



MILLENNIUM CHARTER ACADEMY

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Character Scholarship Community



Welcome to our sixty-fifth edition of "The Academic Journal," a bimonthly bulletin in which you can read about MCA's educational philosophy, instructional methodology, and the various viewpoints and positions of our faculty, staff, students, and families.

Helping our Students Live Harmonious Lives

This is part one of a three part keynote address given by Mr. Paul Rezzo for the 2022 MCA Conference:
Classical Education-A Life Lived in Harmony.

About thirteen years ago, I was in my freshmen American Heritage class at Hillsdale, and the professor, an inspiring and funny man named Dr. Calvert, began the first class by lighting a match, and he gave us a little speech about how our life is but a brief flame – a match lit, burning, and extinguished. And as the flame was slowly burning down the stick and nearing his fingers, he talked briefly about how as we reach the end of our lives, what we'll be thinking about is not going to be business deals we profited from, likes and views we got on social media, all the food or drink we consumed, or praise we won. It's going to be the relationships in our lives. And we'll hope that we were there for our loved ones, for our family and for our friends. We'll think about weddings, children being born, baptisms, holidays, and birthdays, and we will hope that we were the kind of men and women who put those things first while we had the chance. Talk about keeping the end in mind.

Interestingly enough, as you enter the small town of Hillsdale, you are greeted by a sign that says Welcome to Hillsdale: it's the people. That town motto "It's the People" became an unofficial motto of the college, and the more I think about it, it's what classical education is all about in my mind. Bringing together good people like this wonderful faculty here, people who love their families, their friends, and their community. People who want to both improve the minds *and* develop the hearts of their students, so that they can go on and do the same for their families, friends, and community.

So, what I would like to do today is very briefly provide some simple thoughts on what I consider to be the most important end of a classical education, how this purpose is beautifully aligned with the purpose of human beings in general, and how modern philosophies frustrate our students' ability to achieve this purpose.

To do this, I'll go back five years now to when Mr. McCrary and Mrs. Braley called me in and said they wanted me to run a brand-new philosophy course where all I would have to do is teach the meaning of life to a bunch of high school sophomores. More specifically, they wanted me to present a coherent classical vision of our anthropology--meaning WHAT we are as human beings and WHY we are what we are. In other words, what is our nature as human beings and what is our purpose and how does a classical philosophical understanding of this lead to flourishing in our lives and relationships? And though this all sounded a bit daunting to plan, luckily I am not a chronological snob, as CS Lewis might say, someone who turns his nose at the classics; if anything, I am more of a chronological pirate who is not afraid to sail the seas of time, searching for the best that's been thought and said by the greatest classical thinkers and seizing their treasures, and there's nothing they can do to stop me! But the truth is, they would want me to have it and to share it with my crew, and as a classical teacher, I am quick to climb upon the shoulders of "giants" like Aristotle or Aquinas and am grateful to

let them do the heavy lifting because I would not dare assume that my modern mind would be better suited to make it up as I go rather than going back in time and following the common thread of intellectual and moral excellence throughout the ages.

So just as an archer needs a target, in my class we needed something to aim for, so on the first day of class I decide to begin with the end in mind, and I start by encouraging my students to use their uniquely human natural faculty of reason to wonder about what overarching purpose might be woven into the fabric of our being. So I got the idea to ask them two questions: how do we know that we have the ability to love and how do we know that we desire to be loved, and through their reasonable observations and experiences, we quickly get to the basic idea that there's a driving force in their lives that rises above all else, and it has something to do with relationship.

Now of course, when you use that word with a bunch of high schoolers, some of them get a little nervous because they think immediately of romance and who's dating who, and luckily for them we don't go there, at least not for a month or so. But we do wonder about what love is, that maybe it's not just fuzzy, subjective feelings and niceties that involve tolerating someone and making them *feel* good, but that love actually involves action, putting another first, and giving of yourself to help them to truly *be* good, as they do the same for you. We also think about how we are not born into isolation for a solitary human experience. So they think about relationships that are first and foremost in their lives, relationships that they cherish deeply and that help them to be the people they are today. On a human level, the students mention the most important people in their lives and begin to think about family and friends and how our overarching purpose, above all else, must involve being a good a son or daughter, brother or sister, someday a good husband or wife or father or mother, it must involve being a good friend, classmate, teammate, coworker, neighbor, citizen.

So many people today have no idea why they are here, and yet, boom, on day 1 of class, we feel like we have found our overarching purpose in life. Relationship. And it's a good thing we figured this out because according to Natural Law, we can use our rational minds to determine whether or not something is good by thinking through whether or not that thing is in line with its nature and purpose as intended, and if it is, then its considered good, (in other words, it is good because it is being what it is meant to be). And in the classical sense, this goodness is absolutely essential to happiness. But, if something goes against its nature and purpose as intended, there's going to be problems.



Paul Rezzo, College Counselor

There are many questions you can find to illustrate this, so I ask my students some silly ones, "What would happen if your mom tried to sew buttons onto your shirt using a fork instead of a needle? What if you tried to write a letter with a spaghetti noodle? How far would your dad's car get if he filled the gas tank with water? Would eating sand keep your body healthy and well-nourished?"

There's ancient saying that works well to summarize what these questions are getting at: "You can chase out nature with a pitchfork, but it'll keep running back." In other words, you can't really break natural law, it just breaks you, and likely society in turn. Natural Law is not about random, arbitrary rules, it's about bringing your mind into union with reality and allowing that to ground you in the solid truth of what things are and what they are intended for. This provides a natural walking trail with clearly marked signs and railings, not to impose on us, but to propose to us the best path to happiness and interior harmony. Social harmony is built on the inner harmony of the individual, and the best shot we have at achieving that interior harmony is acquiring virtue.

Continued in the next issue.

