

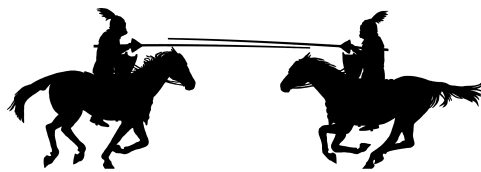
THE ARENA



Issue I: The Commission

April 27, 2026

THE ARENA



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Charlottesville, Virginia
April 27, 2026



MISSION STATEMENT

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt, "Citizenship in a Republic," 1910



When Teddy Roosevelt delivered these words at the Sorbonne, he was encouraging the intellectual man to undertake the rigorous physical activity for which the president was so famous. But these words ring today in the ears of those longing for a call to undertake the rigorous mental activity they are missing in a culture full of intellectual timidity and resignation. Some college students want to enter a different arena from the one primarily presented by Roosevelt, to be "marred by the dust and sweat and blood" of the intellectual work required to ask and answer truly difficult questions. Among this group are the founding contributors of this journal. We have made this platform to enter the arenas of conversation surrounding the important issues that interest us. In doing so, we have set foot in multiple arenas and made one more. Entering the former, the many unending conversations to which we may add a few words, will provide us with extracurricular intellectual formation. But there is something to a direct clashing of pens, so we have created the Journal's Arena, one entered by contributors each issue to spar over a subject controversial between them. We hope through this to strengthen our tolerance for respectful but substantive disagreement, a tolerance all but stunted by our contemporary culture. Finally, we hope, dear reader, that our effort to form ourselves as thinkers yields thoughtful articles for your thoughtful enjoyment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Charles Wilcox".

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Zosia Collins".

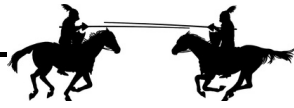
Charles Wilcox and Zosia Collins, Co-Editors-in-Chief

A note from the Editors:

In this inaugural issue, Miss Collins and Mr. Wilcoxon step into the Journal's Arena to debate artistry's connection to skill, touching on Lego creation, Latin oration, and the artistic merits of AI. In a subsequent trio of essays, Miss Collins, Mr. Miller, and Miss Thomas—drawing from Plato, Dostoevsky, Foucault, and Evelyn Waugh—present daring cases for redemption in unexpected places. Miss Noonan pushes back on Jason Brennan's argument for epistocracy over democracy. Miss DeBono provides a literary feature in prose; Mr. Thissell in verse. Many intellectual stances are taken in this issue; we aim to take them boldly, walking with confidence into the great arenas that await us.

CONTENTS

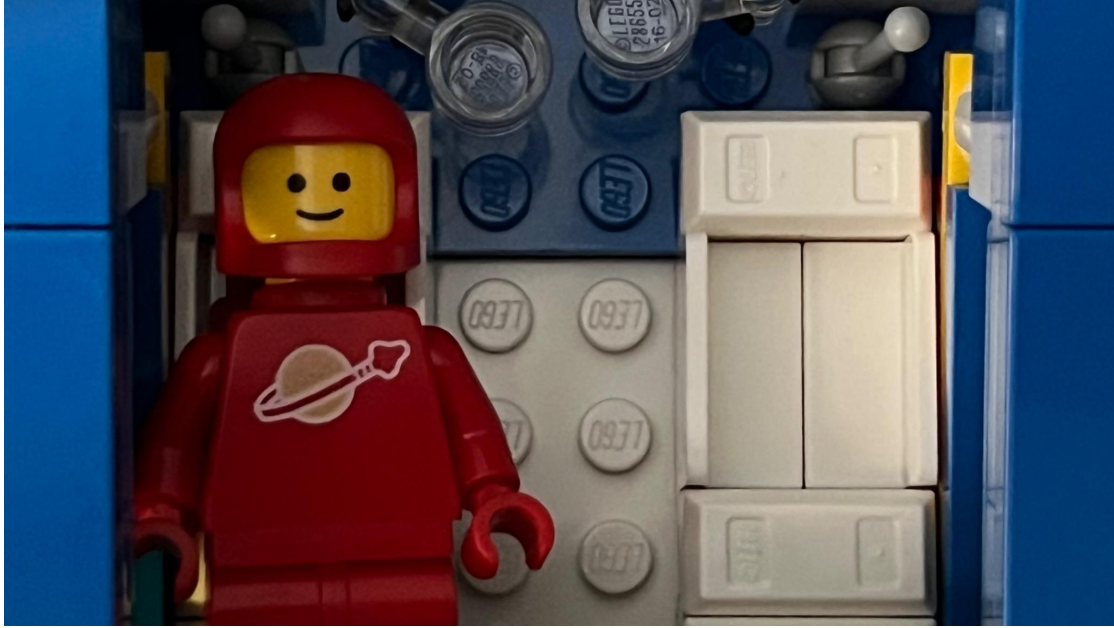
The Journal's Arena:	<i>Page:</i>
<i>Charles Wilcoxon</i> : Defining and Encouraging Artistry	8
<i>Zosia Collins</i> : Disturbed by Joy: Artistry as Divine Translation	13
 Fighting for Redemption:	
<i>Charlie Miller</i> : Crime and Rehabilitation Through Suffering	18
<i>Zosia Collins</i> : An <i>Apology</i> Owed: How Dostoyevsky Reminds Us That We Need Plato More Than Ever	22
<i>Keira Thomas</i> : "He won't quite despair of me in the end." <i>Brideshead Revisited</i> and Redemption in Times of Despair	26
 The Political Enthusiasm:	
<i>Bridget Noonan</i> : Should We Fear 'Epistocracy' Any Less Than Democracy?	32
 Literary Features:	
<i>Gianna DeBono</i> : Lamentation	40
<i>William Thissell</i> : The Snow-Pile	41



THE
JOURNAL'S
ARENA



Charles Wilcoxon
Zosia Collins



Defining and Encouraging Artistry

Charles Wilcoxon

Since my childhood, I have always loved building my own creations with Lego bricks. I love building with others even more, as I often do when my younger cousin, Charlotte, comes to visit. Once, while we were building an island society, she spontaneously began to create a story in verse and rhyme about the Lego Minifigures living on our brick-built island. As she spoke her lyrics into existence, she stumbled a couple of times: a pause to come up with a rhyming word here, a defeated reuse of the word that ended the previous line there. I would not say that the story made much sense. But I was delighted to witness this sudden burst of creativity for its own sake. It has taken me a while to make some sense of that delight I felt; however, I now see that I was reveling in Charlotte's artistry, an artistry at the same level (if not higher) than

many famed creations from historic authors, painters, sculptors, etc. Her artistry reaches this level because, in my view, artistry is detached from quality, only being informed by the internal factors of creation. In this essay, I will explain what constitutes artistry and show my view's liberating effects for all artists, whatever their skills.

It is important to first establish that a creation is not simply art or not art. Any creation instead has a relative degree of artistry in comparison with any other creation. For example, I might claim that the Star Wars television series "Andor" is more artistic than "The Mandalorian," but I would not claim that "Andor" is art and "The Mandalorian" is not. One problem with the latter claim and its general form is that "art" then becomes too easily a label for creations that appeal to us.

Another problem is that, as we will see, a creation is more often the result of various factors with varying sources than it is the product of factors of a singular source. Certain factors from one source may increase the artistry of a creation, while some from other sources may have the opposite effect.

