

“Academic Friendship”

In this essay, I offer some philosophically informed reflection on the aims of college and university teaching.¹ In doing so, I shall draw on my own experience, which is that of teaching philosophy at a selective private university which is also religious. Despite the fact that that experience is not typical of my profession, I hope that what I have to say will resonate more broadly with college and university teachers who are committed to giving their students a good education.

I begin by observing that the relationship between teachers and students is a partnership. I believe that when that relationship flourishes, the partnership becomes a kind of friendship which I shall refer to as ‘academic friendship’. While academic friendship of a kind can develop between an advisor and advisees or between a professor and teaching assistants, the academic friendship that I shall discuss is that which develops between a professor and undergraduate students in her class.

In the first section, I explore what kind of friendship it can be. It is often said that education should aim at making students autonomous. In the second section, I argue that the while autonomy is a worthy goal of higher education, it is not sufficient. In the third section, I discuss qualities of mind other than those constitutive of autonomy which college and university education should try to encourage. In the fourth section, I draw on section I’s treatment of academic friendship to say how those qualities might be encouraged. I close by considering the claim that the conception of education I have sketched is objectionably elitist.

¹ I am grateful to my colleagues Fred Freddoso and Gary Gutting, whose insights into university teaching have greatly contributed to the way I think of it.

- I -

Academic friendship as I understand it is a good in the lives of students and teachers that is choice-worthy for its own sake, but it also has ends beyond itself which help to give the friendship its point. One of those is an end at which all parties to the friendship should aim: learning. Another is an end which it is the special responsibility of the teacher to have in view: the development in their students of certain qualities of mind that – it is hoped -- they will continue to exercise at least episodically after their experience with that teacher ends. The classic discussion of friendship in the philosophical literature is Aristotle's. It will be useful to see where academic friendship fits into the schema that Aristotle developed.

Aristotle famously distinguished true friendships from friendships founded on pleasure and on utility.² His example of the third kind is the friendship that develops between those, such as business associates, each of whom enters into the partnership for his own benefit.³ In the contemporary world of higher education, the partnership between teachers and students might seem to fit most comfortably into this third category. For it is commonly remarked that higher education is increasingly commodified. Part of what is meant by this is that learning is increasingly treated – by administrators, faculty and students -- as a product whose value is strictly instrumental and is determined by market forces. One of the ways commodification shows itself is in

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon (New York, NY: Random House, 1941), VIII,3.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII,4 at 1157a14.

the expectations that students and faculty bring to their relationship. When education is commodified, students regard themselves as customers who are entitled to satisfaction with a product for which they have paid -- a product provided by a professor who feels obliged to cater to demand and taste, and who is primarily concerned with being remunerated for her efforts. Under those circumstances, any friendship that develops between teachers and students *is* likely to fall into Aristotle's third category.

But the treatment of education as a commodity which must be tailored to satisfy student demand is a mistake. The mistake consists, at least in part, in seriously misunderstanding how the goods of a classroom education are to be identified and conveyed. They are not to be identified by consulting student demand since students have at best an imperfect knowledge of what facts and skills they need to master. Those facts and skills are not to be conveyed in ways that cater to students' tastes, since students may not bring to the classroom a taste for the rigor that mastery of those facts and skills requires. The academic friendship that develops when education is commodified has inherent limits, and the limits reflect these misunderstandings. For the friendship depends upon parties to it satisfying one another's expectations of a relationship that is beneficial, and beneficial as judged by the desires brought to the partnership. I have said that the partnership between professors and students has a point beyond itself at which the professor should aim, and that that point is encouraging in students certain qualities of mind. I shall contend later that among those qualities of mind is a taste for intellectually demanding material. If that is right, then the professor should try to make her partnership with students formative: she should strive to form students' intellectual tastes. She

cannot do that if, as commodification implies, she takes students' tastes as given and thinks that her task is to cater to them.

The friendship that should develop between teachers and students has some affinities to the best form of a kind of friendship that Aristotle mentions in passing: the friendship that can develop among fellow travelers. This relationship may seem an unpromising model for the partnership between teachers and students, since Aristotle brings it up to show how relationships can break down over disagreements about common expenses and to exemplify what he seems to regard as attenuated uses of the word 'friend'.⁴ In fact the relationship between fellow travelers can be an approximation, albeit a limited approximation, of true friendship. It is this possibility that I want briefly to explore.

In true friendship, Aristotle says, the partners in the friendship recognize one another's good character. They spend time together in activities in which they develop and exercise the virtues that make their characters good. When partners engage in such activities over time, and when the engagement deepens their appreciation for one another's good character, they develop affection for one another that itself helps to sustain the friendship.⁵ In perfect friendships, this affection is especially deep. Each develops the kind of affection for the other that she has for herself. That is why Aristotle speaks of a true friend as 'another self'.⁶

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 9 at 1159b27ff.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 5.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX, 9.

