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What It Means to Have a Teachable Spirit

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Good evening. I've come from Alabama, but without a banjo on my knee.

It's always nice to be back at Furman University, my alma mater, where memories of my professors, late evenings in the library, campus strolls around the lake, football games, fraternity shenanigans, ex-girlfriends, meals in the dining hall, rounds of golf, great books and profound discoveries all come rushing back to me with haunting vividness and intensity.

The day I moved into my dorm room, just before orientation began, was sad and exciting and frightening and chaotic. I pulled out of my parents' driveway in Atlanta that morning to the melodies of James Taylor singing that he was gone to Carolina in his mind. A couple of hours later I was gone to Carolina, too, but not *just* in my mind.

I parked my blue Ford pickup on the fields beside Blackwell where the SUVs and other pickups were parked or parking. My parents, who had followed me to Greenville in their car, parked in what's now the Trone Student Center parking lot. Back then it was mostly dirt and gravel except for some paved spaces near the coffee shop, which became a Starbucks Coffee but is now, I'm told, part of the on-campus bookstore. My parents helped me to unload the stuff of my old life and to arrange my dorm room for my new life.

My roommate hadn't arrived yet. I claimed one side of the room and began filling my dresser, desk, and closet with things. Since I appropriated one section of the room, I wanted my roommate, Bill, to choose the top or bottom bunk for himself.

We'd spoken only once before, by phone, a pitiful attempt by two distant, disembodied voices to share in a matter of minutes deep convictions, career ambitions, and preferred hobbies. Bill informed me years later that our initial phone conversation had discouraged him. I was coming to college with my high school girlfriend, so he presumed I would be fully invested in passionate romance and uninterested in secondary friendships.

Were it not for my girlfriend, he would have been correct. She, a socialite and a cheerleader, was the type who always searched for bigger and better things, who elevated revelry to the supreme virtue. To keep up with her, I had to fritter away precious hours at parties and functions and bars. She grew bored of me eventually, and found herself in the arms of many other freshmen boys that year. Or rather, they found themselves in hers; she was the aggressor.

I was talking about Bill's arrival. He materialized in the dorm room out of nowhere and with an entourage of relatives: his mother and Irish Catholic stepfather (God rest his soul) and his aunts and uncles and cousins and who knows what else besides. They swept into the room, a noisy spectacle, and everyone was introducing themselves and moving furniture and clothes and electronics and sporting equipment that was never used and encyclopedias that were never opened.

What would've taken my parents and me several trips to unpack took Bill only one. That's how many people attended him and serviced his every need. It was impressive, really, as though I were in the presence of royalty. He *was* rich, in fact, and made a point of displaying his wealth. Only our dorm room seemed bare, too plain and unadorned for this princely graduate of a distinguished private

high school in Columbus, Ohio. So the next thing we knew we were at the finest of fine establishments, Walmart, buying decorations. I had the clever idea to acquire signs with which to adorn our door: a stop sign, a men's and women's restroom sign, and whatever other signs I cleared from the hardware section. Bill eyed these curious treasures skeptically but assented to their purchase. He'd known me only about an hour. Best not to upset the poor Southerner over these procurements, the magnanimous Yankee must've thought.

By mid-afternoon our room was fully furnished. Our new hall mates stopped by to introduce themselves, allured by the bewildering array of signage on our door, which, in the Tate, would have resembled a modernist masterpiece: a condemnatory symbol of the directionless chaos of the consumerist decade we were leaving behind. (It was, after all, 2001.) A crowd developed in our room. We were instantly popular. Bill seemed to appreciate, at length, my unique design tastes.

Bill and I decided to look around after everyone left. Where, we wondered, was the laundry room? We needed to find out, maybe even to experiment with the washer and dryer since we had never used either before. We found the laundry room musty and tucked away in the basement. At least the machines, despite their coin slots, no longer required quarters. I noticed a button on the wall beside a green light. *To test carbon monoxide levels, read an adjacent sign, press button when light is green.* I didn't know much about carbon monoxide, but suddenly had the urge to test its levels.

I pressed the button. The fire alarm erupted; red lights flashed on and off. Bill shot me a glare that conveyed anger, panic, and amusement all at once. Which feeling prevailed, I couldn't say.

