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Fathers and Philosophers

Jonathan Campana

My father is a philosopher. That is to say, he could be. In 22 years of knowing him, I can remember only a small number of instances in which words escaped him. A book of proverbs can be written based on his catchy phrases and smart sayings. These maxims taught me about emotion, passion, virtue and vice. Through both his life and his words, I acquired an education that was unlike anything the world of academia could provide and, without knowing it, he was teaching me age old truths founded in the depths of philosophical thought.

In order to begin a work of this kind, I feel that I should explain a bit more about my family and who I am. I am the younger of two boys that my father, Jimmy, and my mother, Marlene, had. My dad, or as I call him, "Papa," grew up with 8 siblings. He is third in line, and the eldest male. Papa attended Princeton University, met my mom, "Mama," there, married her, and took the first sales job he could find. Two kids and 35 years later, he has sold everything from vacuums to life insurance. He was the pastor of a bilingual church for 5 years and now he and my mom are both marriage counselors.

My story is only a little different so far. Growing up I was as mischievous, strong-willed, and curious as my dad was. My curiosity always got me into trouble and, being of smaller stature, I had to rely on my words to get me out of trouble. The worst of my roguish ways manifested in high school and only a little into college. Throughout the past four years I've mellowed out, but I've still maintained a healthy curiosity and an odd propensity for getting myself in and out of trouble.

In freshman year of college, my literature professor used the entire course to study short stories thus reigniting my natural curiosity and a hunger for more literary knowledge. Since then I have picked up novels, poetry, and even more short stories. I

love soaking up any knowledge I can from these works, but I always find myself putting them in the context of what I've learned from Papa.

As a young man, I am still striving to find symmetry and stability in my own life. Though I've come a long way throughout my years of "higher learning," I have also come to the realization that I do not know everything and that I cannot do it all on my own; imagine that. This realization has prompted me to turn to men and women wiser than myself. From ancient philosophers to literary authors to my own father, I indulge myself in the counsel of those whose wisdom exceeds my own. This allows me to glean knowledge from those on the same journey towards equilibrium. The foundation of this endeavor is provided by my father's views, the views of ancient philosophers, and the writings of renowned authors. I will use the proverbial wisdom of my 56 year-old father as the backdrop for the wisdom of those who came before him.

Each paternal proverb will shed light on a different virtue, as well as a different vice. I will then view each axiom in the light of ancient philosophy and literature. Through this work, I hope to express how a young man's life can be shaped by the words of fathers and philosophers.

"Sex' spelled backwards is 'Xes,' and anything in excess is bad."

Of all the knowledge I have gained from my father, his thoughts on "excess" remain the most relevant to this day. Being a musician, he taught me that finding balance in life is much like tuning a guitar; too much tension and the strings will break but too little tension and the string's sound is flat. In order to produce the right sound, one must tune the string to the exact note. Life, as I have learned, must be lived in this

way. Much like the Flying Wallendas, a great circus family known for their exploits on the high-wire, balance is essential in navigating through life.

Finding harmony between excess and deficit is the cornerstone of many beliefs from antiquity. One of the many prominent thinkers espousing this concept was Aristotle. He believed that the way to develop your true character is to cultivate certain qualities into harmony. In order to understand his thoughts on virtue and vice, one must explore what is meant by “moral virtue.” Aristotle believed that knowledge of virtue is not an inherent quality in a person. He makes the argument that virtues are acquired. Much like a musician refines his craft by much practice and diligence, a virtuous person gains these virtues through acting them out. A skilled musician can tune a guitar by ear, but that only comes with time spent practicing. Therefore, Aristotle believed that a morally just man is made by doing just acts. Likewise, an unjust man is made by acting unjustly. Aristotle makes these distinctions to explain how one is not born virtuous or corrupt, but becomes that way through their deeds. With that being said, we can deduce that acquiring virtue is a habit. Not something that happens by chance, but by choice. Virtues are not emotions, but the actions one commits while experiencing emotions.

Now a balance between excess and deficiency looks different for different people. Aristotle said that the mean is specific to the person. As a rower, I have observed the difference that height and body build can make in a race. The taller, stronger rower has a natural advantage over someone smaller. A taller rower will always be able to move more water than a shorter one, but this does not necessarily make them the superior athlete. Strength is measured differently to a lightweight rower than it is to a heavyweight, which is why there are lightweight and heavyweight events.

A lightweight rower's strength may be weakness to a much more physically capable heavyweight. Therefore, we can make the assertion that balance to one person will be excess to another.

Lo cortés no quita lo valiente

Courtesy does not exclude courage.

Aristotle believed courage to be the balance between overconfidence and fear. I choose to start the journey of virtue here due to its implications on my own life. In my own journey, I have found that courage is one of the most elusive of virtues, mostly because everyone has a different view of what it looks like. To some, courage is the will to fight, while to others it is the will not to. Aristotle suggests that the purest form of courage can be seen in one who faces a noble death in battle. Well, in my case, I have not seen battle and probably never will, but I believe true courage is shown when one can determine the right time and place for their emotions to be released. "Now the courageous man always keeps his presence of mind...for the courageous man regulates both his feeling and his action according to the merits of each case and as reason bids him."

Aristotle also states that any person can feel anger, and any other emotion for that matter, but the true test comes when one can be angry at the exact moment, to the correct person, and in the precise amount that they should be. This is the foundation for a quote used in the film adaptation of "The Odyssey," starring Armand Assante. In this scene, the son of Odysseus moves to kill one of the suitors, but he is warned by his father that, "to be angry is easy, but to be angry at the right man at the right time for the right reason is difficult." Herein lies the trouble in being courageous.

This moment comes at the tail end of Odysseus' journey back home. After many encounters with mythical monsters, amorous goddesses and witches, and even a descent into Hades, Odysseus returns to Ithaca with all the cunning he left with, tempered by the wisdom gained in his voyage. Unfortunately, it took all his experiences for his idea of courage to change. His younger self painted a much different picture of the King of Ithaca, and therefore is worth studying further.

Odysseus was a man deemed to be cunning and courageous. His genius was behind the Trojan horse and the subsequent downfall of Troy. His exploits in battle were great and he was known throughout Greece for his guile and resourcefulness. In *The Odyssey* he is described as "skilled in all ways of contending" and a "mastermind of war." Even Zeus, King of the gods, says of him that, "there is no mortal half as wise." Even with all that going for him, he had one major vice; pride.

This one character flaw has been the downfall of many men and thus why, at least in my opinion, Homer chooses to mention both his hero's victories and this specific downfall. The first of which begins when he encounters the Cyclops, Polyphemos. Odysseus, yet to be discovered by the monster and with plenty of time to escape with all the spoils he had acquired, decided to disregard the urging of his men and wait for the Cyclops to return. This proves disastrous for his crew because the boorish Cyclops feasts on the crew for sport.

Fully recognizing the terror that has befallen them, Odysseus hatches a master plan to fool the Cyclops and save their lives. With the remainder of his crew and their anonymity intact, they are able to escape to the ship and set sail. All would seem well at

this point if not for the pride of Odysseus, which bids him call back taunts to his disgraced foe to pour salt in his massive monocular wound.