A friendship which develops among fellow travelers is not a perfect friendship, at least if the trip is reasonably short and the further development of the friendship is occluded by the end of the journey. It can, however, have elements of true friendship. Fellow travelers can come to recognize one another's generosity and forbearance, their curiosity about new peoples and places, and their dedication to learning more about the sites to which their travels take them. They can spend time together in activities in which they exercise and further develop these qualities of character. Travel can, of course, be informative and broadening. When it is, travelers exercise their virtues of curiosity and openness in the individual and joint realization of goods that are both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable. Some of the affection characteristic of friendship can develop through mutual aid in coping with the challenges and inconveniences of travel. But it can also develop through the deepened acquaintance brought about by passing time together and, more importantly, by the shared experience of discovery.

Like the partnership between fellow travelers, that between students and professors does not have the potential for perfect friendship. Parties to the educational partnership, like fellow travelers, know that their time together does not extend into the indefinite future, since they know that it will end with the conclusion of the quarter or the semester, as travelers know theirs will end with the conclusion of their trip. But that partnership can still exhibit some of the characteristics of true friendship and for some of the same reasons that that between fellow travelers can. When education goes well, professors and students learn from one another. Professors deepen their knowledge of curricular material by teaching it and they learn how effectively to adapt their

presentations of that material to successive generations of students with different sets of intellectual and cultural reference points. Students, of course, are expected to master the material presented to them and to ask questions which deepen their own understanding. Thus like the activities of travel when a trip goes well, the activities of constitutive of education are – when they go well -- informative and broadening. And, as with travel, the goods which are realized in those activities are intrinsically as well as instrumentally valuable.

Teaching and learning draw on qualities of character, about which I shall say more shortly, that professors and students exercise in the pursuit and attainment of those goods. As in travel, so in education, some of those qualities are displayed in mutual aid. Those on the same trip help one another cope with the inconveniences of travel, and can thus serve as one another's allies against its difficulties. At least in the humanities, where even someone who has taught the same material for many years can still arrive at a deeper understanding of it, students and professors can serve as allies against the difficulty of academic material. Their appreciation of one another's character, of what each brings to the educational enterprise, of their shared concern for its success and of the shared joy of discovery, can all lead to bonds of friendly affection. The development of the appropriate kind of friendship between professors and students is one of the joys of teaching. The friendship itself is a good in the lives of both teachers and students, and can heighten commitment to the educational enterprise on both sides.

Another feature of the educational partnership which keeps it from being a perfect friendship is that it lacks the equality that Aristotle thought necessary for perfect

friendship.⁷ One inequality is an inequality of emotional, social and intellectual development. Another is an inequality of power. These differences imply that there are some activities which parties to the friendship will not want to share and some which it would be inappropriate for them to share. The fact that so much will not and ought not be shared limits the depth and intensity the friendship can reach. But the inequalities that account for those limits also give the friendship its point. It is because of students' stage in their intellectual development, and their interest in developing further through education, that they enter into a partnership with their teachers by putting themselves under their teachers' authority and guidance. Teachers enter into it by assuming responsibility for developing their students. Thus the friendship that can emerge between them is like one among fellow travelers. But it is like one in which one of the travelers has the job of planning the journey for the education her companions, so that they develop in ways that they continue to draw on after their discoveries have been made and their journey ends.

I have explored the possibility of a kind of friendship between professors and students because I believe it sheds light on the character and aims of the partnership between professors and students. Desirable qualities bulk large in Aristotle's treatment of friendship and the development that professors are responsible for stimulating in their students is, in part, the development of certain desirable qualities of mind. According to Aristotle, friends recognize and are drawn to one another's good qualities. The affection born of this mutual recognition sustains commitment to the joint activities in which those

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII,6.

qualities are exercised and further developed. This development on students' part is the point of the partnership between professors and students. I want to suggest that one way professors should contribute to its attainment is by modeling the qualities of mind we want our students to acquire. We should do so in hopes that as a result of our academic friendship with them, they will be drawn to those qualities and will want to exercise them themselves. In the next section, I shall begin to identify those qualities and to say what is desirable about them.

- II -

It is often said that formal education should be education for autonomy. The claim that it should be is defended by political, instrumental and perfectionist arguments. According to the political argument, education should foster the qualities of mind needed for liberal democratic citizenship and autonomy – or, more precisely, the qualities whose exercise makes for autonomy -- is among of those qualities. According to the instrumental argument, education for autonomy helps students to realize their interest in leading a good life.⁸ According to the perfectionist argument, students should be educated for autonomy because education should foster the qualities needed to lead a good life, and autonomy is partially constitutive of such a life.

The political and instrumental arguments have obvious advantages if what is wanted are arguments that can publicly justify an education for autonomy. For such

⁸ Richard Arneson and Ian Shapiro, "Democratic Autonomy and Religious Freedom: A Critique of *Wisconsin v. Yoder*," in *Democracy's Place*, edited by Ian Shapiro (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) pp. 167-71.

arguments would have to show that education for autonomy serves legitimate public purposes. The political and instrumental arguments promise to do that, while the perfectionist argument – appealing as it does to claims about the good life – seems not to.⁹ I believe that many of us who teach at colleges and universities are perfectionists about autonomy. We think autonomy is partially constitutive of a good life, and choice-worthy as an end in itself. If I was right to suggest at the end of the previous section that professors can and should model the qualities we want our students to acquire, then it follows that we should model autonomy.