There is another clarification that is necessary: I use the singular "creator" when working toward a definition of artistry, but my reasoning applies in the same way to a body of creators. "Creative team" could be substituted wherever I say "creator." The kinds of people I have in mind when I use "creator" are the people actually *doing* the creating in a creative project.

Let us now look at the various factors surrounding something's creation and how these factors inform the artistry of the creation. There are either internal or external factors for creation.

I will start with the external factors for creation. When a creator is externally motivated to create, he is incentivized by someone other than himself. Perhaps he is working for a large (or modest) commission; or he is asked to make something for his city to display in a public space; or he is asked by a friend to paint her dog. These kinds of external factors are motivational: they initiate the desire in the creator to create. Then there are external factors that are limiting. A board of corporate executives may oblige a filmmaker to include a specific moment that checks a desired demographic box; a city may oblige a mural painter to include specified buildings in his painting; Roman nobles living out a Catonian life of severity might oblige a sculptor to make them appear grumpier than they are in reality. There are many such examples of limiting external factors for creation, and all of them

affect the properties of the final creation. External limiters shift decision-making from creator to sponsor. A crucial dynamic that underscores external factors, both motivational and limiting, is that of a client and service provider. The client funds the work with a broad idea in mind, externally motivating the creator, and may leverage his patronage to shape the creation process, causing the creator to limit his creation in the way the client sees fit. As we see in both external limiters and motivators, what indicates a factor's externality is its source being outside of the creator, and these factors impact the creator through external incentives.

Internal factors are similarly either motivational or limiting. When a creator is internally motivated to create, they are prompted by something that has stirred in their soul; something has urged them to grapple with a part of their experience that warrants reflection and representation. It can be hard to give the precise content of internal motivation. Charlotte was internally motivated to speak poetically about her Lego island, perhaps by previous encounters with rhyming verse and wanting to synthesize Lego-based and poetic creation, or rather by a desire to attribute backstory to her imagined society, or instead by something else wildly different from my speculations. Perhaps upon hearing my speculations, Charlotte would tell me that I need to leave the thinkery and stop digging so deeply into things. But I contend that even if Charlotte cannot put her finger on what exactly motivated her to create, and none of my explanations are satisfactory, that is no matter. Something caused a desire in her to create, something present even if she cannot concretely describe it, something coming from within her. Regardless of the content of

internal motivators, you can tell they are internal when they are simply not external. And further, you can tell that a creation is internally motivated when the creation is not externally motivated. I never asked Charlotte to compose any poetry; nobody offered her any money for verse. This is not to say that all internal motivation is ambiguous. For example, if an artist gives a good interview on what exactly some of the internal motivators behind his creation were, the internal motivations may be pretty clear. What matters in the end, however, is the non-externality of the motivation. Turning to the other kind of internal factors, internal limiters of creation, like external limiters, pertain to decision-making during the creative process. A creator must decide what to do as he creates, and in so doing, he abandons all alternative courses of action at every step. However, unlike external limiters, internal limiters occur when the creator, not an external actor, makes the decision. Internal limiters may be informed by a gut feeling or by an extensively thought-out weighing of various options. Like internal motivators, the content of internal limiters is not important for their definition; what matters is that internal limiters are not external. We can proceed from here to say that internal factors generally are factors with an internal source, the presence of which can be obvious from mere non-externality.

Now that we have some understanding of internal and external factors of creation, I will look at their effects on a creation's degree of artistry. Internal factors contribute to a creation's artistry because they increase the degree to which that creation reflects the experiences of its creator. Even if we have no idea what the exact content of the internal factors of a creation is, we learn more about the

creator by virtue of the final creation's properties as the influence of internal factors on the creation increases. One useful way to think about this might be through the lens of a conversation. Internal factors increase how much a creation, as a conversational tool, authentically relates a creator's message, worry, or curiosity to his audience. Conversely, external factors decrease a creation's artistry because it decreases how much that creation reflects its creator's experiences. Instead of contributing to our learning about the creator, external factors may give us insight into the external actors who affected the creation, but they cannot shed any light on what the creator was trying to get at in creating. To continue the conversation framework, external factors decrease the creation's authenticity as a conversational tool. I am now pointing toward another important aspect of my view of artistry: artistry is the degree to which a creation can act as an authentic conversational tool in relating its creator's experiences. I say "degree" for the reason already established, considering that creations are the result of a concoction of many factors, some of which may be internal and others external.

A final step before we see this conception of artistry's liberating effects is to recognize that artistry is not related to quality. I think a common reason for conflating artistry and quality is because in our lexicon, the "art" of something is the practice of performing well within a certain enterprise or creative discipline. The "art" of oration is the practice of giving good speeches, for example. However, a creator can be artistic without having any grasp of the "art" of the discipline he is engaged in. When Charlotte spoke poetically, she had little skill in poetry to draw from. But that is no matter because her reason for speaking at all

and the resulting self-imposed limits on her speech are what contributed to the artistry of what she spoke, not whatever skill she employed in crafting her spontaneous poem or the poem's attendant quality.

Let me give another very different example to illustrate the irrelation between artistry and quality. One claim made by someone conflating artistry and quality might be that something created by A.I. can be artistic, or that A.I. can contribute to a creation's artistry. The conflater might say this because A.I. (as of April 2026) wields some skill in many creative disciplines, including image generation, writing, and music. Because the A.I. can produce a relatively high-quality creation, it can create something artistic or contribute to a creation's artistry. For me, this conflation is discredited by its allowing for A.I. to be labelled "artistic." That result is one I refuse to accept. The conception of art I have been presenting so far renders A.I. antithetical to artistry. A.I. is not conscious, so it cannot be influenced by any internal factors. The external motivation of A.I. creations comes from the prompt. A.I. only creates in response to something telling it to; it never creates spontaneously or without instruction. The external limiters of A.I. creations come from whatever parameters the prompt gives and the patterns the model detects as it accounts for the inconceivable amount of human creation that it has access to. And this pattern recognition itself comes from an external algorithm, meaning one that is neither made by nor able to be changed by the A.I.. Nothing created by the A.I. can be an authentic conveyor of the A.I.'s experiences: the A.I. cannot experience anything. Thus, nothing created by A.I. can be artistic by virtue of its being created by A.I., and the degree to which an A.I. contributed to

a creation and that creation's degree of artistry have an inverse relationship. But A.I. often yields creations of great quality. Artistry and quality, therefore, can have no relation because the extension of that proposed relation to the A.I. case is unacceptable: it exalts a predictive model as an artist.

A.I. is so appealing to us because it gives creators who lack command of the "art" of whatever creative discipline they are engaged in a way to immediately get a final product of relatively high quality. It is an easy solution to the humiliation of poor skill as a barrier to entering a creative discipline. In reality, however, when prompting A.I. to create something you envision, you are not entering any creative discipline other than prompt writing. Even worse for the creation's prospects for being artistic, you are not even asking another human to bring your creative idea to life, thus depriving the creation of internal limiters that could contribute to its authenticity as a relator of *some* human's experience.

But my view of artistry gives creators who aspire to command the "art" of a creative discipline the liberty to engage in that discipline now, no matter the quality of their creation, knowing that their creation remains artistic inasmuch as it is informed by internal factors. Charlotte had the freedom to create artistically because she was unburdened by concerns for quality. With my view of artistry in mind, the aspiring painter, playwright, or poet is free to start creating at whatever skill level he begins at because he is not worried about his creation being low in quality. Instead, he is eager to create regardless of the final product, knowing that in creating artistically, he can make some sense of his experiences through whatever medium he chooses. It is so

DEFINING AND ENCOURAGING ARTISTRY

easy to leave artistic pursuits untried because of low current skill or paralysis in the face of mounting creative decisions to be made or both. My view of artistry encourages all creators to try, poorly if they must, and be fulfilled in the truly artistic conversation we achieve through internally motivated and limited creation.

