



THE ACADEMIC JOURNAL

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Welcome to our thirteenth 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.

The iLife

iPad. iPod. iPhone. iTunes. iHome. iMovie. iWireless. myVerizon. Myspace.
Great developments that have added efficiency, effectiveness, and even entertainment to our everyday lives.
I can communicate, converge, create, connect, calm down, peruse, produce, and even pay bills.



Apple and other companies are cleverly marketing to us using first person, singular pronouns, such as "I" and "my" front and center of their products and services. It's working, too! Most of the technology world knows that iLife is a suite of software applications for organizing, editing, and publishing photos, movies, and music. Why do Apple and numerous other companies put "self" at the center of their marketing campaigns? The quick answer, of course, is it's really smart marketing. But, *why* does it work so well? Well, it's all about me! What could be better!? What I want, when I want it, and how I want it! I'm in control. (At least it feels that way.) This past Christmas, a retail store at Hanes Mall in Winston-Salem proudly drew attention to a stair-stepped, clothing display that read: "My life. My world. My decree," a marker for an audience who believes the individual has the ultimate and supreme right to decree truth and command whatever suits one's fancy.

The success of this marketing raises important questions regarding what we believe about truth. What if the use of these first-person pronouns is a window into what we really believe about life itself? Subconsciously do we believe that personal pleasure is the zenith of life, and that we have not only the ability but also the entitlement to control all that is around us to that end? By determining our preferences do we, by extension, believe we decree what is good and bad, right and wrong, even truth? Do we believe that we rule as kings with the singular purpose of personal comfort and satisfaction? Are each of us a demigod in his or her own right, battling with everyone around us for self-satisfaction in a world with no universals and nothing that lasts?

Jonathan Edwards, in *Freedom of the Will*, said that free, moral agents always act according to the strongest inclination they have at the moment of choice. Therefore, whether we are five or fifty, we always live our lives based on what we believe is true; so, what we believe *about* truth is a fundamental issue of life, and since knowable, universal truth is at the heart of MCA's vision for the next decade, it is essential that we understand what this means and what it does not mean.

So, how do we understand truth? If we say, "It's true for me, but it may not true for you," what does truth really mean? It means *preference*! It might be a personal preference: I don't believe it matters by what means I provide for my family, as long as I do; or, it might be a communal preference determined by those who agree to agree for the moment: Let's agree that stealing and murder are not acceptable. In this line of thinking "right and wrong" are replaced with "acceptable and unacceptable." Preference, in the end, is based not on ubiquitous truth, but on what is emotionally and physically satisfying. Preferences are what we like, and to like something is to describe *ourselves*, not necessarily any thing that is enduring or universal.

If we live as if we were able to say *my* truth and *your* truth, then each of us begins to use language to spin our own world, to shape it in our own image, rather than using our minds and language to describe and understand objective reality. We must be honest enough to distinguish clearly between *truth* (reliable, objective knowledge of real things) and *preferences* (what we like). There will be disagreements and seemingly conflicting information, but as Plato and Aristotle agreed there is an ideal (truth) to be discovered.

When we declare a *preference* to be a *truth* it allows us to do what we want without any interference of absolutes, since we get to make up our own rules and pretend that nothing else really matters. It's like being pathologically engrossed in a virtual life built inside World of Warcraft's Azeroth where we command virtual armies in virtual battles, or in Simcity where we create our own society, just the way we like it. In these less-than-real worlds, we are in charge, creating and calling all the shots, even proclaiming "game over" when we get too tired or frustrated. Utterly absorbed in such artificial worlds, we lose sight that there is more to real



ity than we are allowing ourselves to experience, that we are, in fact, not calling all the shots in life and that we are not omnipotent. We forget that someone else created and ordered the program, then invited us to participate in that world. Completely spell-bound expressing *preferences* as *truths*, we naively lose sight of anything larger than ourselves, anything grander, more powerful, or more noble.

Thinking this way, our sense of community changes too because each of us is at the center of his own virtual creation. We ultimately become solo agents, interpreting our own world and looking out for our own good. Taken to its logical conclusion, when we have each devised our own worlds in which we do what is prudent in our own minds, then society begins to unravel because there are no unifying values. No one can say honesty is good or murder is wrong because we have assumed the personal liberty to engineer our own systems of belief. When the chaos reaches an intolerable point, society clamors for something to restore peace and safety. The foundation is laid for a despot to reestablish order, ironically at the price of liberty itself.

The question remains, *What could be better?* There are self-evident truths more compelling than my ability to control and construct. There is hope. Beyond our own power limited by both time and by our nature, beyond our ultimately self-protective, self-centered selves with all our questionable and iniquitous decisions, there is real truth, real goodness, and real beauty. If we lay hold of universal, knowable truth, we can face life as it is, not just as we imagine it to be. We can have a logical, coherent matrix through which we can make everyday decisions. We can have a connection to the universal, to the eternal. We can live in freedom and not in despair. Only with a solid grasp of truth, goodness, and beauty can we have a bona fide foundation to live in covenant with one another. If not, then time-honored virtues like respect, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and courage have no basis and cannot bind together a community, let alone a nation.

The work in progress we call the United States of America was founded on the possibility that we can see beyond ourselves and that there is something greater than ourselves. Our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution embody the ideas of great thinkers since ancient Greece and the ancient Hebrew nation. Among those concepts to which our founding fathers assented are these two: 1) We are able and naturally disposed to live in community (“We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union...”); and 2) There is truth greater than ourselves (“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...”).

“Our students... [are] grounded in an honest search for knowable, universal truth, goodness, and beauty. We will increase our attention to developing... a devotion to intellectual and moral integrity.”

from The Vision for MCA's Second Decade

Without hyperbolizing, the stakes are alarmingly high. Without truth there is no way to frame education, no way to decide what to teach and what to learn. Without truth there is no hope of relief from the stress of pretending to be in charge. There is no meaning or purpose to life. No morality. There is no way to understand our guilt or anything legitimate to do with it. There's no hope of explaining right and wrong. And, there's no hope for understanding anything beyond a selfish love. There is no salvation beyond our own minds.

We have to wake up! We have to think, and think well. If we close our ears to the truth, then we open our hearts to deception. Relative truth is no truth at all, and it enslaves us to superficial living, to shallow relationships, and to the potential for anarchy. We must not acquiesce in popular ideas simply because they are in vogue. We must remember that in a democracy, such as ours, the majority determines preference, not truth. We pursue truth through logical examination of reality, understanding that truth proceeds from outside our temporal selves. Whether we are doctors or soldiers or moms or students, in a fundamental sense, it does not matter what honorable role we hold. It matters supremely, however, *what* we believe and consequently *how* we live. As individuals and as nation, we have to know if we are being swept away from truth and noble living. Before new paradigms solidify in our national or individual consciences, let's run our ideas to their logical conclusions and see where we end up. Let's consider what it means to live with integrity, fully aware of our assumptions and their ramifications. In the least, let's be living examples for our children by earnestly pursuing genuine truth, as demanding as it may be.

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