What is an education for autonomy? I take its advocates to mean that one of the goals of formal education should be to bring it about that students hold their beliefs, or some important – though not necessarily large -- subset of their beliefs, autonomously.

What is it to hold beliefs autonomously? This is not easy to determine from the writings of those who favor education for autonomy. One of the difficulties is that, though moral philosophers have done a great deal of work on autonomy in recent decades, their work is rarely engaged by those who take autonomy to be the goal of education. As a result, it is hard to tell how the uses of ‘autonomy’ in the educational literature are connected to uses of the word that are paradigmatic in practical philosophy, such as Kant’s use of it to refer to giving oneself the moral law. I conjecture that the common idea is this: To act autonomously is to follow the authority of reason. To live autonomously is to follow the authority of reason in the on-going conduct of one’s life.

⁹ I explore some aspects of the distinction between political and perfectionist arguments in Paul Weithman, “Education for Political Autonomy,” in *Wisdom of the Christian Faith*, edited by Paul Moser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

To hold one's beliefs autonomously is to follow the authority of reason in determining what to believe about how to live or what one should do. By that I take advocates of education for autonomy to mean that students should be taught to endorse those beliefs about how to live or about what they should do which they take to enjoy the strongest rational support.

Holding one's beliefs autonomously in this sense requires the acquisition of certain concepts and skills. It requires gaining some, perhaps inarticulate, grasp of the concepts of reasons for belief and of rational support. It also helps to be able to distinguish various kinds of rational support such as inductive, probabilistic and deductive support, to assess degrees of support and to recognize common fallacies. Assessing degrees of support, in turn, requires a skill that is more often described metaphorically than analyzed: the skill of "distancing" oneself from one's beliefs or of gaining "critical distance" from them.¹⁰ For only when such "distance" is gained will the degree of confidence someone attaches to a belief reflect what she takes to be the strength of the evidence for it, rather than – for example -- the emotional investment he may have in it because it is his.

Education for autonomy is generally thought to include an education in these skills.¹¹ Sometimes it is also thought to require education for public deliberation, so that students learn to offer reasons for their beliefs about what the polity should do and so that they learn how to support, change, modify or compromise their views when confronted

¹⁰ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 77.

¹¹ Harry Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," *Ethics* 108 (1998): 728.

with appropriately strong counterarguments.¹² Exercising these skills is said to be compatible with holding beliefs about how to live on the basis of trust or testimony, provided one thinks -- or perhaps one sees how -- the trusted or testifying source can itself be rationally supported.

I said earlier that I think most of us who teach at college and university are perfectionists about autonomy. And so I believe most of us think that seeing where reason leads, believing on its basis and recognizing its limits enables students realize very great intellectual values and to lead lives that are, in that important respect, intrinsically better than the alternatives. That is why, regardless of our discipline, we try to educate our students in the skills I have just described.

Why is it better to lead a life characterized by the exercise of these skills? One standard answer is that such a life is better because it is, in important ways, free. For when someone guides her life by the authority of her own reason, she is said to be living a life that is “self-governing”¹³ and therefore independent. Furthermore, leading a self-governing life is thought to be incompatible with complacency, dogmatism, unquestioning trust, and blindly following the dictates of parental or religious authority in determining how to live or what to do. So a life that is independent in this way is free of the various forms of unreason that some college and university teachers think are

¹² When is someone prepared to engage in public deliberation? The answer has to be that someone is prepared only if she has a family of intellectual and deliberative dispositions. That is, she is prepared only if she has the right attitude toward her own views, and she has the right attitude toward her own views only if it is true of her that she would respond in the proper ways were she presented with arguments of certain kinds. And so saying with any precision just what attitudes educators should encourage requires spelling out counterfactuals that become very complicated very quickly. I have tried to do that in Paul Weithman, “Deliberative Character” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (2005): 263-83.

¹³ See, for example, Amy Gutmann, “Civic Education and Social Diversity”, *Ethics* 105 (1995): 572.

prevalent among their students. The belief that these defects are prevalent no doubt goes some way toward explaining the emphasis on education for autonomy in recent literature in the philosophy of education.

Educating our students for autonomy presupposes that they can and will develop an effective desire to exercise those skills. It presupposes, that is, they can and will develop an effective desire to follow for its own sake what they take to be the authority of reason in deciding what to believe about how to live. But how they can take an interest in what reason dictates, so that they acknowledge and are therefore moved by its authority, is not at all well understood. It is not well understood in part because of the difficulty of saying exactly what the desire to follow the authority of reason is a desire *for*. It seems unlikely that the desire we want to encourage in our students is simply a first-order desire just to respond to what they take to be good reasons, without any accompanying higher-order desires. Since we want students to reflect on why they believe what they do, we would like them to respond to good reasons as such, under that description. But is this desire a desire to follow epistemic principles which reason validates? Or is it, in the first instance, a desire to be the kind of person who frees herself from dogmatism and prejudice, and who follows such principles?