Once again, Odysseus decides to ignore the cries of protest coming from his crew, which becomes their downfall. "I would not heed them in my glorying spirit, but let my anger flare and yelled...if ever mortal man inquire how you were...blinded, tell him Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye." This prompts the blinded, boorish, and befuddled monster to cry out to his father for vengeance. Unfortunately, the monster proves the old saying that "it is not what you know, but who you know," to be true as his father was Poseidon, lord of the sea. This one action of overconfidence meant the demise of Odysseus' men and an even longer journey for Odysseus. Even Zeus, rejects a burnt offering from Odysseus because, "destruction for [his] ships he had in store and death for those who sailed them, [his] companions."

Though this is just one of the many examples of the overconfidence of the Greek hero, he returns to Ithaca at the close of his Odyssey to reclaim his throne and rule with a new sense of wisdom. To Odysseus, courage meant dialing back his overconfidence and learning restraint in the face of anger and offense. This illustrates Aristotle's theory that virtue looks different for different people and that there are many ways for a man to be virtuous in his own right.

To others, courage means overcoming fear and gaining confidence. In the biblical account of Gideon, a young man looks past his weakness, rises up and leads an army against impossible odds with the help of God. Sound familiar? Well, this sort of plotline is a common literary occurrence. Everybody loves a story of an underdog rising up, probably because we would all like to see ourselves as the unlikely hero that, if

given the opportunity, could show the world strength of heart; hence, why pop culture loves movies such as *Rocky*, *The Gladiator*, and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*.

The story of Gideon takes place in the backdrop of a 7-year Israelite oppression by the people of Midian. This, much like any other Biblical account of Israelite oppression, was prompted by sins against God performed by the Hebrew people (read: Egyptian captivity, the 40 years spent wandering the desert, etc.) "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years." What turned the tides is when they cried out for help and God, in turn, provides them a champion, of sorts.

As the story opens we see our hero hiding from the enemy in the winepress. Incidentally, this is example number one of Gideon needing some confidence. At this point, an angel appears to him and, in what I think to be a portrayal of God's sense of humor, calls him "a mighty man of valor." The angel unfolds the plan for the demise of Midian, making sure to highlight Gideon's strength and valor in this matter in order to build up his confidence. At this, Gideon replies with, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." Example number two. At this, the angel replies that he has nothing to worry about because God will be with him every step of the way.

Personally, I think that if an angel told me all this, I would be convinced, but Gideon, however, was not. He asks the angel for a sign; this being example number three. The angel provides it and Gideon's confidence is bolstered. He gathers his resources, ten men, and his newfound self-assurance and tears down the altar of a pagan god. Unfortunately, Gideon's move was not without his usual affinity for

trepidation. The account reads that although he takes down the altar, he makes sure to do it under the cover of night because he was too afraid of what his family will think; this being example number four. Examples five and six occur as a result of Gideon's actions. Faced with death Gideon asks for another sign from God, and then after the sign is delivered, he asks for yet another sign that God is still on his side. The story ends with only one more example of his fearful nature. By the end, Gideon lays waste to the opposing Midianites with only a small force of 300 men.

Gideon's story provides the opposite perspective to the virtue of courage. We see here that Gideon questions, not only God, but also his own abilities at multiple junctures throughout the story. Gideon is unsure of himself, while Odysseus is too sure of himself. So where is the balance between these two men? Both are heroes but their journeys were drastically different. Returning to Aristotle's theories, what does the middle road look like? Both men faced similar circumstances. They fought against incredible odds and their mettle was tested in ways most men do not see. Aristotle contends that the fearful, the overconfident, and courageous all show their true colors in the same situations. He states that "the courageous are keen in action, but quiet beforehand."

I believe myself to be an extremely confident person, sometimes to a fault. I tend to look at life as a challenge that must be overcome, which is why the sport of rowing is appealing to me. I know I have been blessed with many strengths, and I use those strengths with confidence. It is my confidence that I rely on most to get me through any situation I face. I believe that in order to have a fighting chance in this world, one has to

know what strengths they possess and be confident enough to use them. Unfortunately, as we have seen in the example of Odysseus, overconfidence comes with a price.

Growing up, I was always cautioned by the tale of Lucifer, the fallen angel that incited one third of the heavenly hosts in rebellion against God. God created this angel, Lucifer, to be flawless in every single way which, historically speaking, never ends well (read: the Titanic). The Bible states that, he was “the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” Lucifer had the entire world in his dominion, but he let it go to his head; yet another historical mistake that never ends well. This prompts God to cast him out of heaven and create a dominion of fire for him to be ruler of. His downfall: pride. This is an extreme and biblically literal example of pride going before the fall.

History is riddled with the downfall of seemingly unstoppable men. My dad constantly mentions how Alexander the Great, a man who conquered most of the known world by his early 30s, died not from battle, but from illness. Achilles, the man gifted in battle beyond ordinary men, died from an arrow in his heel. Napoleon, the emperor of France, lost at Waterloo. These men had every reason to be cocky. They were the demi-gods of their time and yet they still met their end. If I did not rein in my overconfidence and pride, what would make me any different? Even more so, what would make my end likely to be any different from theirs?

“Courage...chooses its course and sticks to its post because it is noble to do so, or because it is disgraceful not to do so.” One year ago, I became very ill. It started out as a simple flu. Not fun, but manageable. Once the drastic symptoms left me, I was left with a constant congestion. It was irritating, at best, until I realized these symptoms were only exacerbated by my rowing endeavors. For weeks I tried to fight through it, but

I only got worse. I only stopped when I came down with flu-like symptoms again after pushing my body to exhaustion.

Much like Alexander the Great, prior to my illness, I was conquering the world. I was the strongest on the team and the most technically savvy on the water. I was untouchable. Unfortunately, I didn't heed the advice of my father and I didn't remember the account of Lucifer. My great pride made the fall all the harder and without my accomplishments in rowing to back up my talk, I was left with very little to brag about. Much like Odysseus, I found myself crying out to the gods, pleading with them to let me find my way home and much like Gideon, I found myself fearfully asking God for a sign that my woes would not be in vain.

I stumbled upon the middle way, the golden mean, by being asked to help out one day at practice. Despite my illness, I was asked to educate the young rowers of the team and make sure they didn't hurt themselves trying to row. (This is actually more common of an occurrence than one might think. In fact, novices, much like infants, have an affinity for inadvertent self-harm.) That day I discovered courage. I learned that courage, in my situation, could be shown by not abandoning my teammates in the face of harsh circumstances. I was also shown that courage is found when one accepts his weaknesses and makes them strengths.

I continued coaching for all the remaining months I was sick and the second I felt better I started training again. Nothing could stop my drive or my will to win. In a matter of a month, I was back to my original strength, and in a matter of two months I had, once again, surpassed my teammates. That time was different, though. I used my

strength to help propel my teammates forward and I made sure to remain quiet in victory from that point on. I knew who I was and that was enough for me.

Estas como la gallina que no tiene agua para tomar, y esta invitando al pato a nadar

You're like the chicken, who has no water to drink, inviting the duck over for a swim.