So start creating now. Make something for no other reason than that you are responding to something stirring up deep within you. Make decisions on your own about how your creation takes shape, choices that are not informed by anything other than what you

think is best for telling us about what you are grappling with in your creation. Release yourself from the self-imposed fetters of concern for quality. Reject A.I. because it is alluring in terms of quality but worthless in terms of artistry. Then, you can experience the joy of creating with the levity of unbridled artistry and of consuming the artistry of other authentic creators. Charlotte's poetry was not a joy to listen to because she was a poetic virtuoso, but because she shared with me her artistry: her authenticity in allowing herself to shine through her creation.



Disturbed by Joy: Artistry as Divine Translation

Zosia Collins responds to Charles Wilcoxon

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused

— *William Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey*

I begin my essay in a similar fashion to Mr. Wilcoxon: by dwelling on a poem. Wordsworth pens the above lines as he is confronted by the breathtaking beauty of the English countryside after escaping the confines of the city; I've included the painting "Tintern Abbey" by Benjamin Williams Leader to help us visualize this scene. Wordsworth needs us to know that there is *someone or something* that he feels he is encountering in this natural scene. This presence disturbs him; it unsettles something inside of him, spurring him to

"elevated thoughts" and prompting him to try to capture this presence in the medium of the poem. Mr. Wilcoxon had a similar experience; unsettled by his cousin Charlotte's sudden burst of poeticism, he was struck by "elevated thoughts" which inspired him to write a delightful essay on artistry. However, I would like to present an opposing view of artistry as a skill evaluated by the quality of a creator's work— specifically, it is the skill of effectively translating lofty ideals into a more comprehensible medium. I will first elaborate on my definition of art, highlight art's fundamental connection to artistry, and then proceed to evaluate AI "artistry" through this lens.

Although Mr. Wilcoxon focuses on artistry rather than art, I find it necessary to my argument to first dwell on what art itself is.

After discussing the differences between external and internal factors that motivate individuals to create art, Mr. Wilcoxon asserts that artistry is purely a reflection of *internal* creative factors. I agree with Mr. Wilcoxon's assumption that art intrinsically represents something about the motivations and experiences of the artist who made it. We can see their creative and aesthetic tastes, and maybe even their own thoughts and feelings towards their subject matter, through the compositions they create. For example, Wordsworth's poem reveals his deep thoughtfulness and sensitivity toward beauty.

However, although this reflection of the artist is beautiful, it is merely *coincidental*. The true purpose of Art is not to reflect *ourselves*, but rather something *outside of ourselves*. Wordsworth's goal in writing *Tintern Abbey* was not to have us understand his awareness of beauty; his goal was to capture some fraction of the beauty itself which set his soul ablaze. Art does not exist to reflect the artist's internal experiences, although it often does so; it exists so that the artist may attempt to capture the vastness of something external to and high above them. In this sense, art is a process of translation—it aims to convert an infinite mystery into a finite, structured form. Rather than aiming to spark conversations, it seeks to necessitate contemplation.

Now that I have discussed what art itself is, I will return to Mr. Wilcoxon's original topic of artistry. I have defined art as a process of translation, capturing higher ideals and presenting them in the language of the human experience. As any student of a language (in my case, Latin) will know, you measure your mastery of a language through your ability to produce coherent thoughts in the language. I would consider myself a decently-advanced

scholar of the Latin language since I am able to produce a fairly quick and accurate translation of Cicero's *Second Philippic*. Quality of results is of vital importance in mastery.

Since art is similarly a process of translation, we should evaluate artistry based on the artist's grasp of the artistic language, and should do so based on the final translation they produce. Artistry is the objective skill of making truth accessible through beauty. Of course, the bar for being artistic varies with age and ability, as with any skill. If little Timmy, age three, sits and builds small towers out of blocks all day, I might rightfully call him a very skilled builder. I would not, however, say the same of 35-year-old Uncle Billy if he produced the same teetering towers. I would, of course, compliment Uncle Billy on his building skills if he fashioned a large, intricate cathedral out of Timmy's blocks. We have different standards for the mastery of a skill based on personal capacity. Charlotte—motivated perhaps by wanting to capture the beauty and vastness of the story which suddenly began unfolding in her mind about the Lego colony—translated the beauty she was encountering to the best of her youthful and unformed poetic abilities. She is artistic in the same sense as Wordsworth; both produced poetry that encompassed something higher than themselves at the greatest possible quality. However, being artistic—acting upon one's full propensity for artistry—is not the same thing as having mastered artistry; this point is reached with the maturity of the artist alongside the honing of their artistic skill, when they are able to craft widely-understood translations of beauty.

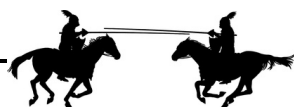
Moreover, I would like to emphasize the importance of originality in artistry. If I choose to go online, copy-and-paste a translation of the *Second Philippic* into a

Google Doc, and pass it off as my own, you would not consider me a competent linguist. Similarly, artistry involves bringing a fresh portrayal of an enduring truth rather than just recycling an old one. Now, just for the sake of argument, I'll point out that this is different from bringing a fresh *perspective*. A fresh perspective would harken back to Mr. Wilcoxon's claim that artistry reflects the internal state of the creator. A fresh portrayal, however, can actually be motivated by either external or internal factors. What matters is that the artist has some sort of grasp on eternal truths, so that they can try to represent these truths in their art. It does not matter whether they are inspired or commissioned to do so; as long as they create a product that inspires others to the contemplation of Truth through an experience of Beauty, they are exhibiting artistry to the fullest.

So far, I have argued that artistry is the ability to comprehend something outside of yourself and translate this thing through an artistic medium. This brings us to AI. AI, not being a sentient being, cannot comprehend anything outside itself. Therefore, asking AI to create art is like asking me to translate Cicero's *Second Philippic* without giving me the original text. If I were well-studied on my history, I could take a pretty good guess at this gist of it— Mark Antony is a vile human being and an enemy of the republic— and yet I would miss every precisely-chosen word, every subtle turn of phrase which really gives the Philippic its distinct quality. I'd be missing the point of the translation, even while giving a pretty good approximation. AI is the same way. It is incapable of contemplation, of beholding Beauty and confronting the Divine. In this sense, it is incapable of the first step of artistry; it has no access to the original text that you're

trying to translate. Therefore, any image or poem that it creates will be an approximation at best, a hollow shell of anything with real substance. Moreover, it will be drawn solely from the millions of data points that AI has been trained on; there is no true *originality* in the work. It therefore can never accomplish the true purpose of art, which is inspiring us to contemplation through fresh translation. It has neither the source material nor innovation.

