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

E Pluribus Unum : Out of Many, One

We live in a world fragmented by our own desire for power and control. We have deconstructed the material world, including ourselves, to explain it and to conquer it, and we are left with the finite pieces that have little to no meaning. Consequently, most schools teach a finite, limited knowledge, ignoring abstractions like truth and ethics because these concepts have been disassembled, or denying them altogether because they cannot be empirically quantified. Most schools ignore virtues such as courage, restraint, and hope, or at best they reduce these to a list of behaviors to teach as if they were the steps to a mathematical algorithm. MCA is part of this fragmented world. However, here's the good news: We have the foundation and the tools to reassemble the parts. We can examine and teach the pieces and parts as they remain within a unified whole. We are looking at this idea from three reference points. In previous issues we addressed it through philosophy and civics. In this issue we'll consider ethics, the moral principles that govern us as individuals and as a community.



Part III: Ethics

In a nation that rejects objective truth yet hides behind a mask of open-mindedness and disavows any fixed values (relativism), especially those values that affect personal or private behavior, we are left with innumerable, shifting moral standards. Three hundred sixteen million citizens in the United States with three hundred sixteen million views, and no way to reconcile them. Furthermore, in this culture where we tend to analyze our surroundings with a cold, pragmatic detachment, we have shutdown our affections for the noble, instead learning to prize efficiency and personal gain.

Without objective standards we are left without any legitimate way to determine good from bad, right from wrong. In fact, we have no basis from which to determine anything except from the whims of our momentary, personal pleasures. If someone were to steal my car (or worse), I could cry foul, let alone expect justice. Without objective standards we have no basis from which to establish an honor code or even a school curriculum. Without absolutes, education is left with the self-serving maxim "knowledge is power."

The absence of objective truth gives rise to relativism (the concept that points of view have no absolute truth or validity, only relative, subjective value according to differences in perception), and relativism plus a desire to control leads to analysis, then to manipulation for personal gain. Bent on analysis, our public education system may decide that a character trait, such as respect, is necessary; but, in order for us to teach "respect," our behaviorist friends, who dominate public school thinking, deconstruct that trait into a long list of independent behaviors, which they then sequence, quantify, place on a time scale, and measure for 80% compliance. Since this approach is typically based in a materialistic worldview, those in charge then give rewards for conformity with the hopes that the behavior might become habitual. All very well intentioned. But from this process, however, children begin to take on a deconstructed view of life devoid of noble ideas, and they begin to learn how to get what they want, or in more crass (but nonetheless true) terms, how to control others. A student learns he can control the responses of others for his own selfish gains by his own words and actions.



The story Millennium Charter Academy is telling starts in a different place and has a different ending. We start by welcoming objective truth whether we like it or not because our devotion to the truth is greater than our personal desires. And, in that enduring, universal, knowable truth we find the basis for transcendent morality, what C.S. Lewis called the Law of Decency or what George Washington called Civility and Decent Behavior. Regardless of the term, it is "a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us." (C.S. Lewis) It is written on our hearts. We look to be informed, inspired, and shaped. From this vantage point, we can more clearly see the human condition, and we can unite in something greater than ourselves.

Millennium's vision of education brings together the head and the heart. When Descartes said, "ego cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am,") he was partially right. We are "thinking things." We are, however, *more* than just "thinking things." We are "loving things," and we are defined by what we love. Not by *if* we love, but *what* we love. Aristotle referred to this as a final attraction, an allure that pulls us toward a goal.

The heart and mind both have dominance, but in different matters. In matters of importance, the heart is dominant. If we know the truth, but have no love for it, the truth cannot affect the way we think or what we do. In matters of order, the mind is foremost. How can we love something we know nothing about? John Piper wrote, "And while it is true that the mind and the heart are mutually enlivening, it is also clear that the mind is mainly the servant of the heart. That is, the mind serves to know the truth that fuels the fires of the heart."



We are driven most fundamentally by what we love. According to Jonathan Edwards in *Freedom of the Will*, we are free, moral agents, and as such we always act according to the strongest inclination we have at the moment of choice. Therefore, whether we are five or fifty-five, we always choose toward our fundamental disposition, what we love most at that moment. In fact, none of us have ever in our lives chosen anything against our will. We always choose our strongest inclination at a given moment. I've heard it said that if you want people to build a ship, don't give them the tasks of gathering wood or constructing a frame, you give them instead a longing for the expanse, the splendor, and the beauty of the sea. Kindle their imaginations and inspire their hearts. Paint a picture of what is true and good and beautiful.

We acknowledge that humanity is both heart and mind, and we bring those aspects into union with each other. We teach the whole child. We discipline out of love for the student. We are mindful of the general well being of our community. Furthermore, while we accept that there are various perspectives of truth, we are willing to do the hard work to pursue the variations until we arrive closer to absolute truth. As we do this, we live out our vision to ground our "students in an honest search for knowable, universal truth, goodness, and beauty, [and we] continue our principle-based discipline grounded in love for the individual and respect for the corporate good, as well as a belief in redemption and growth." Throughout our story, we are building a society that operates from universal, timeless ethics. We are about bringing forth *e pluribus unum*.

Kirby R. McCrary, Headmaster