I shall assume that the desire to follow reason's authority, and thereby to realize autonomy as understood here, either includes or is heightened by the desire to be such a person. If we are to educate students for autonomy, we have to arouse or implant that desire in them. We who teach students can model the qualities we want them to acquire by evincing open-mindedness and intellectual honesty, as well as concern for evidence,

clarity of reasoning and soundness of argument. I said in section I that our students could come to desire the qualities of mind we model for them if our partnership with them has developed into an academic friendship. An argument Samuel Scheffler has made in another connection suggests that this might happen as a result of our modeling those qualities.

In modeling the qualities of autonomy, we show that we are subject to the same authority that we expect our students to acknowledge, the authority of reason. Scheffler has argued that the experience of subjection to a common authority can give rise to a sense of solidarity among those subject and hence to a kind of friendship among them. While Scheffler's paradigms are cases of subjection to a common authoritative person, he says that bonds of solidarity and friendship can also develop in the case of common subjection to the authority of norms. He says:

... we must all confront the normative dimension of human experience. We all live in the shadow of norms, principles, reasons, and ideals that, rightly or wrongly, we regard as authoritative. And although our values vary, the experience of responding to normative authority – of trying to be guided by values and norms that we accept – is part of our common experience. And this too makes possible a form of solidarity -- a form of solidarity that derives from the shared experience of subjection, not to a common authority figure, but to normativity or authority itself.¹⁴

¹⁴ Samuel Scheffler, "The Good of Toleration", in his *Equality and Tradition: Questions of Value in Moral and Political Theory*, edited by Samuel Scheffler (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 332.

Scheffler's argument is interesting and suggestive. While he does not say that common subjection to authority of reason as I have discussed it here creates solidarity, his argument raises the question of whether evidence of that common subjection can itself provide grounds for friendship among a professor and students.

We might think that it can, at least when the students first arrive in college or university. For some students, at least, find that the demands we make of them to reason clearly and to support their conclusions rigorously are intellectually exciting. This, at least, is my experience in introducing students to philosophy, some of whom find the questions and methods of the subject to be an exhilarating discovery. Almost all students find those demands harder to satisfy than the demands made of them at previous stages of their education. Their subjection to new norms of argument, and the felt difficulty of satisfying them, are salient parts of their education. Scheffler's reasoning suggests that by subjecting students to those norms and by modeling allegiance to them ourselves, we can foster an academic friendship in which students admire allegiance to those norms and aspire to become the kind of persons who act from them.

Perhaps we can. And perhaps if we succeed, our students will hold their beliefs about how to live less dogmatically and complacently. But if we try to encourage allegiance to abstract norms of reasoning and argument, we risk combatting dogmatism by encouraging another trait that we lament in our students: the familiar propensity to aim – debater-like -- at victory in argument rather than at truth. In philosophy, we also run a risk Kyla Ebels-Duggan refers to in her contribution to this volume. Philosophy can

muster strong arguments for and against so many ethical positions that students may come to think their own desires are the only bases for deciding how to live. In that case, what is supposed to be an education for autonomy will prove self-undermining, since students will not end up guiding their lives by the authority of their own *reason* after all.

I am, however, skeptical that we could succeed in the way that I have taken Scheffler's article to suggest. I do not have an argument to show that we cannot, but let me identify one reason for my skepticism. That is that the line of thought seems to me to rest upon a false premise. For my experience is that what is salient for college students, even beginners, is not their subjection to unfamiliar and rigorous standards of reasoning which are impersonally applied across disciplines. It is, rather, that they are subject to demanding norms by this or that professor, and they are subject to norms which are specific to philosophy or to English composition or to textual interpretation or – for my most advanced students – to real analysis. This suggests that as we try to model qualities of autonomy, we have to bear in mind that those qualities are exercised while we reason in ways, and take up questions, that are discipline-specific. Thinking about how we might do that brings to light other qualities of mind that want to encourage in our students besides those that I have identified so far as contributing to autonomy. To see what those qualities are, I want to return to the question of why education for autonomy is thought to be so important.

- III -

In the last section, I conjectured that autonomy is so often taken as a goal of formal education, including higher education, because of educators perceive or assume a

widespread dogmatism or unthinking deference in their students that they wish to combat. I tried to suggest how an education for autonomy might remedy these shortcomings without contesting the diagnosis.

Although I teach at a Catholic university at which almost all of the students self-identify as religious and have had considerable religious education, I do not find my undergraduates to be particularly dogmatic. The shortcoming I find to be much more common can be illustrated by recounting an experience that I often have when I introduce students to great texts in the history of ethics. That is that they read the authors as thinking about the moral life in roughly the way that they do. Thus many of them read Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant all as valuing authenticity, non-judgmentalism, service and well-roundedness. Sustaining these interpretations requires students to go to great lengths to locate their own views in the texts and demands considerable hermeneutic ingenuity. More important for present purposes, it also reflects a blinkered imagination.