So, Mr. Wilcoxon, I agree that AI is not artistic. However, I cling idealistically to a view of artistry which is fundamentally connected to the quality of art produced; it pertains to translating something outside of the creator rather than expressing something inside of the creator. Art is made to reintroduce us to the Beauty of something above us— as Wordsworth would say, to disturb us with the joy of elevated thoughts. I echo your call to creation, but we must stress the first and essential step in this process to aspiring artists. So I say to them: go encounter something unspeakably lofty, so tantalizingly elusive that it begs you to translate it into a more comprehensible form. Look at the sky, and hold your breath as you marvel at the impossible majesty of light streaming through the brilliant, billowing clouds. Immerse yourselves in the shifting, interwoven sounds of a symphony, and allow yourself to weep with the rawness of the notes. Toil until you form a relationship that slowly reveals what that elusive thing called "Love" is, and then try to catch it and pin it to paper with meticulous letters. Only this intensely human experience of Beauty can raise us to true artistry.



FIGHTING
for
REDEMPTION



Charlie Miller
Zosia Collins
Keira Thomas



Crime and Rehabilitation Through Suffering

Charlie Miller

Suffering makes the average modern American uncomfortable. One could argue that he structures his daily life around avoiding it altogether, seeking instead to maximize comfort and convenience. Life is arranged to be as easy, pleasant, and comfortable as possible, reinforcing societally the belief that suffering is a negative. This mindset has increasingly shaped public conversation about the role and purpose of prisons and how prisoners ought to be treated. A growing view emphasizes therapeutic rehabilitation, with the focus being the swift reentry of the prisoner back into society while minimizing the suffering they must experience. According to this perspective, suffering is purely bad, and just as we should minimize it in our lives, we should also try to reduce it in the lives of criminals. Yet the effort to entirely eliminate suffering from criminal

justice is a mistake and misunderstands the distinctive moral role of suffering as shown in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Traditionally, suffering is seen not as merely punitive but as a necessary condition for forcing someone to confront their wrongdoing. Through suffering, a criminal is forced to confront their actions, providing a path toward repentance and genuine moral transformation.

Few stories detail the redemptive power of suffering better than *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, which explores the transformation of the main character, Raskolnikov, after he commits a brutal murder. He partially commits the crime for money but also to test his theory that some extraordinary men can be above moral laws; "I wanted to

have the daring ... I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man ... whether I was a trembling creature or had the right.”¹ After committing the crime, Raskolnikov’s world comes crashing down around him as he feels the cosmic weight of the crime he has committed and struggles to live with the guilt that haunts him. When he is back in public after seemingly getting away with the crime, “[h]e felt as if he were nailed to the spot A gloomy sensation of agonizing, everlasting solitude and estrangement suddenly rose to consciousness in his soul.”² Raskolnikov’s punishment, beginning in his own conscience, isolates and traps him in a permanent state of inner torment.

Raskolnikov is miserable and descending into madness; his theory has failed, and he feels he has no way out. But as much as the story is about the fall of Raskolnikov, it is also about his ultimate redemption that comes through his acceptance of his crime and his willingness to suffer for it. He eventually decides to confess to Sonia, the woman he falls in love with, and she encourages him to face the gravity of his crime and confess. She beseeches him, “You must accept suffering and redeem yourself by it.”³ But Raskolnikov is hesitant to accept the terrible thing he has done and face the consequences, “But why am I going there now to give myself up? What for? What have they against me? They have no evidence. It was all a dream... Why should I go? Why confess?”⁴ Ultimately, he does confess to the authorities and gets sent to prison for eight years of hard labor in Siberia. In confessing, he accepts the suffering required to grapple with the moral consequences of his crimes. As he states toward the end of the novel after spending time in Siberia, “I did not bow down to you, I bowed

down to all the suffering of humanity It was the suffering that was my teacher. And in it I understood myself, and the meaning of what I had done.”⁵

As a modern reader, it is easy to assume that what Raskolnikov clearly needed was some form of therapy to reason through his actions. Yet despite his brilliant intellect, and maybe because of his pride in it, he is incapable of simply thinking his way to moral clarity. The novel instead presents suffering as the only necessary path forward, insisting that it is precisely the punishment that Raskolnikov willingly chooses to accept and not shy away from that is ultimately what saves him from madness. The fact that he had the ability to suffer for his crime at the hands of society allows him in some way to bring about justice, to make up for the cosmic imbalance he created by his crime. As he states in the last paragraph of the book, “He had risen again... he knew that he would have to pay for it dearly... but that was the beginning of a new life.”⁶ But Raskolnikov in some ways represents every criminal who feels they were justified in committing their crime. And in this way, there are many men like Raskolnikov to whom true interior freedom can only come through receiving the justice their crimes demand. Raskolnikov embodies the individual whose very nature demands such justice, revealing suffering as a necessity in moral transformation and repentance.

Dostoyevsky is not the only person to identify this link with suffering and redemption. Michel Foucault’s 1975 publication *Discipline and Punish* provides an interesting historical perspective on the issue of punitive justice. Although in the overall piece Foucault is critiquing the punitive justice system, the story he highlights in the beginning

of the book provides a fascinating lens into how older Christian societies viewed suffering in relation to crime. This highly disturbing story tells of a man who is being brutally publicly tortured to death for the regicide of King Louis XV in 1757 France. The question arises: how could Christian men do such a thing to another human being? It is easy to look at the torture and think they simply wanted to hurt the man, but this does not totally align with the story. During his torture, there were priests continually next to him, allowed by the authorities to hear his Confession and offer him the cross of Christ to kiss.⁷ Why would authorities who hated this man allow him to gain the possibility of eternal life by letting the priests minister to him? Because they thought they were in some way doing good for him. They believed that through his excruciating suffering, he could in some way make up for the effects of the crime he had committed. And even the extreme punishments and torture were understood as a path toward repentance and genuine acknowledgment of guilt.⁸

This piece is not making the argument that societies should bring back brutal tortures or punishments of the past. I present the case that totally removing suffering from prisons might miss an important aspect of renewal and redemption. The Foucault piece provides a historical perspective on how societies have viewed suffering in relation to crime. It reveals how, in Christian societies less than 300 years ago, societies did not shy away from suffering to create genuine transformations of the heart. Part of this certainly stems from Christianity and the idea that suffering is a gift that must be confronted and accepted for redemption. As Christ said in the Gospel, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take

up his cross daily and follow me."⁹ Suffering shapes people into who they are and ultimately, if undergone in the right spirit, makes them better people. Criminals are those who are most in need of transformation and redemption; if suffering is completely removed from the prison system, or the prison system is abolished completely, where will the Raskolnikovs of the world turn to redeem themselves?

To conclude, modern discomfort with suffering has led to a vision of justice that seeks to eliminate it wherever possible. However, both literature and history suggest that this compassionate instinct is fundamentally incomplete. As seen in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is not redeemed through careful examination or psychological intervention, but through the very suffering he tried to resist. In the same way, the perspective presented in *Discipline and Punish* shows a world where suffering was inseparable from justice and repentance. I do not argue that modern society ought to return to brutal punishments, but I challenge a view that seeks to remove suffering entirely. If suffering is indeed an aid for individuals to confront their wrongdoing and to morally transform, then a criminal justice system that seeks to remove suffering entirely will be missing a fundamental part of human redemption. Justice must be concerned not only with reintegration, but with restoration of the whole individual, and suffering—although difficult and uncomfortable—can help.