Papa got married very young by modern standards. He was a young man of only 21 and my mom, only 18. Their love story can be saved for another time, but for our purposes, we must consider the circumstances around their courtship. My grandfather on my mom's side ruled his family with an iron fist, and even though my mom was independent and had moved out, she still lived under the restrictions of her father. The logical choice, to them, was to get married and finally earn their freedom. The two of them, much like many young couples, had little money to their name, but all the hope in the world.

This proverb was passed down to my father by his own dad. My grandfather saw the situation unfold and advised my young father in matters of benevolence. In my grandfather's view, my dad was trying to save my mom from the tyranny of her own father, but unfortunately, he had neither the experience nor the resources to support a wife. Thus, my father was like someone who has no food of his own to eat, inviting the neighbors over for dinner. Was Papa wrong? I think not. Was his heart in the right place? I think so, but I do know now that he believes he would have done things differently if he had the chance.

Benevolence, or as Aristotle terms it, "liberality," is another virtue in which a fine balance must be attained. A benevolent man is not defined by his giving of money to

those less fortunate whenever he feels it is necessary, and he is obviously not defined by keeping his money to himself. Aristotle's definition of this man goes beyond charity, as the liberal man must also know when to give of himself and when to accept for his own means. As my dad quickly learned, giving entirely of yourself with no regard for your own well-being, ends in disaster. While, keeping all the good you have to yourself is of no benefit either.

Though the liberal man giving in excess and disregarding his own needs sometimes characterizes Aristotle's definition, I believe that the true nature of this virtue, and the other virtues, is found in knowing one's limits. Knowing one's limits comes with time being able to test them. Much like in an athletic setting, your brain tends to underestimate your physical ability and one of the greatest strengths of a top athlete is the ability to mentally push past their physical limits to achieve greatness. With that example out there, I feel it is necessary to say that the liberal man is astute and wise not only with his finances, but with his non-monetary resources as well. I have seen many fall victim to their own kindness by giving time or mental reserves without utilizing any time for their own.

Before we delve into literary views of benevolence, prodigality, and illiberality, I find it necessary to invoke the muse of an Italian poet, Dante Alighieri, lest we find ourselves in our own dark wood of literary error. Dante's account of his descent into Hell provides us with a unique look at the consequences of when we do not find the Aristotelian mean. These consequences have implications beyond Heaven and Hell, as Dante had more purpose in writing *The Divine Comedy* than to merely speak to the

afterlife. Dante wanted readers to change their lives in the present; to find happiness and balance now, rather than wish they had later.

The first part of Dante's descent takes him through the circles of hell, past the carnal, the gluttonous, and the virtuous pagans left in limbo. In the fourth circle Dante encounters the hoarders and wasters; both parties consumed by their obsession with money. Dante's description of the populace of the fourth circle of Hell matches the description offered up by Aristotle. Since the Bible states that the love of money is the root of all evil, it would make sense that Dante include these sinners in his infernal journey. It is interesting that both the prodigal and avaricious love money but express their love in different ways. Prodigals enjoy the misuse and utter disregard of their resources while the avaricious cannot keep enough to themselves. All this we must consider as we hone in on Aristotle's virtue of liberality.

Though the prodigal appears throughout literature, one of my favorite examples is from F. Scott Fitzgerald. In his widely acclaimed novel, *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald paints a superb portrait of the prodigal man. Before we mine further into the implications *The Great Gatsby* has on our understanding of virtue, we must first understand a little about Fitzgerald's background and the cultural climate he lived in. Before he wrote his masterpiece, Fitzgerald, much like Papa, had no pennies to spare when he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre. Unfortunately, she broke off their engagement because he couldn't support her. Once his first book got published, though, he found himself living a life of opulence and Zelda returned to him. He spent a great deal of his money living as a celebrity and lavishing his wife. His money also went to extreme amounts of alcohol

so, needless to say, he knew how to write about prodigality. The creation of Jay Gatsby, a character in his most-acclaimed novel, was the result of Fitzgerald's life experiences.

Aristotle said that a prodigal man is destroyed by his own devices and this rings true for Gatsby. Jay Gatsby, originally James Gatz, started out with very little to his name. He grew up in poverty and always detested how he was limited by his inadequate wealth. Unfortunately, he could not keep his love, Daisy, by his side and she married a very wealthy man instead of him. Once Gatsby's wealth was acquired, he moved near where his love lived with her husband and did all that he could to get noticed by her. He spent a great deal of his money on extravagant house parties that were legendary throughout the city of New York. The transformation from James Gatz into Jay Gatsby left him with the idea that spending was the way to attract Daisy and gain fame. Fitzgerald and Gatsby could not take all the blame for how their mindsets changed, in fact, a great deal of blame rested in the women they pursued, and ultimately, the social norms of the society in which they were a part of.

Gatsby's rise to fame was fueled by endeavors that were less than reputable. This is one aspect of the definition that Aristotle provides for the prodigal man. Not only does this man exceed in giving/spending, but reckless spending leads a prodigal to seek out unwholesome ways of earning capital. Gatsby tells Nick of how he came into his wealth, which was a finely fabricated fable of how he inherited his family's money after they died. In reality, Gatsby found wealth through bootlegging, crime, and shady investments. His friendship and business alliance with Meyer Wolfshiem is evidence of these claims.

Wolfshiem's character is introduced in the fourth chapter of the book as the reader starts gain more insight into the life of Gatsby. The reader learns that the two met after the war and we can deduce that this is the beginning of the unwholesome business dealings Gatsby had with this man. Wolfshiem tells stories of crime and even brazenly tells Nick about his cuff links made out of human molars. As the reader quickly discovers, Meyer Wolfshiem is not the kind of person to get into business with. Gatsby's alliance with this man is telling of the kind of man he has become and the kind of men he has aligned himself with in order to win his wealth.

A prodigal man, as mentioned before, is destroyed by his own fault. In the case of Gatsby, we see that his cavalier nature and theatrical presence draws much attention. These led Gatsby's party guests to wonder where his vast wealth came from and inquire further into the character of their host. Tom, Daisy's husband, was no exception to this. As soon as Daisy started spending time with Gatsby, Tom mounted an investigation of Gatsby and all his dealings. After seeing Gatsby interact with Daisy, Tom soon deduces Gatsby's intentions with Daisy. Unfortunately, Gatsby does nothing to stop these accusations and, in fact, fuels the fire by brashly boasting of how Daisy never loved Tom. This does absolutely nothing helpful for the situation and, in turn, leads to the death of Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress.

Gatsby's example shows us how a prodigal not only lavishly spends, but must replenish their wealth by questionable means and encounters trouble because of their nature. Both Gatsby and Fitzgerald end up being destroyed by their own reckless wastefulness. This same vice threatened Papa in his younger years, but he found his way out of a profligate mindset and was able to support his wife and child on the way.

Unfortunately, each of these three men was threatened because of the women they loved. They each had to make a choice between modest living and extravagant death.

Many great men have met their doom in the love of a woman. Once again, we see this theme littered throughout all of history, literature, and film. Samson and Delilah, Romeo and Juliet, and Spiderman and Mary Jane Watson all represent how men blindly follow love straight to their destruction. Each of these men throw caution to the wind and spend time, money, and other resources without question for the people they care about. Though I have had my share of prodigal experiences when it comes to my dealings with the fairer sex, my fight with prodigality came last year when helping a friend in his time of need.