This constriction of the imagination is not to be confused with the dogmatism that education for autonomy is supposed to remedy. The dogmatist is able to entertain the possibility that the author under consideration defends very different conclusions than he does, but he insists that she is wrong to do so. Because the students I have in mind read into texts views which they take to be not just true but obviously so, it never crosses their minds that the fundamental questions of human life have been posed and answered in many different ways. This poverty of the imagination does not just limit the ways students read texts. It also limits their ability to imagine and pursue intellectual and moral options that are open to them. It therefore restricts their freedom, albeit in a very

different way than dogmatism would. For dogmatism restricts freedom by undermining self-direction; poverty of the imagination restricts it by reducing what students regard as live possibilities. It follows that an education which enriches students' imaginations promises to enhance their freedom in a very different way than education for autonomy as I have discussed it so far.

Once this kind of enhancement is taken to be a goal of higher education, we need to revisit the question of what contributions we who serve on college and university faculties can make to its attainment. I suggested at the end of the previous section that the qualities we most obviously model for our students are discipline-specific or that they are qualities which are exercised across disciplines but which we model in discipline-specific ways. So to address the question of what contributions we can make to the attainment of the goal, it will help to ask what contributions college and university professors are well suited to make in virtue of our disciplinary training.

That training is advanced, and quite often doctoral-level. To complete it, we had to spend years mastering what had already been achieved in our disciplines. One of the reasons we were drawn to work of that kind, I think, is that we are inspired – rather than repelled or defeated – by the depth and complexity of what has already been achieved in our areas of study. The achievement that drew us into and that holds us to our academic disciplines may be the contrapuntal structure of a Bach fugue, the lovely architectonic of John Rawls's theory of justice, the beautiful proofs of equilibrium results in economics, the ways Cicero and Augustine exploited the syntactic possibilities of classical Latin, the elegant equations of quantum electrodynamics, or a thousand other things. But whatever

those achievements are, we who have done advanced disciplinary work are unusual in being excited by them.

In some classes, at least, we have the opportunity to teach our students about the material whose complexity excites us. Their coming to understand the complexity of that material by working through it – laying out arguments, analyzing fugal or syntactic structure or solving problems -- is an exercise of students' reason. The exercise can be arduous, but the processes of gradual discovery and deepening appreciation can also be sources of great pleasure. One reason they can be sources of pleasure is that coming to understand a new style of painting or of music, of writing or of proof, often requires the application of new concepts by which to analyze and describe our experiences.

Appreciating the best exemplars of those styles is a matter of learning to see in those paintings or musical compositions or novels or proofs complexities that would have eluded or confused or bored us without the right education. Learning thus enriches experience and the enrichment of experience holds the promise of intellectual pleasures which are new. These are pleasures which are enjoyed by we who love learning. We can communicate our enthusiasm for them to our students in hopes that they will become the kind of persons who enjoy those pleasures as well.

Analysis of a text, of a musical piece, of use of language, of a scientific or social scientific theory also brings to light the accomplishment involved in the work analyzed. We who teach these works are well positioned to appreciate those accomplishments because, having worked through them ourselves and having tried to make specialized contributions of our own, we understand just how hard-won they were. And so two more

things that we can communicate to our students that they may not get from anyone else are an enthusiasm for the great accomplishments of the human mind as such and a heightened appreciation of what tremendous accomplishments they are.

Coming to understand those accomplishments can bring students considerable satisfaction. We who teach college have all seen students grow in confidence and self-respect as they gain some command of difficult material. It can also, and should also, induce humility. For to come to understand intellectual accomplishment is to come to see how hard intellectual problems are, how resistant those problems are to human understanding and how talented and hard-working are the people who have offered answers to them that are worth studying.

Moreover, I take the creation of beauty, the pursuit of knowledge of the natural and social worlds, and the attempt to understand the human condition to be pursuits whose importance is obvious. And I take a nuanced and informed appreciation of what has been achieved in these pursuits --- a nuanced and informed appreciation of artistic and intellectual achievements -- to be part of a well-lived human life. One of the reasons I take such appreciation to be part of a well-lived life is that the importance of the pursuits in which these achievements are won may not be obvious to students. Seeing the standards by which success in them is reckoned, and gaining some appreciation how works have been fashioned which meet those standards, should lead students to value those pursuits because they are activities to which intrinsic goods of beauty, knowledge and understanding are internal. Another of the reasons I take appreciation of great achievements of the human mind to be important is that they are great achievements of

the *human* mind. They are the achievements of members of our species who are engaged in practices created and sustained by us. Appreciating them should move students to respect the faculties which all of human beings have a share and thereby, it is hoped, to respect for humanity itself. I therefore take encouraging such appreciation to be among the goals of a humanistic education and hence among the goals at which every college education – whether at a religious or non-religious institution -- should aim.

But I assume that even if we who have done advanced disciplinary work love intellectual intricacy, we do not love it just for its own sake or just because appreciating it advances humanistic values. I assume we are also drawn to it because we think it suits the intricacy and complexity of the world.¹⁵ What it means for intellectual complexity to suit the complexity of the world may be clearest in physical or social sciences which make use of mathematical models to describe the objects of inquiry. But I assume the same is true in the arts and humanities, where complicated interpretations may be needed to bring out the nuances of the work under consideration, and where works themselves must be nuanced to do justice to the human realities they explore.