FIGHTING FOR REDEMPTION

Notes

1. Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, et al. *Crime and Punishment*. Random House US, 2012. Page 273
2. Ibid, pg. 86
3. Ibid, pg. 277
4. Ibid, pg. 322
5. Ibid, pp. 359-360
6. Ibid, Epilogue
7. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish the Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, 2011. Page 3
8. *The Holy Bible*. New American Bible Revised Edition, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2011. Heb. 12.6, 11
9. Ibid, Luk. 9.23



An *Apology* Owed: How Dostoyevsky Reminds Us That We Need Plato More Than Ever

Zosia Collins

“Discussion.” For most humanities students at UVA, this word evokes an ordeal involving sitting at cramped desks under fluorescent light in awkward silence while the T.A. looks around desperately for someone who is willing to compromise their nonchalance in order to gain a participation point. This scene would surely have shocked Thomas Jefferson, who intended UVA to be a testament to the “illimitable freedom of the human mind.”¹ Yet, in the halls of Mr. Jefferson’s university, our minds are being stifled by an oppressive consensual silence. Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* also features a university student, Raskolnikov, although we meet him in the dank streets of St. Petersburg rather than in the classroom.

Raskolnikov, too, seems to have forgotten the original meaning of “discussion”; the agitated conversations we hear him having are all with himself. Separated by hundreds of years, UVA undergrads and Raskolnikov find themselves in the same plight; although drenched in intellectualism, they are unable to force themselves into dialogue with others. Why is this a real problem— and moreover, what can we do about it?

Rather than beginning our search for answers in 21st-century Charlottesville or 19th-century Russia, I propose an expedition to the dry heat of Athens in the 4th Century B.C. Somewhere in these winding streets, probably locked in a debate with some misguided, pompous young member of the

Greek aristocracy, is a balding, ugly old man. Although not part of a university, this man, Socrates, is running a sort of educational institution of his own. One of his students, Plato, is perhaps sitting and taking notes. We can overlook much of what he's writing, but one term is of vital importance: "philosopher." Very generally, this word refers to an individual who is able to reach truth by asking themselves and others fundamental questions which challenge the basis of preconceived notions. Through meaningful discussion, the philosopher is able to come to a true understanding of the issues they investigate. *This* is the ideal of Western education; this careful, communal examination of reality is the theoretical basis of universities for centuries to come.

With this in mind, let's leave these Greeks to their riveting discussion and return to the alleys of Russia, where Raskolnikov continues to flounder. Like a typical struggling university student nowadays, he is forced to spend hours alone immersed in intellectual texts; unlike a typical struggling university student, he resolves to murder an innocent pawnbroker who lives nearby. Pondering the truly horrifying and criminal nature of the murder he has resolved to commit, Raskolnikov declares that "it's better not to think at all!"² Through these words, the extent to which Raskolnikov's education has failed him is apparent. Instead of pondering the reality of his actions in an open and philosophical fashion, he actively shuts himself off from enlightening thought and interior discussion of his crime. Despite his university, which encourages him to isolate himself in order to pore over and produce niche intellectual arguments— or perhaps, because of it— Raskolnikov has lost his will to *think*. An

eerie parallel emerges between him and the college student stubbornly sitting in their discussion doing online shopping and ignoring the T.A's questions— their silence declares, "it's better not to think at all!"

It would be one thing if Raskolnikov's intellectual stagnation were a self-contained vice. However, Dostoyevsky takes this attitude towards a haunting conclusion: *it enables Raskolnikov to intellectually amend himself to committing a murder*. After bludgeoning the pawnbroker to death, he nearly makes a misstep in his criminal calculations and asks, "What's the matter with me?"³ After committing such an egregious crime, it would be fitting for Raskolnikov to pose this question on a serious spiritual level, but he is only able to apply it to a purely worldly consideration. Empty, logistical questioning fills the space which guilt normally would. The moral apathy university has taught him spares him from having to deal with any repercussions of conscience, allowing him to internally come to terms with a brutal murder. Stuck in a meaningless discussion with himself, it is clear that the "illimitable freedom" of Raskolnikov's mind has indeed been wounded to a crippling degree. Raskolnikov's education has warped him into a fallen student—a being driven by powerful intellectualism which, unconstrained by morality, is weaponized for the logistical achievement of his plans.

While the murderous fallen student is a horrifying creation, Dostoyevsky does not stop here; he points out that the morally passive nature of this fallen student means that they will continue on their path of destruction unless acted upon by an outside force. This is demonstrated as Raskolnikov talks to the crime's investigator, Porfiry. Raskolnikov's empty questions continue as he scrutinizes his

latest statement and berates himself for a mere two words: "Why did I insert that 'I think'? ... And why does it bother me that I inserted that 'I think'?"⁴ Raskolnikov's irrelevant and scattered questions conveniently prevent him from even considering the possibility of confessing his crime to Porfiry, repenting, and doing penance. The modern collegiate aversion to real, substantive discussion locks him into his current course of action, allowing the fallen student to live at large and prowl about looking for his next victim.

Luckily, one philosopher is dwelling hidden in the pages of *Crime and Punishment*. We meet him in Porfiry as he is confronting Raskolnikov about his crime; he is gently corrective rather than aggressive, asking, "Have you really lived so long, though? Do you really know so much?"⁵ By casting Raskolnikov's personal authority and knowledge into doubt, Porfiry equips him with an intellectual humility conducive to questioning presuppositions— even that of his own competence. Porfiry continues in his attempt to dispel the mental haze of passivity which engulfs Raskolnikov by suggesting that confession of his crime and resultant suffering will ground him, but on "what shore? How should I know!"⁶ By posing the question of Raskolnikov's ultimate destination without providing an answer, he leaves a line of discovery open for Raskolnikov to pursue himself. Proceeding into increasingly personal territory, he ventures, "You don't believe in your theory anymore, do you?"⁷ He harnesses Raskolnikov's growing doubt in the prideful theories which culminated in and justified his crime, thus also casting doubt on the morality of the murder itself. Gently but insistently, Porfiry's interrogation begins to demand a change of perspective and a casting off of old

ideas. In the spirit of Socrates, he crafts thoughtful and provocative questions which equip Raskolnikov with fresh intellectual humility, consideration of life's bigger significance, and freedom from the burden of his prior mindset. Through Dostoyevsky's narrative, he slowly takes on the persona of Plato's philosopher, guiding Raskolnikov towards transcendent truths through meaningful dialogue.

Miraculously, exposure to the philosopher begins to heal the fallen student. Porfiry convinces Raskolnikov to turn himself in, physically reconciling him with the truth of his crime, but Raskolnikov has yet to come to a spiritual understanding of his guilt and his need for suffering. However, he begins to make this unification of his actions and intentions as he considers, "what was he after? Mere existence?"⁸ Clinging to this heavy question, he heaves himself out of his spiritual lassitude and actively starts to seek out truth and understanding. Just as Porfiry, the philosopher, has shown him, he examines the trajectory of his life and his deeper motivations in a distinctly philosophical manner. Continuing this radical openness to truth, he wonders, "everything had to change now, did it not?"⁹ Sensing a disconnect between his refusal to acknowledge his culpability and his lifestyle of repentance, Raskolnikov instinctively understands that embracing a philosophical mindset involves reorienting his whole person, body and soul, towards truth. The exact nature of the truth he must pursue is still hazy, but he thoughtfully considers the Faith of his dear friend Sonia and asks, "can her beliefs not be mine too?"¹⁰ Not stopping at a mere rejection of his old theories, Raskolnikov's Socratic mindset allows him to consider and personally confront other ideas, prompting his

AN APOLOGY OWED

unprecedented serious consideration of religion. Porfiry, as the philosopher, has managed to do what the entire modern university system could not: he shows Raskolnikov how to formulate questions about himself and the foundations of reality. This invaluable tool frees Raskolnikov from the clutches of intellectual stagnation, allowing him to become the philosopher in his own life.