We needed to flee. We knew it was illegal to stay in the building, but also that we weren't in danger, that there wasn't a fire, so we repaired to our room. The hallways were empty. No one saw us sneaking up the stairs. Once in our room, we determined to wait out the alarm. Eventually, we knew, everyone would come filing back when no fire was detected.

So we sat. And we sat. And we sat, completely silent. Then came a loud knocking at the door. *Wham! Wham! Wham!*

I stood, frightened. Bill stared at me, desperately shaking his head as if to say, *Do not open the door!* I paused out of deference. The knock came again: *Wham! Wham! Wham! I'm sorry,* I said, *I have to open it.* Bill buried his face in his palm.

I opened the door. There before me, standing six foot six, muscles bulging, stood a firefighter in full gear. From behind his goggles, which were affixed to his helmet, he looked me up and down, head to toe. *This is it,* I thought. *I am going to be arrested on my first day on campus, and I'm taking my innocent roommate with me.*

Speechless, I offered my wrists for the cuffing, obsequiously extending my arms. The firefighter lifted his goggles, revealing brown button eyes, and removed his helmet. He looked at me and then behind me, back at me and then behind me again. It struck me that he was examining the door. *I'm sorry,* he said. *I thought this was the bathroom.*

The bathroom's over there, I said, pointing down the hall.

Thank you, he said, and walked away.



I closed the door. Bill sighed with relief and then he and I roared with laughter.

I remember my first day of class. It was early, Introduction to Philosophy with Dr. Sarah Worth. After class I walked back to the dorms. A guy named Jonathan Horn, who lived on what was then the Sigma Chi hall on the ground floor, intercepted me. He was animated and flustered. I had played little league baseball with him back in Marietta, Georgia, when I was seven or eight, but had not seen him again until orientation week. He was now a rising sophomore in college. I don't recall how we established that we'd been teammates long ago, but we made the connection. He was the first student to show me around campus and to introduce me to the fraternity ecosystem. At this particular moment, he was frazzled and going on about how an airplane had crashed into the World Trade Center. I was confused, not really knowing what the World Trade Center was. *You know*, said Jonathan, *that tall building with offices and restaurants and stuff on top.*

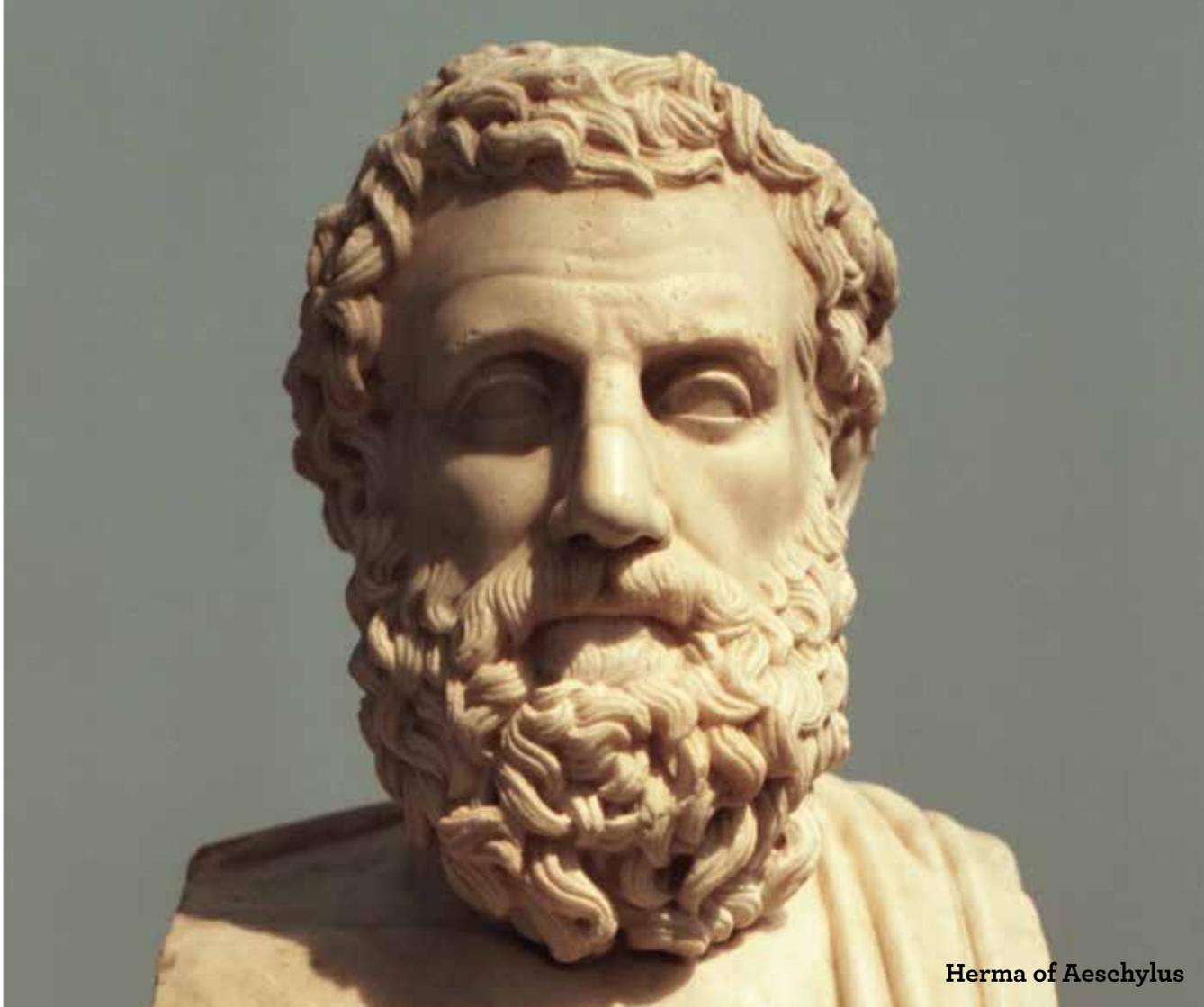
I *didn't* know, and had assumed that whatever struck the building had been small: a glider or an ultralight. I walked up the stairs to my room and turned on the television. Moments later a second plane—a large commercial airliner—crashed into the Twin Towers, and I saw, or at least seem to recall, people leaping from the monstrous building to their deaths. I was horrified and scared and confused, still so very confused, and tried calling my dad's cell phone because I knew he was flying to New York that morning.