My friend, a prodigal in his own right, was going through a tough time early last year and lady luck seemed to be too busy washing her hair or studying to give him the time of day. He had come to the brink of his own destruction through a series of bad financial decisions and the love of a woman. He gorged the relationship with weekend trips to Disney, dropping hundreds of dollars on clothing and jewelry, and time spent solely with her and not his friends. After all this, he could not keep her in his life and she decided to call the relationship off. This plummeted his mood into depths he had never experienced before and he chose to console himself with even more reckless spending and wild living. Bad went to worse and he found himself contemplating suicide.

Seeing this, I did all that I could on my own to help him. Countless hours were spent talking to him and doing my best to counsel him. I neglected school, relationships, and other commitments in order to help this friend. It was not long before I was exhausting my money on taking him out just to spend time with him. Not only that, but

every time I had a rough day, I decided to treat myself to a nice dinner; one outside my price range. Although I did everything I thought to, I only delayed the inevitable. The finality of the ordeal came when he attempted suicide, failed and was sent to a therapeutic facility. This trial soon passed and he is now back on track and making the best out of the life he has been given.

Once again, we see how knowing one's limits is of utmost importance in becoming virtuous. This is also how we see that prodigality can often be masked under the guise of benevolence. What I tried to do for my friend came from a place of genuine concern and a desire to help any way I could. Unfortunately, I was very limited in how much help I could truly provide. My first instincts were to drop all that I was responsible for in order to help which eventually led to many complications with school and relationships, resulting in some problems that just could not be solved. By being so reckless with my time and resources and overconfident in my abilities to help, I was brought to the brink of my own destruction. I learned my limits through that experience and that is when I firmly decided that I would not go into the mental health field upon the completion of my Bachelor's in Psychology. This decision came with great struggle and deliberation but, in the end, I believe it to be the path that is best for me.

The flipside of the prodigal coin is illiberality. Now, the most glaring literary example of such a person is Ebenezer Scrooge, a crotchety old man that would put even the great Walter Matthau to shame. Scrooge is the prototypical illiberal as he fits Aristotle's description down to the letter. This person, unlike the prodigal, exceeds in taking, and lacks in giving. The illiberal person tends to have all the resources they need, sometimes in excess, but declines to "share the wealth," so to speak. Also, as

you may have already guessed, this sort of stingy, selfishness is most often exacerbated by old age. Thus, bringing us back to the original definition of Scrooge being, a crotchety, old, and stingy man.

Illiberality is a construct that is much more common than prodigality, which is due purely to human nature. It is not within one's natural instincts to give of their own stores, in fact, it is much more natural to keep resources to oneself. As both Dante and Aristotle explain, illiberality goes beyond that of just storing up food for the winter. Avarice can be likened unto lust for money. Dante's avaricious were once clergy, blinded by their greed and now unrecognizable in the afterlife. Someone once told me that those in power seek more power and it is a well-known saying that "absolute power corrupts absolutely." These two proverbs shed light on, not only those who Dante saw afflicted by their own voracity for wealth, but also many poems concerning avarice.

Victor Hugo's "Envy and Avarice" tells of two sisters, Envy and Avarice. Avarice is described as pale, with gloating eyes, and her back and shoulders doubled over. Hugo's description mirrors that of an elderly person, whose body endured the weathering of many years and much greed. Avarice is holding a box close to herself, a box which is described as "fatal." In the poem, Avarice repeatedly emits one phrase, "There's not enough, enough, yet in my store!" Hugo's account typifies the standard illiberal, with a bankrupted body and blinded by their own greed.

As a capitalist society, greed is a flag so gallantly streaming and illiberality runs as deep as the roots of our amber waves of grain. Within the past few years our lust for money as a nation has come to bear and we are now in a constant, Inferno-esque, battle between our illiberality and our prodigality. Since this is not an examination of

modern society's virtues and vices, I will spare you my own political views and musings. What I will say is that the Scrooge mentality is so pervasive that it affects everyone in one way or another.

As I bring my college career to a close, I long to see four years characterized by benevolence, liberality, and all-around virtuousness. Unfortunately, I find that this is not the case; in fact, at times I have been the opposite. I have already mentioned how I met the spirit of prodigality and barely made it out of the encounter with my wits and my well being intact. Though, lust for money has never been quite the struggle I have faced, a liberal mindset is something that I have had to reacquire after being so loose with my own resources. As humans, it is natural to learn from negative experiences and do your best to not let them happen again. The problem lies in not finding the balance, and swinging to the opposite side.

The story of my friend's and my own prodigality did not end with the resolution of his problems, or even my own problems. The damage done by that experience did not reach its zenith until much later. Those few months left me destitute of money, energy, and mental resources. I realized that I needed to get back on track and that I needed to spend some time bringing my life back to baseline. At first that meant more time spent on school and rowing, both endeavors I have always enjoyed. I was training hard and working hard on all the schoolwork I had to catch up on. I enjoyed the sense of accomplishment I felt and how my body was showing that I was sleeping more and eating better. Though, it became clear that this was not enough for me. I wanted more. I once again neglected relationships by working constantly and spending any other free

time training. More time at work meant more money and more time training meant more notoriety on the team.

I remember telling a friend of mine, years ago, that college is the time to be selfish. My 18 year-old self believed that the next four years would be a time, not only of self-discovery, but a time to focus entirely on myself; hoarding my resources for my own and saving up for a time of famine. I did not realize how wrong I was. College definitely sets the course for the rest of your life, and if you live it selfishly, it's a hard habit to break. I had to break myself of the mindset after my desire for more power and more money became such a problem. Luckily, I was working at a job that didn't pay too much, so once I realized how much I was neglecting other aspects of my life and how little money I was making in the process, I decided to move back towards the mean.

Now I know that a part of who I am is doing all I can to help people, but in order to make sure I do not repeat my actions in the past, I must understand where I should seek outside help, and also when I should take a step back and take time to myself. I realized through this ordeal that my support systems, such as family and friends, cannot be ignored and should be treasured. Those people are the ones that I not only should freely give of my time and resources, but are the right kind of people to accept help from. Thus, I feel that I am well on my way to reaching the Aristotelian virtue of liberality; by knowing my limits, knowing my supports, knowing who and when to give freely to and knowing who to turn to when I need help.

En boca cerrada no entran moscas

A closed mouth catches no flies.

When I was a young boy, my father behaved a lot differently than he does now. It is safe to say that as I was growing up, he was doing the same. I didn't realize it then, but there was much that he had yet to learn and understand about himself. I was born as he was reaching the age of 30. His twenties were behind him and with that, his wild days in college and the first few trial-filled years of his marriage to my mother. The second decade of his life closed with lessons learned on pride and prodigality, but he had still so much knowledge to gain about patience.

When I was younger, I was much more of a "hot-head" than I am now. Attribute it to the temperance that comes with age or the fact that I got myself into more trouble than I care to elaborate on, either way, I have mellowed out in my time at college. In my pre-adolescence, my anger ran hotter than the Florida sun and my patience wore thinner than my grandfather's hair, which was the most probable cause for my father's receding hair line and high blood pressure. Yet, I am told I was not that much different from my own father in his youth. Maybe Papa saw aspects of himself in me, or maybe he saw how unruly I was and vowed never to be that crazy again. No matter what the reason, Papa realized that something had to change, for his benefit, mine, but most importantly, my mother's (read: "if Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy").