The intellectual complexity that interests me most in the present connection is that to which I am most attracted and that with which I am best acquainted. That is the complexity of philosophy. The best practitioners of that discipline have always assumed that progress can be made only by uncompromising rigor, by insistence on the significance of fine distinctions, and by careful examination of the questions being posed

¹⁵ There are, of course, exceptions. See Sergiu Hart, “An Interview with Robert Aumann”, *Macroeconomic Dynamics* 9 (2005): 686-87. Aumann makes the same point in his “Autobiography”, accessed April 9, 2012, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/2005/aumann-autobio.html.

and the answers being floated. Deep understanding of philosophical texts draws on the same skills to recover the problems with which those texts are concerned, the answers they propound and the alternative questions and answers they reject or overlook. The historical, exegetical and systematic questions with which philosophers are concerned demand that these skills be brought to bear. It is their exercise that gives philosophical work its distinctive kinds of complexity and exactness.

The need to draw distinctions, multiply questions and clarify concepts is as pressing in practical philosophy as it is in other areas of the discipline because moral reality itself is complicated. The subtitle of the conference at which papers in this volume were first presented is “Problems of Morality and Justice”. We who study those problems and their history are aware of how wide a range of considerations bear upon them. It is hard to know whether some of those considerations trump others absolutely or whether they should be balanced and, if so, how. We know how hard it is to pose a problem of morality and justice in tractable form, and we know that philosophers have identified very different problems as central. Moreover, we have all had the experience of thinking that we know enough to make some progress on a problem, only to read something that shows us dimensions of that problem of which we had previously been unaware, dimensions that have been painstakingly explored by others whose work we realize we need to learn. Thus intellectual work in moral and political philosophy – as in other areas of philosophy and, I assume, as in all areas of inquiry humanistic, mathematical and scientific – is regularly punctuated by reminders of a familiar truth: the problems on which we are working are harder than we thought.

Speaking for myself, I find the first glimpse of new intellectual territory to be a bracing experience. While the thought of entering virgin space is intimidating, I look forward to exploring new territory when I know that I can make my way through it with the help of scholars who have gone before me. The prospect of eventually being able to look at a fascinating problem from a different place is part of what keeps me going. In this, I assume I am like most college and university professors who are sustained in our work by the joy of discovery. The real benefit of realizing how hard our problems are is not, however, the pleasure that accompanies progress and insight. It is the brake that that realization provides. Seeing how hard intellectual problems are – including moral and political problems – and seeing how much can and should be learned about them, greatly diminishes the attraction of simple answers and of those that are most commonly accepted. Appreciation of complexity halts the precipitate march to premature conclusions.

Our students are not naturally sensitive to the difficulty of moral and political problems. My own experience is that even before they can entertain answers, they have to learn to be bothered by the questions and to be shown their many dimensions. And so another thing that we can and should do for our students is to show them that even the most familiar human phenomena admit of complex explanations, that they do so because moral and political reality are hard, that the great questions of humanity – and the great questions facing our society -- are therefore complicated, and that the easy answers are more likely to merit suspicion than acceptance.

This may itself alleviate the many of the intellectual shortcomings college and university faculty say they detect in their students. Consider again the students I mentioned at the beginning of this section who read their own moral views into great texts in the history of philosophical and religious ethics. I opined then that the reason they do so is not that they hold their views dogmatically, but because they are unable to imagine alternatives. They do not know enough about moral thinking to imagine that someone might look at the moral world very differently than they do, with different conceptions of human happiness and fulfillment or wrongdoing and guilt. And so the other, less strained and more faithful interpretations that classic works might bear simply do not occur to them.

Part of teaching students about the complexity of the moral world is recovering the questions posed by great thinkers of the past and showing why those thinkers posed the questions they did. Another part is assessing the answers to those questions, both according to the standards used by the thinkers who offered them and by standards of adequacy for us. Because of the difficulty of moral and political problems, I do not think we can offer knock-down arguments for, or marshal the full authority of reason behind, answers to those problems. We who explore these problems in our teaching can indicate what arguments we find most compelling, and present them forcefully, while openly acknowledging the difficulties with them. What we *must* do is to show students that their initial formulations of questions and answers need considerable refinement.

Showing them even that much is freeing, and freeing in a different way than the education for autonomy discussed in the previous section. For as students come to

understand how differently the human world has been conceived at different times and by different thinkers, the various ways in which they might live, including the various ways they might understand and live their religious tradition, are greatly multiplied. Removing the blinkers from their moral and religious imaginations by multiplying possibilities frees them from the self-imposed necessity of choosing from a small number of familiar options.