We had a landline in our dorm room: a phone that plugged into the wall. Only a few students carried cell phones back then. It was the first year I hadn't worn a pager on my belt. My parents had given me a cell phone the week before, but I didn't use it—and wouldn't use it regularly until spring semester, when cell phones suddenly proliferated across campus. My Dad didn't answer his phone. I assumed the worst and tried calling Mom. Eventually I got ahold of her. She had, she assured me, spoken to Dad. He was okay. Now she was trying to locate her brother, my uncle, who'd also flown to New York that day, or maybe was in New York already for work. In either case, he was eventually accounted for.

The first day of college is disorienting and momentous, one of those rare occasions when you're acutely aware of the gravity of the moment you're experiencing. For *my* classmates, though, that day was disorienting and momentous, not just *for us*, but for the *entire country*, perhaps the *entire planet*. It marked the end of an era. I was a grownup, and so, too, was the United States of America. The ideas and books my classmates and I discussed that semester, and for the next few years, took on a furious intensity. Everyone, it seemed, was debating weighty and difficult questions: *What was America?* *What was terrorism?* *Who* was responsible for this attack? *What* was just war? What were the differences between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism? What was totalitarianism? What is Western Civilization and Eastern Civilization? Weren't there *other* civilizations? What the hell *was* civilization? What was the *difference* between a conservative and a liberal? How do you *accommodate* differences in beliefs, feelings, and opinions within a diverse populace? What were facts, and how could people arrange them differently to produce competing narratives?

My high school sweetheart broke up with me a few weeks into freshmen year. I was devastated and buried myself in books. Bill, to his credit, grew concerned and suggested that I meet with his English professor, Judy Bainbridge, for advice and direction. He watched me reading and writing poetry in the evenings, slowly disengaging from the social scene, spending countless hours in the library with books that weren't assigned in my classes. He thought I needed an intervention.

He was right. I met with Dr. Bainbridge and showed her some of my poetry, which did not impress her. I don't remember much about our conversation, but I recall her recommendation that I take certain courses with certain professors, and also that I join both the college Republicans and the college Democrats so that I could be exposed to different viewpoints and learn to avoid ideological complacency. I followed her advice, joined both organizations, and throughout my time at Furman tried to keep an open mind about, well, *everything*.