Aristotle had trouble pin-pointing what this next virtue looks like. In my estimation, it is because anger, temperance, and lack of anger can all be deemed as virtuous based on the situation you are presented with. In today's society, we are taught that showing anger is bad, but much like Odysseus taught his son, anger is right as long as

it is shown in the right context. Patience is a virtue, yes, but nowadays patience looks like the “welcome” mat on someone’s doorstep and temperance is the nerdy kid who gets shoved in his locker in middle school. Aristotle, however, had a different view on temperance.

As we learn more about Aristotle’s virtues, it becomes very apparent that these virtues build on each other. This is shown in how Aristotle explains a temperate or gentle man, this man being “loth to take vengeance and very ready to forgive,” and with this we can see elements of courage and benevolence. So how does one become temperate? How do those of us who fly off the handle find a way towards the mean? The answer lies in the study of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and the character, Tybalt Capulet, because, let’s face it, a literature analysis just isn’t complete without some Shakespeare.

Tybalt’s introduction is found in Act 1, Scene 1 where an infraction has occurred in this Shakespearean gang war. Benvolio, a Montague, doing his best to keep the peace, gets caught up in the conflict and is confronted by Tybalt, the cantankerous cousin of the Capulet clan. Tybalt’s first words are “Turn thee, Benvolio; look upon thy death,” solidifying him as the personification of “shoot first and ask questions later.” As Benvolio continues to try and diffuse the situation, Tybalt becomes more and more enraged. He even declares that he hates peace as much as he hates Hell itself and it is this unbridled fury that brings about trouble time and again in this play.

The next time Tybalt storms onto the scene it is at the Capulet’s dinner party where Romeo has been spotted in his Juliet induced star-crossed stupor. Tybalt, without hesitation, orders a page to fetch his sword and then proceeds to tell Lord

Capulet of how Romeo's presence will soon be met with death. Unfortunately for Tybalt, Lord Capulet is wiser and tells Tybalt to prematurely end his assault on the house of Montague lest the party be ruined. Here Lord Capulet tries to teach his young nephew patience but the tetchy Tybalt will not hear of it.

Tybalt's angry antics land him in trouble when he confronts Mercutio, Benvolio, and Romeo and challenges them to a duel. Mercutio takes it upon himself to duel with Tybalt, which results in Mercutio losing his life. At this, Romeo loses his own cool and fights Tybalt to avenge his friend. Tybalt dies in this battle and thus ends the saga of the angry Capulet. Tybalt's anger and bloodlust could not be satiated and, in turn, he became yet another casualty of the Capulet-Montague feud. We learn here that the quick to anger are usually the quick to die, and the balance between excessive anger and excessive doormat-ness cannot be found in unbridled rage.

These lessons also teach us that since Aristotelian virtues build on each other, it would make sense that the vices do as well. A wise alien once said, "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." Despite the fact that Yoda is old, green, and entirely fictional, his words of wisdom ring true in our study of anger. When Yoda said this to Anakin Skywalker, he knew that Anakin's fear, if left unchecked, would cause his anger to burst forth. Many of the hot-tempered people I've encountered are those that are desperately trying to prove something. This need to prove oneself, in my opinion, stems from an underlying fear. In the case of Tybalt's bravado, he feared being viewed as a coward. So in his encounters, he deems those who are not angry and willing to fight as cowards.

This is what Papa thought in his youth; those who won't stand up and fight are cowards and those who act out of anger are manly. Growing up under the red flag of machismo colored his view as such and it took many years to change these views, but he soon learned the proper occasions for anger and temperance, for the man of virtue knows that both are needed depending on the situation. Tybalt, on the other hand, did not know and neither did Anakin, thus leading to their deaths.

I, much like Papa, was not always the calm, cool, and collected man I am today. In fact, I was quite the opposite, as I could not control my anger and overconfidence. I took great pride in "stirring the pot," so to speak, and I got myself into a wildly unnecessary amount of trouble because of it. I have already told you of how my pride led to a great fall last year when I got sick, but I rarely tell the story of how my anger almost led to the beating of a lifetime. One of the reasons I hesitate to recount this story is because I believe it to be telling of my true character at that age, which is something I'm not proud of.

In order to properly relay this story, I must give you some background information. Much like many high school stories, it all begins with a girl; a beautiful girl named Arielle. Her beauty was only matched by her high propensity to ensnare men in a one-sided Romeo and Juliet style scenario. It is for this reason that I'm sure I'm not the first, nor will I be the last person to mention her in an expository endeavor. In this particular year of my captivity, she had found herself another poor schlemiel to love, much to my dismay.

The day I found out, her, another friend, and I decided to go to the beach at night just to hang out. Just before we arrived at the beach Arielle revealed the identity of this

month's competition. I became very enraged but had to keep my cool around the girls, lest my true intentions were discovered. As we were exiting the car at the beach, a guy in a pickup truck drove by, honked, hollered and catcalled at the girls. With my anger boiling just barely under the surface, I got out of the car and start yelling any profanity and using any offensive hand gesture that came to my mind in that moment. This helped alleviate my anger for two reasons. One being the emotional release I experienced from yelling and two being how anger was quickly replaced with terror as the pickup turned around and started heading towards where I was standing.

I don't know if you have felt the simultaneous urge to run, play dead, and wet yourself, but trust me, it is not a feeling you want to experience. Luckily I chose to run, as the latter two would have drastically changed the outcome of the story. As I ran to find a spot to hide, I forgot that the girls were still around, completely in the open. As I was exiting my hiding spot, I heard the driver of the pickup ask the girls where their boyfriend was. Without missing a beat, Arielle scoffed and yelled back, "yeah, he's not my boyfriend." This unintentional jab at my self-esteem didn't deter the efforts of this young man who could only be described as a Napoleon on steroids.

I stepped out of the shadows and stood before this 5 foot 5 inch hulk of a man. It took all 5 feet 8 inches and 150 pounds of me to stop my voice from cracking when I said, "Yeah, I'm here." With his tree-like arms pulsing with anabolic rage and his barrel-chest puffed out, he said, "you got a problem with me?" I swallowed the lump in my throat and shakily said, "No sir." He then advanced towards me and plainly stated, "good, because I will kick your ass if you do." He took one look at me, turned around, and walked away. Now this could have been the end of a mildly entertaining story about

my crazy youth, but it would have been too easy and made too much sense for me to stop talking.

After I recovered from the miniature, fear-induced stroke I just had experienced, I remembered all the anger I had from the day and uttered one reckless rage-filled sentence back to him. The man stopped in his tracks and turned around upon hearing, “Yeah! You better walk away!” Much to my horror, he started advancing towards me and with the creatine-fueled power of a thousand weight lifters, he sucker punched me and knocked me to the ground. As he moved in to deliver another blow, it took the urging of the girls to get him to stop. He then stopped, laughed, and walked away.