Crime and Punishment at first appears a cautionary tale: it paints a chilling picture of just how easily the education system's aversion to discussion can create a devilish fallen student who will commit ruthless crimes one after the other. However, Dostoyevsky provides an antidote to this appalling fate. The agency of

one man who asks open, probing questions is able to resurrect the intellectually and morally curious streak inside Raskolnikov. The implication for our modern university classrooms is clear. Yes, students aren't partaking in discussions— but maybe that's because they're not being asked the right questions. By veering away from the personal and controversial into the cliché and obvious, our professors are running the risk of creating intellectually stagnant mutants out of an entire generation. We need Socratic figures who will push back on our apathy and force us to *think* again. It will be uncomfortable. It will be divisive. But ultimately, it will be transformative.

Notes

1. Thomas Jefferson, "Thomas Jefferson to William Roscoe." *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/75.html>.
2. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. Signet Classics, New York, 1968, page 71
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4. Ibid., pg 318
5. Ibid., pg 437
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7. Ibid., pg 439
8. Ibid., pg 521
9. Ibid., pg 521
10. Ibid., pg 522



“He won’t quite despair of me in the end.”
***Brideshead Revisited* and Redemption in Times of
Despair**

Keira Thomas

The modern culture is obsessed with comfort, but nevertheless rejects authentic consolation. The hope and joy once found in religious piety have been mocked as a fantasy, the “opium of the people,” as Marx phrased it.¹ Happiness is thus pursued through earthly means, avoiding God at all costs. This separation from the source of authentic goodness can only lead to despair. In Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*, the characters are caught in this vicious cycle of trying to escape misery through sin, inevitably leading to hopelessness. Through Divine Providence, however, good can be born from evil. Although the main figures in the story ebb in

and out of a myriad of destructive and sinful patterns, they are never rejected by God himself. *Brideshead Revisited* promotes the inherently Christian idea that redemption can be pursued even in circumstances of despair, providing consolation that can last into eternity.

Sebastian Flyte, a friend of Charles, the narrator, is a member of an aristocratic family and is fixed in a debaucherous cycle of alcoholism and subsequent sins. Sebastian’s family dynamics contribute to his personal struggles, as he is a child of divorce; his father, having committed adultery, left the family when Sebastian was a boy. Sebastian blamed

the broken home on his mother, Lady Marchmain, whom he develops a hatred for over time. Sebastian fills voids in his life with substance abuse. At the beginning of the novel, this is seen as a typical youthful approach to alcohol, with Sebastian getting drunk in a carefree, seemingly innocent way. This habit, however, is poisonous, inevitably leading to addiction. Another cause for strife in Sebastian's life is the Catholic Church, as he has a tormented relationship with the Faith, a situation that is in part the result of his conflict with his mother and general family situation. Furthermore, he realizes that the Church promulgates undeniable truth, but simultaneously refuses to amend his life according to its teachings, viewing his religion as an entity that takes away privileges and pleasures from him. Throughout the entire book, Sebastian is trying to be happy, but is seeking authentic joy through the wrong avenues, namely the bottom of a bottle.

One of the first stages in Sebastian's essential plunge into darkness is his rejection of his family. Consumed by his addiction and dislike for his mother, Sebastian leaves the country, continuing his worsening alcoholism abroad, ending up bedridden from illness. Sebastian's state, a result of his drinking, prevents him from seeing his mother before she died. Furthermore, his constant drunkenness leads to his own destitution. His one comfort is an escaped German soldier, Kurt, who is later captured and killed. Fully isolated himself from any friendship and happiness, Sebastian is reduced to a wandering drunk. After years of chances at redemption, Sebastian finally finds solace in the Church. In the depths of his alcohol-induced illness, he is rescued by monks, who recognize his need for physical and spiritual help. After being taken in, Sebastian

reconciles with the Church. The monks' intervention is a case of Divine Providence, as Sebastian's brokenness and sickness led him back to the Church, which depicts how God's grace reaches even the most fallen, as Sebastian was allowed redemption even in his complete state of ruin. There were certainly less-desperate moments throughout the novel where Sebastian could have come back to the Church. However, "no one is ever holy without suffering," a motif that proves true in the case of Sebastian's reconciliation.²

Julia Flyte, the younger sister of Sebastian, has an early life not much easier than her brother's; she too is raised in a home ripped apart by adultery and divorce. She too leads a debauched lifestyle opposite the Church but cannot bring herself to fully reject the theological truth of Catholicism. Julia's primary conflict with the Church is in regards to her ambitions for marriage, as she wants to secure the best match possible, regardless of any love that might be or might not be attached. As she is forbidden to marry Protestants and is thus confined to a small pool of candidates, "her religion stood as a barrier between her and her natural goal."³ Eventually, Julia overcomes her qualms regarding religion when she rashly marries Rex Mottram, a divorcee whose marriage to Julia is invalid in the eyes of the Church. However, Julia was soon unhappy in her marriage, leading to her own spiral into misery and attempts to find alternate sources of happiness.

Within the first ten years of Julia's facade of a marriage, she involved herself in extramarital affairs to escape her own misery. Her life has been tainted by horrible grief, as she had a baby born dead. When speaking to Charles, she reveals that had the baby lived, Julia would have raised her as a Catholic. She

says, "That's one thing I can give her. It doesn't seem to have done me much good, but my child shall have it."⁴ Despite her rejection of the Catholic lifestyle, Julia wanted to give her child a chance at avoiding the irresolvable emptiness she finds in her own life. Later, Julia begins an affair with Charles, who is married, continuing her frantic self-destruction aimed at some imitation of happiness. After one of her Catholic siblings condemns her persistent sin, however, Julia plunges into despair, recognizing the depth of her sin which she believes to be irredeemable. She maintains the idea that there is "no way back; the gates barred"; she sees no way to redemption.⁵ Believing there is no point to repentance, she continues in her relationship until, once again, tragedy enters her life, as her father, Lord Marchmain, lays dying in her home. Julia realizes that he was likely on a path set for hell, given his past sins of adultery. In addition to grieving for her father, she sees his lack of repentance as symbolic of her own irreconcilable rift with God. Her life as an adulteress echoes Lord Marchmain's sins; if he is not absolved, she believes she has no hope. However, her father does repent, in a near-miraculous deathbed reversion. It is this moment, in the height of her despair, that opens Julia's eyes to the extent of God's mercy; redemption is still possible. While her despair does not physically lead her to the Church in the same way that it does for Sebastian, Julia's identification with her father's sin and subsequent reconciliation achieves the same effect of reversion. In the end, Julia recognizes the extent of God's outreach in times of despair and human depravity, saying, "The worse I am, the more I need God. I can't shut myself out from his mercy."⁶

Charles, an atheist, encounters the Church and the Flyte family when he befriends Sebastian at Oxford. Charles is initially attracted by the apparently strong familial dynamics within the Flytes and is fascinated by the complex relationships within Sebastian's family as well as by the Faith itself. At the beginning, as he sees the Church through Sebastian's lens, it is no wonder that he can make no sense of Catholicism, as he is surrounded by those who believe the Faith and yet reject its moral teachings. For the majority of the novel, Charles identifies happiness as being the absence of discomfort, a definition that leads him further away from the reality of authentic joy. Charles ultimately departs from the Flytes, ignoring the reality of the Church.