Herma of Aeschylus

I majored in English and quickly adopted convictions that I considered to be leftist—in particular in the field of economics of which I was ignorant—because I wanted to do good, be nice, and help those who were less fortunate. Turns out I *still* desire those goals, only now I have a more principled and mature approach that in our current intellectual climate would be considered conservative or libertarian. This approach is predicated, not on how much I know, but on how much I *don't* know. I have F.A. Hayek to thank for my epistemological commitments.

The development of the legal system demonstrates the importance of maintaining conflict at the level of rhetoric and persuasion, the alternatives to coercion and force

I have spent over a decade studying former United States Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., who, to my mind, is one of

the most misunderstood figures in our country's history—a punching bag for commentators of various political persuasions. His book *The Common Law* tells the story of the evolution of the common-law system from its rude and primitive origins, when violence and personal vendetta characterized the arbitrary rule of kin and clan, to a more mature and sophisticated system involving public fora, courts and tribunals, administrative procedures, impartial juries, and the emergence of general principles out of concrete cases regarding unforeseeable conflicts between antagonistic parties.

This tidy account details how vengeance and passion yielded to reason, rhetoric, and rationality as argumentation and persuasion took the place of blood feuds as the operative form of dispute resolution. I'm reminded of Aeschylus's great trilogy, *The Oresteia*, which consists of tragedies that mythologize the founding of a rational Greek legal

system that supplanted the carnage and recklessness of the grand age of Homeric gods and heroes who warred without end. You might find a distinctively American version of this myth in the television series *Deadwood*, which traces the development of government and law in a chaotic Western town.

I bring up Holmes and Aeschylus and *Deadwood* to suggest to you the immense importance of free and open dialogue, of rational argumentation and civil disagreement. Civilization itself—that is, a state of human society that is organized, peaceful, and prosperous, consisting of science, industry, arts, and literature—is potentially at stake when disagreement is no longer maintained at the level of rhetoric and resolved through persuasion and procedure. In the absence of ongoing conversation and debate, we risk falling into the chaos and

violence and internecine strife that destabilize and destroy civil societies.

Before the Civil War, the idealistic young Holmes—then known as Wendell—flirted with transcendentalism. Having fought in the 20th Massachusetts during the Civil War and having experienced firsthand the carnage of battle, he spent his later career as a jurist seeking to accommodate disagreement, diffuse conflict, and moderate uncompromising political forces that threatened to bring about widespread violence. He did not want to witness another Civil War.

When I worked at the Alabama Supreme Court, I handled hundreds if not thousands of cases. Appellate cases provide edifying examples of the centrality of patience, humility, tenacity, and



Apollo and Diana Attacking the Children of Niobe
—Jacques-Louis David, 1772

open-mindedness to problem-solving and unfettered inquiry. I would read appellants' briefs that convinced me of the rightness of their clients' positions. Then I would turn to the appellees' briefs that seemed equally persuasive. Had I been tasked with deciding between the appellant and the appellee using my isolated reason and judgment, I would have struggled and despaired and probably arrived at erroneous conclusions. Fortunately, though, I had not only my colleagues to assist me, but innumerable precedents in prior cases and hundreds of years of development in the law to guide me. The appellant and the appellee were just two parties to a larger conversation that had endured in varying forms for centuries. Resolving their particular dispute required an exploration of the reasoning and rationale of several judges faced with similar facts and issues.

We learn by similar processes. Stuck between competing arguments, torn between opposing positions, we suspend judgment, or *should*, until we have analyzed the relevant facts and issues and mined the past for like situations and instructive examples. We should question our presuppositions and examine complex conflicts from different angles. Aware that knowledge is limited, memory is selective, and perspective is partial, we must avoid the trap of ideology, which causes people to choose what they believe *and then* to find support for it, or to draw complicated ideas through simplistic formulae to generate favored outcomes.

College should be about discovery, learning, and the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. It should involve inquiry and curiosity, challenge and exploration, forcing us to shape and revise our beliefs, to pursue clarity through rigorous study. The *Book of Proverbs* submits that *fools* despise wisdom and instruction. To avoid foolishness, we must be teachable. And we must learn our limitations.