As the girls picked me up off the ground I learned two valuable lessons; letting anger control me can only end in the systematic destruction of my self-esteem and the painful reminder that I don’t have any muscle in my abdominal area. No matter how much it hurt, I needed to be knocked down to understand that to be angry is easy and to be angry at the wrong time or wrong person could hurt really bad. I don’t know if Aristotle had to learn this from personal experience or not, but he knew that too much anger could kill a man. He also knew that too little, or as he called it, wrathlessness, could be the end of a man as well.

Aristotle regarded the wrathless as foolish, because while the wrathful man exhibits anger at all the wrong times, as in every time there is even the slightest opportunity to show anger, the wrathless miss every opportunity to show it. Things that should upset them don’t, and things that should pain them, don’t seem to have an effect. Yes, these people may avoid some steroid ridden, Napoleonic encounters such as my own, but they still get “beat up” in their own way. Life and people tend to take

advantage of how they seem to roll over and die instead of standing up for themselves or others.

Back in 1759, a French author named Voltaire realized the mindset of this kind of person was an epidemic that needed to be remedied. In that time a man named, Gottfried Leibniz, promoted a philosophical concept throughout the region. Leibniz believed that God created the world, and God is flawless, therefore the world should be flawless as well. Meaning that any imperfection in the world that is perceived by man is not really an imperfection, but something that is the best of all possible worlds. Voltaire saw this theory and used his novel, *Candide*, to make a complete mockery out of it.

The main character, Candide, is an innocent young man who lives in the castle of a wealthy baron. This castle is a veritable paradise for our protagonist and he enjoys living the cushy lifestyle. This life even includes being near the lovely Cunegonde, who is the daughter of the Baron. Unfortunately, no novel about the folly of optimism is complete without a female helping lead the protagonist into oblivion, so, not surprisingly at all, his love gets him into trouble as he is found kissing her and then kicked out of the paradise that is his home. Candide's expulsion from his opulent abode is the first of many ill-fated events he encounters and then "overcomes" with the teachings of optimism.

Once on his own, poor Candide encounters two soldiers who are overwhelmingly nice to him. Candide enjoys their hospitality and kindness, as he has just recently become homeless. These two travelers are even so nice as to provide him with an involuntary enlistment into their army. Unfortunately, before Candide can even realize

what has happened, he has been fettered and shipped off to war. Two floggings and a near loss of his head later, he still remains optimistic.

Soon after this ordeal he takes the first opportunity he can and quickly deserts the army. In his travels he sees how the war has ravaged both the people and the landscape he is traveling along, but after all this, Candide seems unaffected by all that he has seen and experienced. Honestly, most people would have gone mad with rage by now. If I was kicked out of my home, captured and enlisted in the army, ruthlessly beaten, and then homeless yet again, I feel like I would be ready to kill the next person that crossed me. If this were not enough to spark his anger, he encounters his old mentor, Pangloss, who tells of how the baron's castle was raided in the war and all the inhabitants killed. Even the lovely Cunegonde was raped and brutally murdered. This news troubles Candide, but he quickly recovers from his initial shock and desperately tries to find the good in the situation. Instead of getting even a bit angry, Candide sees this as an opportunity to thank his lucky stars. If he hadn't been kicked out of the baron's house, he would have been surely killed.

With newfound optimism Candide continues on his journey. The rest of the book is basically the complete deconstruction of "the best of all possible worlds" theory as poor Candide over and over becomes a human punching bag. Little by little, he becomes more and more disillusioned with Pangloss' theory, but he will not show even the slightest bit of backbone throughout the whole novel and it is this lack of response that makes him look foolish.

Aristotle viewed the wrathless person as even more of a detriment than the wrathful man. As a child, remember that kid that just couldn't show their frustration well?

That kid that bottled everything up and then let it loose in a frenzy that can only be described as cataclysmic? That is the result of someone who does not show his or her anger in a healthy manner, or at all. The hothead gets their anger out quick, and then doesn't have to deal with it for much longer. Sure, there is a bit of destruction left in their wake, but they get the anger out and move on with their day. The Candides of the world cannot move on because they let their emotions stew and then boil over at a later, much more terrible date.

So what can we learn from the examples of Tybalt and Candide? From Papa and myself? I must admit that it took a punch to the gut and blow to my pride for me to bring my anger in check. Unfortunately, in recent years, I've become more reserved and taken on some Candide-like characteristics. I've let some things roll right off my back, which, at the time, I thought was the best course of action. What I have learned, both in life and now in writing this, is that the balance is hard to come by, especially when it comes to showing anger. This year alone has showed me that there are plenty of times when showing your anger is the right move. There are some causes worth fighting for and some people that just don't understand until they see how passionate you are.

For the past year I have coached a high school rowing team. This young team is full of rowers with all the potential in the world and all they needed was someone to help them unlock it. When I arrived, I quickly got to work on teaching the new rowers the fundamentals of rowing and the nature of competition. 8 months later, the novice rowers have brought in the most medals for the team this year and the most medals from any novices in past years. These young high schoolers received the most of my attention and coaching and benefited from it. Unfortunately, the head coach didn't give them the

time of day initially due to most of them being abysmal rowers at the start of their time on the team. Once they became proficient rowers and started winning medals, he turned his eye on them and wanted to coach them more.

This led to much conflict between the two of us because I had become quite territorial, and took it as an offense that their successes brought about his newfound interest. After a couple of months of conflict, mostly brought on by the combined pride of the two of us, it all came to a head after a race in which I allowed the boats I had cultivated be changed by the head coach. After his changes yielded terrible results, I, along with the rest of the coaching staff, told him we needed to change things back and go with what we had before. After much debate I put my foot down and let him know, point blank, that his opinion was not as valid as mine based purely on time spent with the boats in question. I believed that the chances the girls had at success would be diminished if they were switched up based on the whims of someone who didn't spend any significant time coaching those boats.

I believe my response was, not only warranted, but within the realm of reasonable anger shown. I fought for people whose development I had a vested interest in. I believed so strongly that I was right that I would not back down. In the end, we came to an agreement; my suggestions taken and a new coaching rotation put into effect. Now we all strive to coach each boat equally so they benefit from each one of the coach's expertise. Lesson: learn when anger is valid and worthy to be let out. In my opinion, one of the best times to show your anger is in the defense of those you care about. That one moment has helped me stand up for myself as a person, student, and a coach.

Temperance is a virtue that is as valuable as all the wealth in the world. One of the most salient memories I have of my father's anger being an asset is when someone made the mistake of threatening my family in an argument with my father. They were talking in the front doorway of my house through the partition of the screen door. Once any mention was made of harming his family, Papa, with the swift and powerful motions of a lion, left the doorway and engaged the enemy of his kingdom. He simply approached the man and uttered three simple sentences. "No one threatens my family. If you want to do this, I promise you that we are not walking out the same way we went in. Make your choice." Papa, at that point, a collected man, let his anger burst forth and without making any moves toward violence, ended the assault on his household.