Of course, even if students' imaginations become less constricted as a result of education, they still need the confidence to explore newly opened possibilities. That confidence may not be easily found. My tentative generalization about students is that many of the traits that we think we see in them – uncritical acceptance of answers provided by a moral or religious authority, a tradition or a revered text; facile debating; the toleration of any intellectual or moral position whatever; the tendency to read all authors as agreeing with them – stem at least in part from a desire for simple solutions to the problems of life. The desire for simple solutions, in turn, stems in part from an understandable aversion to intellectual effort and in part from the conflation of simplistic clarity with toughness and moral strength. But I think students, like many other people, also seek simple solutions because they find comfort in the thought that the world, including the moral world, is easily comprehended. The recognition that it is not is part of intellectual maturity. It is also a quality of mind that is needed to live a good life and to be a good citizen. Encouraging it should be one of the goals of a college or university education. In the next section, I shall suggest a way for college and university faculty can encourage it.

- IV -

In section II, I argued that if we are to educate students for autonomy as that is usually understood, we must encourage them to become the kind of person whom their reason moves by the exercise of its authority. In section III, I argued that there are other exercises of their reason which we also want to affect them. We want our students to admire the complexity of great intellectual accomplishments and to appreciate what makes those accomplishments great. We want them to take pride in gaining some understanding of those achievements but also to be humbled by their magnitude. We want them to respect human reason and humanity itself. We want them to be moved in the right way by the complexity of the world, including the human world, so that they do not shy away from the difficulty of moral and political problems or seek refuge in easy solutions.

If students are to become persons who are affected in these ways, their education must do more than develop their intelligence. It must also shape their cares, their tastes and their desires. For example, if they are to appreciate great works of literature or philosophy, economics or music or physics, they have to develop a taste for intellectual beauty and elegance. If they are to take pride in the mastery of difficult material, they have to care about learning and regard it as a worthy accomplishment. If they are not to shy away from unfamiliar and difficult answers to the questions of life, they need to develop intellectual courage and steadfastness in the pursuit of truth. How are these qualities of mind to be encouraged?

As with the desire to follow the authority of reason, so with the desires associated with the qualities of mind discussed in section III, it is not altogether clear what the desires are desires for. But as with the desire to follow reason's authority so with these desires, I assume that they include or are enhanced by the desire to be a certain kind of person. If that is right, then we who teach them should try to cultivate that desire by being the kind of person we think they should we want to be. We can do that by modeling the qualities of mind we want them to acquire. And so as we teach our discipline to our students, we can model enthusiasm for its intricacy, depth and beauty.

Of course, whether our modeling these enthusiasms inspires them in our students depends upon whether our students will want their education to make them the kind of persons our professional training has made us. That they will want that may seem unlikely. The fact that few of our undergraduates follow us into the academy suggests that few of them develop the desire to emulate us. The failure of many of them to develop it may be over-determined, but one explanation would surely appeal to the powerful peer- and pecuniary pressures that incline students to value their learning instrumentally rather than intrinsically. It would be unrealistic to believe that we can successfully countervail those pressures in very many cases or that we can inspire powerful intellectual enthusiasms that persist through the whole of our students' lives. What we can realistically hope to do, I think, is inspire enthusiasms and aspirations that fire them for a time and that have enduring effects. I suggest that we can do that by forming academic friendships with our students, so that they come to see those qualities

of mind that they want to develop at least for the duration of their time with their professor. How can such a friendship be built?

In section I, I likened academic friendships to friendships among fellow travelers, one of whom guides the others. We can start building such friendships with our students from the time we start to guide them, by starting with some phenomenon that they think they understand – a familiar political phenomenon like voting or a familiar moral one like the attempt to live a good life – and show them how deeply puzzling it is. Through the course of our time with them, we can make evident how much we love the intellectual puzzles and the solutions that have been offered to them. And we can communicate how much we want our students to love them too. By working with them, evincing concern with their progress and allying with them against the difficulty of material that we, too, want to understand more deeply, we can guide them to the shared goods of intellectual discovery. The sharing of these goods among those who share a classroom can engender a sense of community. In my experience, that sense of community is often enhanced by students' acquisition of a new, shared idiom which is drawn from the philosophical material we are working on and which becomes a transient part of their working vocabulary. I suggest that when students feel that they are part of a classroom community led by a professor who evidently cares about sharing broadening educational experiences with them, they respond by developing – at least in nascent form -- the qualities of mind that we want them to acquire and that we model for them.

The academic friendships I have described grow out of the shared good of progressing in a particular area of intellectual inquiry. At the end of section II, I drew on

Samuel Scheffler's work to raise the possibility that academic friendship might "derive[] from the shared experience of subjection ... to normativity itself". The normativity to which I referred is that expressed by the norms of evidence and reasoning to which we hold our students. I do not deny that solidarity might develop among students, and between students and their professors, as a result of their attempt to comply with those norms. But if it does, it will be because students have learned to care about complying with them, because they have come to see complying with them as something they want to do. I doubt that students will care about complying with those norms apart from wanting to think well about the subject matter of one or another academic discipline. If this doubt is well founded, then – if students do come to care about complying with such norms for their own sake – what they will care about for its own sake is reasoning well about the subject matter of one or another discipline. And if *that* is right, then the kind of academic friendship I drew on Scheffler's essay to identify presupposes that professors have successfully inspired the care for their subjects that I have said we should model.