Learning our limitations

Across the hall from me, on the top floor of Manly Hall, during my freshman year at Furman, lived my friend Andre, a kicker on the football team. He was affable and happy, the kind of person you wanted around when you told jokes because of his contagious laughter. He was much bigger than

I was, though not as large, say, as an offensive or defensive lineman, and one day we wrestled on the floor right there in the hallway of the dorm. It was all for fun, but a *real* contest of manly strength with *actual* pride and reputation was at stake. Several of our hall-mates watched and cheered as Andre wrapped me up like a pretzel and pinned me to the ground in an impressive show of force. At first I tried to maneuver out of his iron grip but, realizing I lacked the strength, I simply submitted, defeated and docile, waiting for him to release me.

I had lost, and was genuinely surprised by the ease with which I had been conquered. I realized that, given my size, I possessed only so much physical power, and that someone of greater size and strength could, quite efficiently, subdue me. You would think that common sense, or a basic understanding of physical reality, would have led me to that conclusion already, but I was young and hubristic. At some point, a short man must acknowledge he's short. A slow man must acknowledge he's slow. A clumsy man must acknowledge his inelegance. We're not all mathematicians, rocket scientists, or geniuses. But to realize our fullest potential, to maximize our ability to know things and accomplish our goals, we must discover our strengths and weaknesses. We can't be who we're not, but we can make the best of who we are.

Aesop, a slave in the ancient world whose fables have been told since at least the 6th century B.C., tells of the Proud Frog, the mother of several little froglets. One morning, while she was away, an ox, not seeing the froglets, stepped on one and squashed him to death. When the mother returned, the froglet brothers and sisters croaked and squeaked, warning their mother of the enormous beast that had killed their brother. *Was it this big?* the mother asked, swelling up her belly. *Bigger*, the children said. *This big?* she said, swelling her belly even more. *Much bigger*, the children said. *Was it this big?* she said, swelling her belly and puffing herself up with tremendous force. *No, mother, the beast was much bigger than you.* Offended, the mother strained and strained, swelling and puffing, swelling and puffing until—*boom!* She popped!

You see, we shouldn't presume to be more than we are.

I learned years after graduation that, while he was in medical school, Andre entered the great, ever-growing family of the departed, having taken his own life for reasons I don't know and probably couldn't understand. Even today it's hard for me to imagine what could have driven this fun-loving, kind, strong, and generous person to such unbearable, unspeakable despair.

Channeling human emotions through debate and rhetorical fora

Human beings are emotional and passionate. Our feelings, our tendencies towards anger and wrath, are not, however, necessarily bad. If someone were to enter this room and commit some violent atrocity, we would be horrified and enraged. When we hear grievous stories of innocents who have been slaughtered, deprived of their possessions, hurt, mistreated, or oppressed, we fume and demand responsive, retributive action. Anger towards some people suggests that we feel strongly towards *other* people, that we have the capacity, in other words, to love deeply, bond, and affectionately associate.

But our anger and wrath must be constructively channeled. The legal system provides a mechanism for managing the pain, outrage, hurt, and anger that threaten to disrupt social harmony. Consider *The Eumenides*, the last play in the trilogy, *The Oresteia*, which I mentioned earlier. Here is the backstory. Clytemnestra murdered her husband, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, after he returned home to Argos from the Trojan War. She had taken a lover, Aegisthus, just as Agamemnon had taken a lover: the seer, Cassandra, whom Clytemnestra also murdered. At the behest of Apollo, Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, avenges his father's death by killing both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

Now the Furies—three enraged goddesses in the form of beasts who are older than the Olympian gods and goddesses—relentlessly and recklessly pursue Orestes to avenge the murder of Clytemnestra. Apollo has given Orestes temporary

refuge in the temple at Delphi, but Clytemnestra's ghost rouses the passionate, bloodthirsty Furies into uncontrolled passion. They are shocked and angered by unpunished matricide. Athena intervenes to assemble a jury and hold a public trial in which the prosecuting Furies will argue their case and Apollo will serve, in effect, as Orestes's defense attorney.

The jury splits, leaving Athena to cast the deciding vote. The Furies worry that if Athena opts to acquit Orestes, she'll usher in an era of lawlessness. They believe that order and the integrity of the ancient law depend on killing Orestes. To them, Orestes's murder is especially offensive because Clytemnestra is the mother, the *fertile* figure, the bearer of *life* from whose womb Orestes emerged into the cosmos. An attack on the *mother* is an attack on life itself, on the very continuity of human existence.