A virtuous man becomes angered over injustices to those he loves, has the courage to fight for them, and gives of himself liberally. I can only hope to become a man like that one day, and I believe that the defense of my team is a step in the right direction. I believe my ongoing fight for the well being of 40 rowers is a constant test of my mettle. Sometimes I become angry but I have learned the best times to use it; like a fighter who makes every strike count, as to not waste any energy. If the study of virtue has taught me anything, it is that I must be efficient with my resources, hence why we must choose to show virtue at the precise time. If we fight just for the hell of it, we are doing nothing but punching at air.

Mas sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo

The Devil knows more because he is old than because he's the Devil.

This brief treatise into Aristotle's virtues has brought us to the piece de resistance, the end all be all, the grand pubaa of all virtues. What make this one virtue

important is it's enormity and it's difficulty in attaining. A man who can master this, is the true definition of Aristotle's virtuous man. Confucius calls this man "superior," because they are the best, and they know it. This man knows himself, expects victory, and attains it.

Whether you call it what Aristotle did, "high-minded," or what Confucius did, "Superior," this person observes the mean in all that they do. Confucius said that the path of the Superior man is like the beginning of a long journey, one must take that first step. In a rowing race, the start is crucial to how a boat will do throughout the race. In elementary school, we hosted a run to fundraise for our school. At the very beginning of the race, a girl tripped on her shoelaces and caused everyone else to trip over her. Within seconds there was a fifteen-student pileup. Needless to say, that was a wrap on her fundraising for the day. In the race of life, the superior man doesn't forget to tie his shoelaces and therefore, saves himself an embarrassing face-plant into the concrete.

This means that preparation is present in a high-minded person. As I have mentioned before, a skilled musician prepares diligently for the concert and a star athlete puts hours of practice in before the big meet, therefore the high-minded person practices each of the virtues constantly. By definition, the superior man utilizes the virtues in concert and has mastered each one of them. Meaning, you cannot become superior unless you have had time to cultivate the virtues and discover what balance means to you. The Devil isn't good because he is the Devil, he's so good because of years of practice; there's no substitute for experience.

So how does one engage all the aforementioned virtues, while avoiding the vices? It's all about mindset. You focus entirely on your goal. Confucius said that the

Superior does not abandon his goal even for the time it takes to eat one meal. During my time as a coach, I have learned many things. One is, I'm constantly learning. Another is that every single day I need to have a goal, and I need to let it be known to those I am coaching that day. The focus of the practice becomes improvement, even if it is by a small amount, for there must always be forward motion. Come race time, there must also be a goal. Many coaches, including myself, fall into the trap of making the goal to win, but this is not what high-mindedness is about.

A high-minded man's goal is simple: honor. Honor is the superior man's focus, every single day. In any team, there are those that truly apply themselves, and those that do not. On the team I coach, there is one girl in particular that has consistently stood out amongst her peers. Every single practice, without fail, she approaches me and asks what she can improve. Not only that, but she remembers it for the next practice, and works her hardest to rectify the problem. At the end of the next practice, she asks me if she improved her problem, and if there is anything else she should work on. This is what high-mindedness is about. Confucius said the superior man is constantly seeking improvement; always finding areas that need work.

In the end, honor is not gained in one day of racing, but every single day, at practice. The superior man knows this, and therefore makes their daily life concerned with being virtuous. Easier said than done, right? Right. Lieutenant Jimmy Cross struggled with this in Tim O'Brien's novel, *The Things They Carried*, an account of the Vietnam war.

Jimmy Cross was the leader of the Alpha Company, the company Tim O'Brien was a part of. Throughout O'Brien's recollection of this war we learn more and more

about the character of Cross; including his strengths and weaknesses. He is by no means, the perfect person, and he had much to learn about becoming the Superior man, yet greatness and honor was thrust upon him at a young age. Aristotle states that the superior man is someone who occupies a tremendous office, one with enormous responsibility. To be responsible for the lives of each man in your company is an incredibly heavy charge and something Jimmy Cross took seriously. Yet, at the young age of 24, Jimmy Cross was just a young man in love with a girl, and he just happened to be at war. So despite his important position, he was still young and had trouble observing the mean.

Despite his faults, Jimmy has, in my opinion, what Aristotle described as a “greatness of soul.” He has this, not because the decisions he made were good, but because of what he learned from the decisions he made. This is why experience is the gateway to becoming a Superior man. For it is often through the experience of defeat, that one learns how to live victoriously. Jimmy looked at himself first, not others, to find fault. Not only this, but he moves to correct these faults as soon as he realizes them. When a member of his company dies, Jimmy finds all that could have done to stop it and when he comes upon what he believes to be the core issue, he does all that he can to stop it from ever putting his men in danger again.

Jimmy believed his love for Martha, the girl whose letters, good luck charms, and ambivalence he carried with him every day on the battlefield, caused the death of Ted Lavender, another member in his company. Jimmy is daydreaming of her and the life he could have with her when Ted is shot. He never fully forgives himself for this, but he makes sure it doesn't happen again. He takes what he has of Martha and burns it, so

that he is no longer distracted from his job. Years later, at a reunion, Jimmy encounters Martha, who has moved on from toying with the emotions of men to become a missionary. Jimmy professes his love to her, yet she is, once again, uninterested in what he had to offer.

In the second chapter of O'Brien's book, we witness a conversation between Cross and O'Brien in which they reflect on the war and all that happened afterward. This is where we see a great deal of Cross' character. We see that Cross remains open with his feelings, both hate and love. He remains true to Martha and proclaims that he still loves her, and he also shows his hate for allowing Ted Lavender to die. The foundation for a virtuous life was there back when he was 24, and after many years, he has built upon that foundation to become even more virtuous.

His courage, willingness to give of himself, and anger in the right situations all make a strong case for his high-mindedness. The non-perfect nature of Jimmy also makes him ideal. All can agree, even Aristotle and Confucius, that an honorable man is not a perfect man. The virtuous man is not a saint, by any means; in fact, he is more apt to start out as a man with excessive faults. Don't believe me? Look at the life of Paul.

Paul is another biblical example of a virtuous man, but for all of the acclaim and honor he received in the biblical texts, his beginning can only be described as disgraceful. Paul was once known as "Saul of Tarsus." He was known in the Christian world as the Sentinel; a Terminator of sorts. Disregarding the Arnold Schwarzenegger imagery that was invoked with that last statement, his main purpose was hunting and destroying members of the new, derisive cult known as Christianity. Not so virtuous right? Well, through a series of pretty unfortunate events (sorry, Lemony Snicket), he

found himself on the other side of the law, helping Christians everywhere. Isn't it funny that a lot of times in history, literature, and life it takes something extreme like going blind, getting knocked off your horse, seeing Jesus, etc. for us to start acting right? I know that if I was Saul, and was confronted by a guy who had died a while ago, I would most likely scream like a girl and soil myself. After that, I would change my ways.

Long story short, Saul became Paul, and ended up writing a good portion of the New Testament. Despite all this, Paul wrote that there were times that even he had trouble staying on the straight and narrow. He told his readers that what he wants to do (the virtuous thing), he doesn't and what he knows he shouldn't do (vice), he ends up doing. Does this make him any less of the superior man? Not at all, because he realized this was the case and worked to fix it. Paul's evil alter-ego, Saul, would not have done the same. Both Saul and Paul were concerned with honor, yet Paul excelled because his concern was honor from fulfilling a higher calling, not something superficial. Paul knew who he was and had extensive knowledge of both his strengths and weaknesses.