One of the ways in which the academic friendship of professors and students is like that among fellow travelers is that both kinds of friendship are generally of limited duration. However successfully we create communities of learning in our classrooms, those communities disband at the end of a quarter or a semester or an academic year. This raises the possibility – indeed, I assume, the likelihood -- that the desires and cares we try to encourage in our students will quickly cease to motivate. But even if that is so, as it often is, we should not conclude that the qualities of mind we have tried to model will vanish when our work with students ceases. The experiences of a journey can have a

lasting impact even after the vividness of the experiences of travel fades. Indeed, one of the ways that the most vivid experiences of travel can broaden and educate us is by shaping our tastes, thereby disposing us to respond to later experiences differently than we otherwise would have.

This effect of travel was given eloquent expression by Henry James who at the end of roughly a semester's visit to Rome, wrote:

One would like to be able after five months in Rome to sum up for tribute and homage, one's experience, one's gains, the whole adventure of one's sensibility. But one really has vibrated too much -- the addition of so many items isn't easy. What is simply clear is the sense of an acquired passion for the place and of an incalculable number of gathered impressions. Many of these have been intense and momentous, but one has trodden on the other -- there are always the big fish that swallow up the little -- and one can hardly say what has become of them. They store themselves noiselessly away, I suppose, in the dim but safe places of memory and "taste", and we live in a quiet faith that they will emerge into vivid relief if life or art should demand them.¹⁶

We can hope that the qualities of mind that we try to model for our students can remain as dispositions which will be triggered when "life ... should demand them" by confronting students with questions that students have studied with us.

¹⁶ Henry James, *Italian Hours* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1995), p. 193.

- V -

The conception of academic friendship that I have sketched may seem highly idealized. It makes very optimistic assumptions about student responsiveness to our teaching. It also seems to presuppose the kind of teaching that only those of us who work at elite institutions are able to offer and that only students who attend such institutions are likely to receive. For the kind of partnership in learning that I have described seems most likely to develop in small classes in which professors can get to know their students, can learn what interests them and can track their progress closely. It may well be that few colleges and universities can make such classes available to their teachers and students. If that is right then the education that I have described, like the travel to which I have likened it, is a privilege which is not widely available.

I offer just three too-brief replies.

First, if the conception I have sketched is indeed idealized, then it must be something of an educational ideal. Ideal theory is useful in philosophy of education as elsewhere. One of its uses is that it helps us to see more clearly where and why teaching and learning that depart from it fall short. The availability of small classes is often used as a measure of the quality of education a college or university offers. The discussion of academic friendship may help to show why such classes are desirable and what students are losing when the only classes available to them are impersonal because they are large. Another way in which the discussion may prove useful is in critiquing the aims of professors at institutions which *are* able to offer small classes. Small classes can also be

impersonal if faculty fail to develop an academic friendship with their students because they view a lighter grading load primarily as an opportunity to do their own research. Someone who treats small classes in that way incurs an opportunity cost himself and imposes an opportunity cost on his students. Greater appreciation of the value of academic friendship can help us to see just how high that cost is and what a dereliction it is to impose it.

Second, we who teach at selective institutions teach students who will enjoy a wide range of opportunities upon graduation. Many of those opportunities will be lucrative, in the long run if not the short. Parental pressures, peer pressures, the pressures of educational debt, the unspoken equation of success with wealth, and the desire to enjoy at least an upper middle-class life all incline the best graduates of the best universities to pursue opportunities that promise financial rewards. Their unthinking choice to do so are often lamented, and rightly so.¹⁷ If our students are to be dissuaded from making those choices, the dissuasion is likely to come from people who know them, whom they admire and who evidently have their interests at heart. If we who teach them have developed academic friendships with them and have modeled a commitment to intellectual life, we will be much better positioned to persuade them that other ways of life, dedicated to the pursuit of other values, are at least as choice-worthy as the careers so many of them now decide to pursue.

¹⁷ See, for example, Ezra Klein, "Harvard's Liberal Arts Failure is Wall Street's Gain", accessed April 15, 2012, <http://mobile.bloomberg.com/news/2012-02-16/harvard-liberal-arts-failure-is-wall-street-gain-commentary-by-ezra-klein>.

Finally, I have said that one of the ends of academic friendship is to remove the blinkers from students' imaginations. The actual is a particularly powerful constraint on the imagination. In particular, the pervasiveness and familiarity of injustice in our world inclines us to think that such injustice is natural, and the illusion of its naturalness makes it hard for us to imagine how else the world might be. To adapt a thought of John Rawls's, injustice can seem as natural a feature of our world as our own mortality¹⁸ and it can be as hard to imagine a world without the former as one without the latter. The broadening of students' moral and political imaginations, at a time of life when many of them are inclined to idealism anyway, can break the hold of the actual and help students to think, carefully and rigorously, about how different the social world might. We who teach students who will one day assume positions of authority and advantage have a special responsibility to help broaden their imaginations in this way.

Paul Weithman
Department of Philosophy
University of Notre Dame

¹⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 91.

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