Athena is faced with a seemingly zero-sum situation: she must either spare Orestes's life and enrage the Furies, who will unleash their lethal rage on society, or give the Furies what they wish, namely Orestes's death, and thereby inflame Apollo and the other Olympian gods. Violent revenge appears inevitable. A self-perpetuating cycle of violence seems destined.

The Furies are wild, destructive, and vindictive. Athena in her divine wisdom recognizes, however, that they are indispensable to the law precisely *because* of those qualities. If someone is murdered, the legal system must bring about justice and mete out coercive punishment. The emotions and passions that animate revenge must be mediated, however, through formal and public processes, procedures, and protocols to ensure that they do not spin out of control, infecting whole populations beyond the immediate parties to a case. The legal system, by bringing conflicts into the field of rhetoric, argumentation, and persuasion in open fora governed by procedural rules, mitigates the intensity of the parties' passions and emotions, which must be channeled through formal institutions and subjected to public scrutiny.

So *what* does Athena do? She splits the baby, as it were, by voting to free Orestes and by promising

the Furies a high seat on the throne of her city, where they will enjoy everlasting honor and reverence. Of course, she must *persuade* the Furies of the rightness of this resolution. She does so with such effectiveness that her persuasion is likened to a *spell*; the Furies call her rhetoric *magic*. *Your magic is working*, the leader of the Furies submits. *I can feel the hate/the fury slip away*.

Like Holmes, Athena despised civil war. *Let our wars/rage on abroad, with all their force, to satisfy/our powerful lust for fame*, she says. *But as for the bird/that fights at home—my curse on civil war*. She has pacified the hateful Furies and established a *system of conflict resolution, not just for this matter but for all future matters*.

Dealing with the inevitability of conflict

Imagine, if you will, that you could press a reset button that erased all memory and knowledge of the past but that instilled in each of us one definite principle; namely that every person by virtue of being human deserves to live freely and peaceably until visited by a natural death. This button would provide humanity with a clean slate, as it were. A fresh beginning. But it wouldn't be long before inevitable conflicts arose. Accidents would happen. People would get hurt. Emotions and passions would be inflamed as a result. We seem to be wired to favor family over strangers, and to desire healthy and prosperous lives for our children. We want to maximize our well-being, sometimes at the expense of others' well-being. Given the option to help our



Orestes Pursued by the Furies
—William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1862

children or the children of some faraway stranger, we choose our children, the beings we brought into the world, on whose behalf we labor, weep, and rejoice.

Even if we *could* start over, struggle, contest, fighting, and feuding *would* arise. In light of the inevitability of conflict, we must make every effort to restrain it at persuasion and rhetoric. The university as an ideal represents a kind of intellectual forum where the sharpest minds come to debate, not the case of a client, but of an idea. Courtrooms provide spaces for litigants to have it out, so to speak, whereas universities provide spaces for scholars to test and debate facts and theories.

Universities are like courtrooms where competing ideas are given a hearing; the principle of rule of law over arbitrary and tyrannical rule should govern inquiry on campuses

We could think of the university as a legal system in which intellectuals *litigate* differing viewpoints before juries of intellectual peers who are committed to the advancement of knowledge and the clarity of ideas. We evaluate legal systems based on their tendency toward tyranny on the one hand and rule of law on the other. A tyrannical legal system is characterized by arbitrary commands, private vendettas, rapidly changing rules and standards, retroactive application of new rules and standards, lack of procedure and due process, and ambiguity.

The Death of Socrates
—Jacques-Louis David after 1787



David depicts Socrates about to drink hemlock rather than endure exile after being convicted by the Athenian government of subverting the local youth with his teachings. Disciples surround their principled friend, bidding him an emotional farewell.

By contrast, rule of law consists of general, regular, stable, and public rules regarding fundamental fairness that play out in established processes, procedures, and protocols. The university and the legal system realize the benefits of receiving and transmitting knowledge through open dialogue and debate, of resolving complex disputes through argumentation rather than physical force and intimidation, of settling controlling precedents through the aggregated decisions of innumerable minds, of suspending judgment on controversial matters until discovery procedures and deliberative processes have been exhausted, and of appealing contested judgments to additional, impartial bodies that will analyze the facts, evidence, and operative rules from a more removed vantage point.