So what does this all mean for those of us searching for moral virtue and, ultimately, virtuous superiority and high-mindedness? This means that the road to high-mindedness is long and arduous, full of bumps and full of obstacles. This road was never meant to be easy, as it is those who are superior (meaning, yes, they are better than others) who are meant to tread upon it. By definition, superior means there exist others who will not reach that point, and remain inferior.

I can tell you with certainty that I am still on that road, Papa is still on that road, his Papa is still on that road, and you are on that road. The road to high-mindedness is a path we all have laid before us. I know that my experiences thus far have brought me

to a crossroads. I am sitting on the precipice of great and terrible things. These next few months of my life will set the stage for the rest of my time on this planet. Graduation is looming over my head and while it brings excitement and joy, it has also left me with a feeling of trepidation. How can I know that my experiences thus far have prepared me for what lies in store? The decisions I will have to make soon will be difficult and I will have before me the choice between what is best for me and what is best for my wallet.

At the beginning of this calendar year, I was moving into a completely new chapter of my life. I was starting the last semester of my senior year of college, my last semester of collegiate rowing, and my last chance (or so I thought) to make a name for myself in Tampa. I had just ended what was the longest relationship of my life, and I was, honestly, scared to do new things without someone I had spent nearly every day with for the past two years. I had before me the option to move back to my hometown, take a job as an insurance agent, and live a life of prosperity in the realm of financial services. This meant leaving two rowing teams that meant the world to me. Both USF and the high school team I coached would be just a fond memory and I could only hope my legacy would last.

If I'm being honest, as I looked out on what my life could become with this vocation, it didn't look terrible. In fact, I would lead a pretty comfortable lifestyle. Though, as a kid I knew that I didn't dream of one day becoming a financial services representative for a big corporation. Oddly enough, as a kid I never aspired to do the things kids usually wanted to do such as become a policeman, fireman, or an astronaut. Growing up in church, the heroes of my world were church leaders, mainly Pastors. Strange as it seems, the three greatest men I know were once Pastors.

Papa, as I already mentioned, pastored a church for 5 years and in that time I was able to see him at his lowest and at his highest. It is for making it through those times with his integrity intact that makes Papa my hero today. The other two pastors are renowned for the same reason. Peter, my former youth pastor, is a man that I hold in the absolute highest regard. If you were to ever find a man well on his way to becoming the superior man, this is the guy. I have never seen such courage, gentleness, benevolence, and honor in a man so young. I cannot mention any, and I mean any, of my accomplishments without finding a way his teachings, and most importantly, his actions have influenced them. Much like Papa, he encountered great adversity from our church home, but throughout the trying times Peter never lost sight of his honor. He was never vain or assuming, yet his charge was so great.

The last of the three pastors is an elderly English man named Neville. As a man nearing the end of his life, his wisdom has reached astronomical heights. His knowledge and experience have brought him to the place where I can safely say he has become the essence of the superior man. Once again, his concern was honor and the legacy he left behind and, let me tell you, it is quite the legacy. Under his leadership many foreign countries received aid, the local community was strengthened, and many families received comfort and help in their times of need. He is a cornerstone of the Sarasota community because this man's ministry either directly or indirectly benefited a great deal of its population.

Growing up under each of these pastors, naturally I heard countless sermons about countless spiritual topics. The sermons I remember most from my father are the ones I've told you all about. Papa's ultimate ministry was his family, his church building

was his home and his sermons were his little proverbs, sayings, and the things he did to back them up. 22 years of my father's ministry have been poured into my life and I am thankful every day for such a great example.

The two sermons I remember most from Peter were at the beginning and the end of him being my youth pastor. The first was telling us to get up off the sidelines and the bleachers of life and go out and make a difference. I was reminded it was not simply attending a race that makes you an athlete, much like standing in a garage does not make one a car. In life you must take action, lest you become stagnant. I heard this at a time in my life when I was jaded and pissed off at the world, yet I was moved by these words. Aristotle would have been proud to see his teachings advocated so long after he formed them. As I mentioned at the beginning of this endeavor, one can only achieve virtuous harmony by acting in ways that are virtuous. If you do not act, how can you practice the virtues?

The second sermon was a call to focus. Peter spoke about the Biblical description of Heaven and what Heaven means to us. What I took from it is that we must always have a focus. As Maximus Decimus Meridius proclaimed in the movie *Gladiator*, "what we do in life echoes in eternity." I distinctly remember thinking of those words while listening to Peter speak that night at church. The focus has to be our goal, or overall mission. The past four years has been marked by one goal: graduating. I tried to make every action work towards that goal. Some have naturally hindered that goal and others have helped it, but here I am, only two weeks away from reaching it.

Pastor Neville's sermon on finishing strong is something I will absolutely never forget. Seven years after that sermon was delivered it is something I think about on a

regular basis. It is a principle I brought to rowing, to education, and now, to coaching. I have learned that the outcome of any event can be determined in the final seconds of its duration. In rowing, that last twenty strokes can mean the difference between last place and first. If we are to leave a strong legacy, we must always remember it is never too late to finish strong and make something of yourself.

Pastor Neville's words echo in my ears as I am finishing this chapter of my life. What does finishing strong look like to a 22 year-old undergraduate student at USF? For me, it is using the experiences I've gained in the past four years to propel me forward. It means pursuing what I love instead of what will make me a quick buck. This also means knowing myself and what skills I have to leverage the pay that I am worth; always remembering a high-minded man claims much because he deserves much.

So to bring it all full circle, I've decided to follow my passions and continue coaching and investing in the lives of younger people, much like Peter, Neville and Papa did with me. Teaching is a vocation that requires you to be in perfect balance, just like Aristotle taught. As a teacher of philosophical thought, I wonder if Aristotle ran into any of the modern day problems teachers/coaches run into. I wonder what the equivalent of chewing gum in class was back then, or if there were that one person in his classes that would not shut up. As a teacher, one must learn to master their anger, rein in their pride and overconfidence, and learn to give of oneself without burning out. My goal as a coach is always to help those I teach to act with honor and to always find balance.

The teachings of Fathers and Philosophers shaped who I am now, and will continue to shape me as I move forward in life. I hope to, one day, fulfill the role of both

Father and Philosopher to those I educate. Whether it be with the goofy sayings and proverbs I already tell my high-schoolers (much to their embarrassment) or the sayings my father taught me. I will continue to cite Aristotle, Fitzgerald, O'Brien, Shakespeare, and many others as I get a handle on my life and try to teach others to do the same with theirs. I hope that this brief dissertation on virtue and vice will help illuminate the path of balance to those who decide to tread on it, and hopefully to those further along the path than I am.

Virtue is not about doing everything right. Discovering virtue is about finding the balance between two vices, which you can only accomplish by getting up and doing it. Get off the bleachers, race with a purpose, and finish strong. Intend on racing with virtue, and although you will inevitably trip up, you will run with honor. That is the best advice I can give so far, and it is how I will live my life in the coming years. In the words of my Papa "Vale mucho más morir intentándolo, que vivir toda tu vida lamentándolo." It is better to die trying, than to live your life with regret.

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