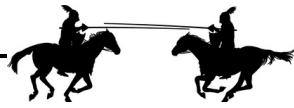
Later in the novel, Charles appears bitter and disenchanted. He enters into a marriage that, for him, is completely devoid of all love and happiness. He is hateful to his wife and, despite his earlier fascination with close families, is an absent father. After being consumed by his own contempt for life, he and Julia begin an affair that, to him, seems like the first real happiness he has had since the days of his friendship with Sebastian. Clinging to this facade of happiness, Charles essentially abandons his family, pursues a divorce, and begins to live in sin with Julia. Charles remains unbothered by his conscience—but as Julia wrestles with her faith, he realizes that her Catholic identity is not as dormant as he had thought, which ultimately threatens their supposed happiness. It is not until Lord Marchmain's repentance that Charles' "veil of the temple [is] rent from top to bottom"; it is then that he comes into full awareness, not just of his own faults, but of the total reality of the Catholic Church.⁷ This sudden realization comes at the same time as Julia's reconciliation,

which in turn brings about the end of their relationship. It is in this time, as Charles is essentially jolted into the acceptance of the truth, that he also loses the only semblance of happiness remaining in his life. Despite his misery, Charles is still able to repent and convert. It is ultimately Divine Providence that brought good out of his affair with Julia; it was his relationship with her that brought him into contact with the truth of redemption through Lord Marchmain's reversion. Charles, in the earlier parts of the novel, had a plethora of avenues to get to the Church, but it is not until he is so morally depraved that he is finally able to accept the truth of Catholicism. This again proves that redemption is found in cases of utter despair, as seen by Charles' transformation from utter sin and misery to the pursuit of authentic happiness that the Church promises in eternity.

As seen by the complete states of moral depravity and despair that each of these characters mires themselves in, and by their respective reconciliations, Divine Providence overcomes the most sinful patterns and circumstances. The modern thinker is like Charles, supposing that happiness is just the absence of discomfort. However, in the end, God stands as the only beacon of authentic happiness that shines through the shades of despair and suffering, just as the "small red flame - a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle" stands as the redemptive light in this world.⁸ Authentic piety is not mere avoidance of reality, but rather an identification with Christ's suffering, offering hope. Christ has defeated sin—despair is no match for His redemption. ✂

Notes

1. Marx, Karl. *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right."* 1843. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.
2. Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited.* Little, Brown, and Company, New York, 2012, pg. 355
3. Ibid, pg. 208
4. Ibid, pg. 297
5. Ibid, pg. 330
6. Ibid, pg. 392
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8. Ibid, pg. 402



The
POLITICAL
ENTHUSIASM



Bridget Noonan



Should We Fear ‘Epistocracy’ Any Less Than Democracy?

Bridget Noonan

Epistocracy is a form of government that distributes political power based on merit. It is promoted by Georgetown Professor Jason Brennan in his book *Against Democracy*, where he asserts we should reconsider the value of democracy and replace or supplement democracy with some form of epistocracy instead.¹ Democracy is an imperfect government system, but still regarded as the best government form we could implement. In the words of Winston Churchill, “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried.”² Government is a tool in society used to protect the rights of its citizens and promote justice; Brennan argues we should at least consider epistocracy as a potentially more effective solution in this

manner.³ His well-reasoned arguments beg the question: Should we fear epistocracy less than democracy? I argue no, indeed, we should fear epistocracy *more* than democracy, because epistocracy both inherently violates a government’s Social Contract with its citizens and is too easily corrupted.

Brennan most convincingly advocates for epistocracy on the basis of instrumentalism; he argues we ought to value government for its value in being the best way to promote justice.⁴ I will explain how, while Brennan’s argument is compelling, he makes a crucial mistake in his definition of instrumentalism that proves epistocracy would fail in its instrumental duties to a greater degree than democracy does. Brennan further would counter this by

asserting that while democracy is the best government type we currently have, we should at least test epistocracy, at a small scale if need be, to see if it is more adept at promoting justice.⁵ I argue, however, we should avoid even testing it, as epistocracy is inherently a form of government susceptible to corruption and thus would be too dangerous to even attempt its implementation in our imperfect world.

Epistocracy Inherently Violates the Social Contract

Brennan believes there are two methods by which to evaluate democracy: instrumentalism and proceduralism.⁶ An instrumental view of democracy is one that values democracy solely for its functionality; i.e., democracy's ability to promote justice better than any alternative form of government. Proceduralism, however, asserts there is *intrinsic* value in democracy. A proceduralist believes equal suffrage is a good in itself, not just a means to an end. Brennan argues democracy should be valued only insofar as it is instrumentally useful; if another form of government is more effective in promoting justice, he believes we should pursue that other government.⁷ This is the base he lays to argue for epistocracy, a form of government he believes would be far more effective in fulfilling governmental roles. Brennan believes democracy's value is a mix of the two, although he more heavily stresses the importance of democracy's instrumental role.⁸ He believes government is nothing more than a tool to achieve justice, and democracy is our imperfect hammer, albeit the best hammer we have found so far.⁹

Although I agree with Brennan that government is only useful insofar as it fulfills its duties and thus an instrumental view is essential in evaluating the value of democracy,

Brennan falters in his evaluation of the instrumental value of democracy. Brennan fails to acknowledge a key component of a government's instrumental value; a government's functionality rests on its ability to uphold its end of the Social Contract. The Social Contract, a principle of government legitimacy best articulated by esteemed philosopher John Locke, states: "men being... by Nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate and subjected to the Political Power of another without his own *Consent*. The only way whereby anyone divests himself of his Natural Liberty, and *puts on the bonds of Civil Society* is by agreeing with other Men to join and unite into a Community."¹⁰ The people must consent to sacrifice some of their rights in order to receive protection for other rights. A government's legitimacy stems from the consent of the governed. If citizens do not offer this consent through political participation, they cannot morally be subjected to the laws imposed by this government.¹¹ This is not to say a citizen can break any law they disagree with, but rather, as noted by Britannica author Brian Duignan: "there can be no subjection to power without consent—though once political society has been founded, citizens are obligated to accept the decisions of a majority of their number."¹² Citizens must offer their consent to be governed through political participation; once they offer this consent, they must abide by laws implemented by the government, being exempt only when the government breaks the social contract and violates citizens' fundamental rights.

One of Brennan's most compelling arguments he would counter with here is that of the antiauthority tenet. Brennan argues that even if people don't believe a superiority in

ability to discern truth qualifies some people more than others to make competent political decisions, they at least should acknowledge that some people’s foolishness with regard to politics should *disqualify* them from voting and potentially imposing foolish or even harmful policies on fellow innocent citizens.¹³ He uses an example of a plumber to show there are some fields in which others obtain superior knowledge to ours, and we would be better off trusting the care of our pipes (or, in the case of politics, our rights) to them. I argue that each person must first choose to hire the plumber. This may mean the plumber gets bad business and is forced out of the market, if there are enough fools not to accept him; but if he is truly qualified, we can trust the vast majority of people to, if they don’t have much plumbing knowledge themselves, identify who the best plumber is to hire. Bad plumbers will get worked out of the market, and good plumbers will likely find success. Even though many people in the United States are not educated in politics, they generally are able to discern who will best represent them in the political field; good politicians will more often than not find success, and bad ones will typically be identified and dropped. So yes, while some people are foolish and don’t have a great knowledge of politics, their political rights should not be stripped away in the name of protecting the safety of their fellow citizens; the hard working Vulcans (Brennan’s term for the logical, wise members of society) who run for office will find success if they truly are as talented at their job as Brennan thinks they’ll be.¹⁴ If they really know what they are doing, they will win the favor of the political market, including all its Hobbits (Brennan’s term for apathetic, disinterested citizens) and Hooligans

(Brennan’s term for emotional, prejudiced citizens).¹⁵

Epistocracy is Too Easily Corrupted To Be Successful

Brennan further argues that epistocracy *may* be better than democracy, so we ought to at least try implementing it, even if only on a small scale at first. This is a dangerous idea; epistocracy is indeed a form of government that will likely work more efficiently than democracy, and by his plan, we would thus scale up after its initial success. I fear any implementation, which may very likely lead to a great small-scale success, would blind us to the natural faults of epistocracy and lead us down a slippery slope to implement this easily corrupted form of government.