Violent protests, no-platforming and de-platforming, dis-invitations, the shouting down of controversial speakers, or of blacklisting, harassing, threatening, or doxing them—these push us in the direction of arbitrary and tyrannical rule rather than the rule of law. They foment anger and outrage and privilege immediate vengeance over rational, procedural argumentation. They inhibit learning and deprive others of the opportunity to understand people and issues with greater clarity. They rouse emotions and passions that are antithetical to civility and humility.

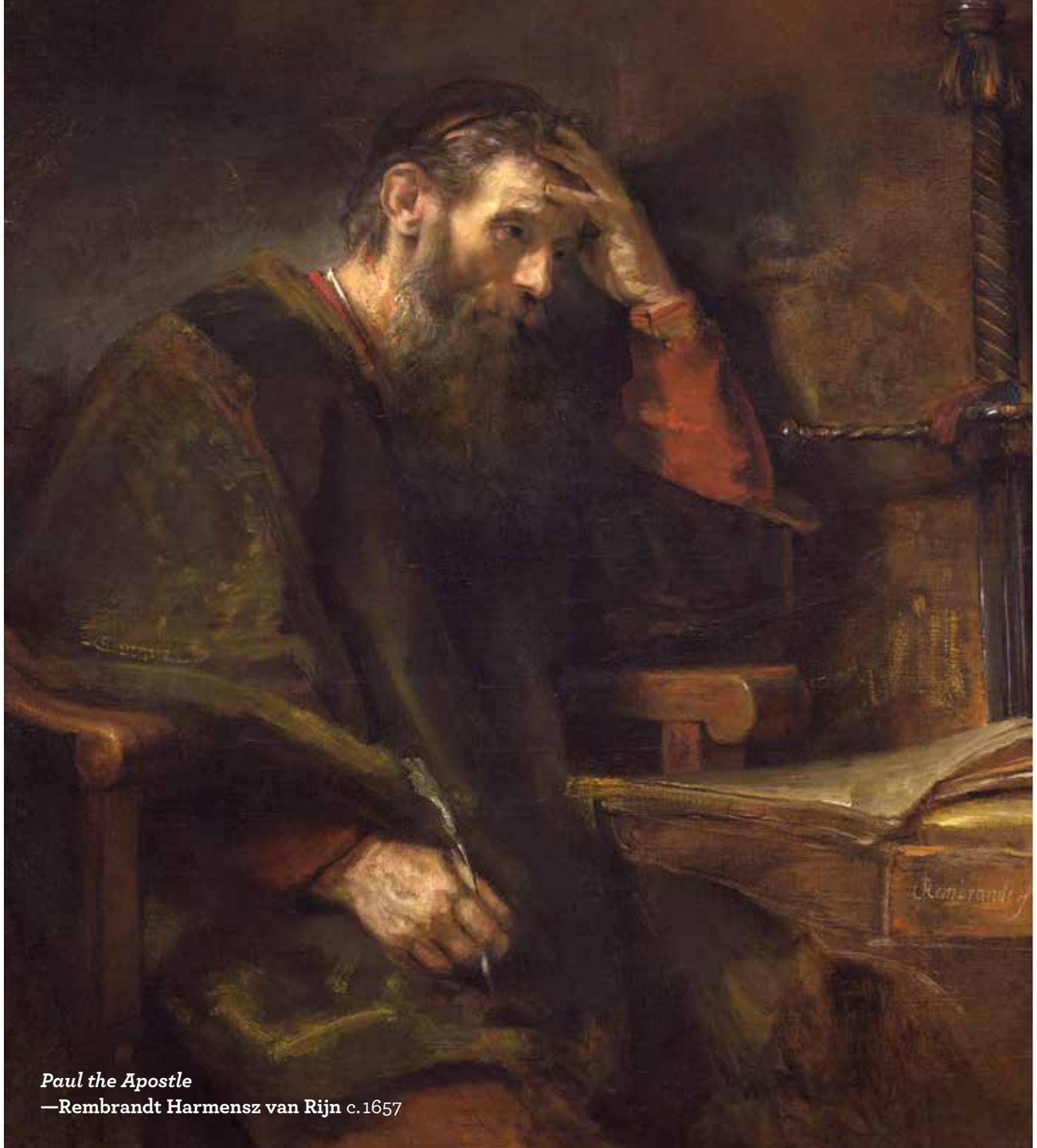
College students should, in my view, think of themselves as judges in training—not in the sense that they will preside in courtrooms or manage and decide cases, but in the sense that they will be constructive participants in their civic and intellectual communities, cultivating the standards, norms, and discernment necessary to improve the lives and institutions of their family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, cities, counties, states, and country. They may not *render* binding judgments, but they will *exercise* judgment.

