’re never without. Cradled lovingly, reached for unconsciously, clung to with a deep and mostly unacknowledged need, they’re at once our symbols of self-absorption and, increasingly, the locus of our public life. They disrupt our communion with God, family, friends. They steal our time. They lead us into temptation. Long before
our children text and drive, or discover what sexting is, or succumb to cyberbullies, we leave them to their devices—like any Canaanite offering sons and daughters to Molech.

But surely this overstates the case? Doesn't blaming our devices amount to fetishizing a wafer of digital circuitry—naively focusing on the object, as if it were some graven image, while ignoring its intangible yet real purpose? Our devices exist to bring us data, information. They make knowledge flow, and deliver us from grinding, time-consuming tasks. They help us track down our best friends from high school. They help us monitor our children's progress in math. They warn us about tornadoes, give directions to the hotel, channel money to a host of good causes. They even promote, for millions of users, the free exchange of reflective, insightful opinion. Such benefits manifest the spirit of the device. Don't they?

Of course, there's the dizzying volume of so much information, and the effects this surfeit has on our forms of attention. For years, psychological studies and more personal reports have observed our dwindling ability to concentrate. The confessions of the penitent device user are becoming a stock essay genre—available most often in digital form. It's time to disengage, unplug, get back to nature, say these writers. We're losing our wisdom, our humanity, our souls. But no one really means it. If we meant it, that would mean...well, no one really knows what it would mean.

Then there are the specific evils our devices bring: bogus information that was once called—when everyone knew and agreed upon what the phrase meant—"fake news"; instantly available, casually accepted pornography; character inflation and character assassination, whether the targets are celebrities or sensitive teens; and sheer corrosive, numbing stupidity, from incoherent use of language to videos of mindless behavior. To such we yield ourselves, drifting imperceptibly and sometimes willfully from whatever is honorable, whatever is lovely, whatever is worthy of praise.

But none of that has anything to do with the devices themselves, right? Data is content, and content can change. Once we suffer through these growing pains, the internet will come of age, its true potential revealed. We'll experience the real benefits of our devices. The destructive impulses will wear themselves out, like a thunderstorm or a bad cold. When the Zeitgeist turns, the people who produce and control content, waking to their enormous influence, will make a collective effort toward truth and the common good, applying the same ingenuity that they now expend on ephemera and profits. Maybe they just need to see things bottom out. Maybe they just need some prodding from a concerned public.

Maybe they're just all in the bathroom.

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### On The Poets

**Bill Stadick** has published poetry in various publications, including *First Things*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Christianity and Literature*, and *The Christian Century*. He founded and writes for Page 17, Inc., which specializes in marketing and advertising communications.

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