Brennan acknowledges the unfair discrimination many groups of people faced in the past when denied equal suffrage, appreciating the long struggle for African Americans and women to join the United States’ political sphere.¹⁶ He responds, however, by asserting they were denied suffrage for the wrong reasons, and *his* idea of distinguishing between those who deserve and don’t deserve suffrage is based solely on competence. He anticipates the obvious objection that there are people today still denied equal access to opportunity; this could create an unfair representation of citizens in government, likely being skewed to the wealthiest or most advantaged members of society, with little knowledge of how others live. He refutes this argument on the grounds that the solution would therefore be to promote educational equality, not to continue allowing universal suffrage.¹⁷ This is a poor assertion, underestimating the world’s ability to solve these issues; over the last two and a half centuries, the US still has not achieved equal

opportunity for all. Groups who have been discriminated against in terms of suffrage vary across history, and we likely will never live in a perfectly just world. We thus cannot put trust in any system easily susceptible to corruption. Just as socialism failed historically because it never could truly be implemented in its full ideal in our imperfect world, neither can epistocracy ever be justly implemented in our imperfect world.

Ben Bayer, a writer, fellow and director at the Ayn Rand Institute, acknowledges the common claim that the USSR never truly implemented socialism; Bayer then admonishes the idea that if tried again and with greater commitment to the original ideal, we would achieve better results.¹⁸ Lenin's socialism failed when power fell to Stalin, who massacred people with his KGB; Mao's socialism failed when he gained full power and murdered millions. Socialism has failed so many times historically because it is a form of government too susceptible to corruption for it to ever be truly successfully implemented.¹⁹ Epistocracy is the same; its nature shuts out entire swaths of civilian voices and allows others to rise to power under the premise that they are superior in the realm of politics. As historian Lord Acton once famously said, "power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely."²⁰ Even if the Vulcans who are given power are

superior in politics to their fellow citizens, this sense of superiority will corrupt them. While Brennan does not suggest giving all our rights to a wise king as Plato did, he proposes we raise a certain group of people over another and give them power over everyone's rights. This is a dangerous game. Regardless of how uneducated citizens are, they are entitled to have grievances about government and government policy; they often know more than the educated about what does and doesn't work in their society at the basic level than those in power do. If they can have no political power behind these grievances, the grievances are, in the words of A.D. Lindsay, "apt to be neglected."²¹

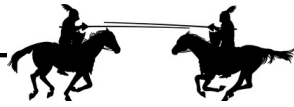
Conclusion

An imperfect world yields only imperfect forms of government. Brennan is correct in that we must search for a government form simply the best at promoting justice, but epistocracy is not that government. Epistocracy, from its very roots, violates the Social Contract in not acquiring the consent of the governed from *all* the governed, and it is a government form that can never be justly implemented in an unjust world. Given that we live in an unjust world, epistocracy is a danger to society, and we ought to fear it far more than democracy.

Notes

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2. Peter Millett, 2014, "The Worst Form of Government | Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Blogs," Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, March 5, 2014, <https://blogs.fcdo.gov.uk/petermillett/2014/03/05/the-worst-form-of-government/>.
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LITERARY
FEATURES



Gianna DeBono
William Thissell

Lamentation

Gianna DeBono

Under this soft and silver night a mother's tears fall as a bow upon a violin. Dark shadows dance a silent waltz across the walls, fluttering like gray moths and whispering feverish secrets to a sleeping child. He does not stir, nor does he cast a glance towards the anguished features of the woman in whose arms he limply rests. His mother has laid her blue veil across his body and pulls him firmly to her chest. Littered across the concrete floor are drifting constellations of clear glass, ebbing and flowing in splintered patterns that reverently reflect the child's ethereal face. He and the woman are alike in their stillness. She is listening for a breath stolen from the hand of God, sitting clothed in regality and watching her son's red gaze drip down her face, raking her worn skin in cutting strokes. His cheeks are sunken against gleaming bones and painted with ash, torn flesh tightly draped across a frozen rib cage.

Moonlight strikes the woman's face as she sings to her son. Her voice spills through the cool air like buttermilk and white roses. She sings words crumbling and weary, words with rusted syllables and gold-gilded edges, black silk words veneered with gossamer tears and ringing with broken copper bells. She sings as she rises to leave from the center of her concrete room, delicately stepping on shattered glass and past dancing shadows, scarlet ink spilling from the soles of her feet and the burning wound in her chest.

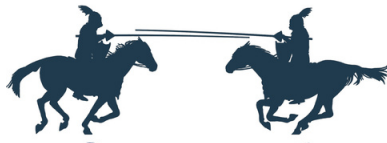
Her heart, though pierced by a sword, swells and quickens in the night, a modest percussion beneath the grand and sweeping crescendo of her mourning song. Before her sits a green mountain cloaked in the rising sun, its summit disappearing into a faint crown of stars. Wisps of grass melt into dark gravel beneath her and blanket the ground like snow. As a cross set upon her by heaven, her child lies heavy in her grasp, resplendent colors darting about his soft and lovely expression under the open sky. She lays him gently in the dirt as night is swept from the earth. Amidst dark soil and thorns, she kisses his forehead adoringly. The ground becomes still beneath them, exhaling a weary and final breath into the new morning. Alone, a mother lifts her mantle to cover her son's face, and the air tastes of salt and light.

The Snow-Pile

William Thissell

Out walking into the frozen forest of old on a blank opaque day,
I thought to myself “I should head back from here—
No, I continue toward the unadulterated serenity the winter hath wrought.”
The sky, white as a slate of brilliant marble, blots out the fearsome sun.
Just underneath, the lines of tall trees covered in snowflakes many inches deep
Just underneath, the once autumn colorful forest floor now shrouded
With me on top walking like its commander,
Reaping the benefits of the snowfall.
In the distance of
my conquered lands, I saw a hill—
No, a mountain of snow—
Children crowded around it, still with snow in their busy hands,
Wonderfully working together in seraphic sync as children do
When a shared goal is to be achieved.
At the first sight of me, many of the children scattered
Behind the monstrous mountain.
When I put a clump of snow upon the sky-high beast,
Only then did they emerge in a clamor;
Their childish faces rekindled with uniquely youthful exuberance,
Showering the frozen forest in delight,
Warming my heart as best they could!

Inspired by Robert Frost’s “The Wood-Pile”



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Featuring:

Keira Thomas

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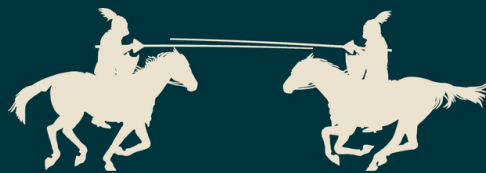
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