You cannot refine your logic and reasoning, your critical thinking, your ability to formulate cogent arguments, without considering diverse ideas with which you disagree. And when you identify an idea with which you disagree, you should adopt a Socratic approach to it, asking question after question until you grasp at a deeper level *why* you disagree and how to articulate your disagreement in a manner that persuades others to your position.

Good judges are patient, diligent, competent, credible, independent, and impartial. They avoid not just impropriety, but *appearances* of impropriety. They eschew favoritism. Confidence in their office and judgment depends upon their integrity, high standards of conduct and method, and prioritizing of truth, evidence, and fact over private interests and biases. They are not influenced by familial, financial, or political factors but courteously committed to fair processes, correct answers, sound research, substantiated arguments, and reasonableness. The best judges and professors I have met over my career are those whose personal political convictions, and whose attitude regarding partisan elections or newsworthy current events, were unknown to me.

The lesson of the Furies is that violence breeds violence, and that coercion breeds coercion. If you stifle speech, rough up speakers, intimidate them, prohibit them from airing their opinions, you generate backlash, maybe not right away, maybe not in a form that you'll immediately recognize, but forces will work to meet your anger with anger. Intellectual inquiry has difficulty flourishing in a climate of radioactive anger and toxic outrage.

Unleashing fury upon those who express views with which you disagree will only jeopardize your credibility, and might just empower the ideas you're seeking to discredit. Ideas that appear taboo or transgressive often spread when powerful forces seek to suppress them. The paradox of the martyr, of course, is that his or her power resides in defeat, in death. The voice of the martyr is loudest once he or she has been permanently silenced. There's a reason why passive resistance and civil disobedience are so effective in the long run.



Paul the Apostle
—Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn c.1657

The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus had told him—perhaps through a vision or a revelatory inner voice—*My power is made perfect in weakness*. Another paradox: strength resides in meekness and mildness. If you are utterly convinced of the rightness of certain views that you sincerely hold, then constructively to advance them, to see them succeed in the long run, you should air them from a position of meekness and mildness. Spreading them with coercion or force will probably fail. Even those who

outwardly manifest the signs of a convert might inwardly reject the views they purport to have adopted. Beliefs are dubious that depend for their advancement on the use of coercion and force. A resort to violence in the name of an idea suggests that arguments *for* that idea are unpersuasive. In the absence of articulated reasoning *against* certain views, those views gain credence and currency. Attempting to stamp them out through coercion or force is counterproductive.

Civility and humility are therefore indispensable to the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge.

I'll end with the wisdom of Aesop's fable *The Cat and the Fox*. The fox, you see, was braggadocious, boasting to the cat about all the things he could and would do *if* he were attacked by hunting hounds. The modest, sensible cat replied to the haughty fox that she, having only *one* simple trick to escape dogs, wasn't so clever. *If my trick doesn't work*, she sighed, *then I'm done for*.

The fox, laughing, mocked the cat for her lack of cunning. *Too bad you're not as smart as I am*, he taunted. As soon as these words were issued from his snout, a pack of hounds descended upon him. The cat resorted to her one trick and escaped. The fox, however, tried *several* tricks, each craftily, but they didn't work. The hounds snatched him up and tore him to shreds, filling their bellies with bloody fox meat.



Friends, my fellow Furman paladins, don't be the fox. Please, don't be like him. There are always dogs—and *cats* for that matter—who are better and smarter than you are. There are *always* powerful forces beyond your control. Be sensible lest they swallow you up. Be humble and teachable, know your strengths and weaknesses, and suspend judgment on important and controversial matters until you have considered them from different angles and, if possible, examined all relevant data. Unless and until you do these things, you won't acquire and transmit knowledge with your fullest potential.