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AUSHALINKI: PROGRAM FROM PARADIGMS

Thomas J. Cunningham

While the shape of any General Education curriculum may vary according to each institution's pattern of degree requirements, the broader and more important question—what is, or ought to be, the content of a General Education Program—is open to general solution.

My title advances my solution. For it asserts that a Program of General Education ought to arise from paradigms: that is, it may be gleaned from examining those persons who have possessed and clearly exhibited such an education. Further, the title proposes a quartet of persons drawn from those traditions vital to Americans to serve as paradigms: Augustine, Shakespeare, Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. Let me approach the topic broadly.

Academics naturally tend to breed their own kind: we tend to pay more attention to those students who major in our field, who will enter the graduate schools that occupied us, and look to a career like ours. Erikson called it generativity, and it certainly is not a vicious tendency, although it is a shortsighted one. For the students who will teach in colleges—anywhere else—are but a miniscule part of the audience of our courses; and those who select our field as a major are, if we teach in general education courses, but a slight subset of that fragment. Further, while we may tend to look upon Aquinas, Newton, Kant, Hegel, William James and Paul Samuelson as models, it is well to note that all of them exercised their creative life in universities as a professional calling.

Our students have other destinies than ours; they need other models, with achievements other than those of college professors. AuShaLinKi provides these paradigms. Their very names identify their achievements, and their intellectual lineaments propose the general content for the patterns of course adopted. For Augustine, Shakespeare, Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. were neither specialists nor academic figures. Indeed, they were not merely thinkers, although thinking exercised each mightily: they were practical persons who administered a diocese, met performers' artistic and economic demands, waged a war and converted a nation's conscience by disobeying unjust laws.

Only one of them, Aurelius Augustine was a teacher. Still, he fitted this into the busy administrative tasks his appointment as bishop occasioned. Some philosophers, like Hannah Arendt, find him tiresome. But she thinks only of the old bishop, correcting his earlier writings as he watched Vandal invaders ring down the curtain on Western civilization. She ignores the irrepressible golden boy of half a century earlier who fathered a son with an equally young mistress, who orated before the emperor and other
civil dignitaries, who listened to pagan and Christian sages, bested each in discussion and argument and who, even in his *Confessions*, addressed to God, maintained that he had by himself at 17 years of age, studied a most difficult tract in logic such that no living person had subsequently shown him anything new in that subject. Shakespeare too exhibited extraordinary effervescence as a youth—Anne Hathaway was older and pregnant when she married the teenager—and the youthful bridegroom soon left for London; indeed, some scholars argue that Will served in the Royal Navy, perhaps in the new world. Lincoln also wandered as a young man, rafted down the Mississippi before Mark Twain imagined such a journey for Huckleberry Finn; Captain Lincoln saw active duty in Illinois' militia and watched an early, dear friend die, before he settled down to practice law at 26. Martin Luther King, Jr., having completed his final year of high school at 15, left his native state to labor for a summer in Connecticut's tobacco fields; the very train ride home following his free summer mapped out his whole life's work: when the train passed into Virginia, he was compelled to eat his meal behind a screen in the railroad diner, sealed off by Jim Crow laws from the equality promised in our Constitution.

Our students, in their desire for travel and adventure, find much in common with these great exemplars. It is no wonder that our students, like Chaucer's Christians, with the sign of the Ram in the night sky and winter ending, longen to go on pilgrimage. The tragedy is not that they spend federal funds earmarked for tuition to do it, but rather that they unimaginatively settle for Fort Lauderdale. Our students, I maintain, can exhibit other, even more significant points of congruence with these exemplars. Let me turn to those.

Augustine summed up in a phrase what would be the educational experience of Shakespeare, Lincoln and King. Rhetoric, he wrote, is an art learned in a short time and when you are young or not at all. Shakespeare, as S. Schoenbaum and Sister Miriam Joseph have shown, certainly learned rhetoric in a brief time and when he was young—at his local grammar school under a freshly minted Oxonian, and he seems not to have earned the highest mark in his rhetoric class! That training, directed a decade later on various chronicles he perused, permitted his native genius to encompass every quality we and our students glimpse in Stephen Spielberg, George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, Anthony Burgess, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, W. H. Auden and then some. Lincoln admitted that he had received in his entire life less than twelve months schooling. But he privately read and clearly mastered both the classical rhetoric text used for decades at Yale and that fountain of AngloAmerican jurisprudence, Blackstone's *Commentaries*; in addition, Lincoln seemed expert in Euclid, far beyond the rudiments his sometimes work as a surveyor demanded. It seems clear that Quintilian, Cicero and even Demosthenes would be hard pressed to equal Lincoln's address at the Cooper Union and half a dozen other presentations he made. The gifted Martin Luther King, Jr., at 15 years of age, skipped his senior year of high school to enter Morehouse College where, unexpectedly, he found his reading skills inadequate for undergraduate work; however, prodded by imaginative faculty members, he quickly made up his deficits to become a consummate orator.

Augustine, Shakespeare, Lincoln and King summed up in their lives what the ancient world sought and we still seek for each educated person—a sense of self, of
service or skill, of community or citizenship and of the cosmos itself. Augustine's autobiography surpasses insights into the interior drama which are evident in the aphorisms of Marcus Aurelius and in Porphry's *Life of Plotinus* (which it was intended to combat); it remains unsurpassed by Rousseau, Tolstoi, and, quite likely, anyone else. Shakespeare, in the soliloquies he places on the tongues of fictional characters, discloses powers at least equal to Augustine's, but the Bard of Avon only tells us indirectly of himself. Lincoln's infrequent but poignant reflections on himself are similar in tone and depth to those of Aurelius. The private documents of Martin Luther King, Jr. are not yet public; still, fragments made available reveal he possessed, like the others, enormous ego resources and strength.

Quintilian said that the rhetor is a good person speaking well. Augustine exceeds that demand with ease—his Latinity is of a sort quite different from that of Caesar, Cicero, Seneca, Aquinas, Milton or Newton. It is rather as if Shakespeare or perhaps Albert Camus, nurtured like Augustine on Africa's northern shore, had written in Latin. Further, it is Augustine's skill in language and analysis that enabled him to serve his age and later ones by clarifying the patrimony of the two cultures, Greco-Roman and Christian, he sought to unify. In somewhat similar manner, the linguistic and analytical skills of Shakespeare, Lincoln and King enable each to serve his age: the Bard of Avon to vivify the ossifying Latin tradition by wedding its literary forms to the vital but hitherto simplified stagecraft of his day; the American President to clarify to the nation the moral dimensions of its bifurcation and, in prose as limpid as Napoleon's directives, to spur on the faltering portion he commanded; the black Nobel Laureate to join his complaint of rights denied and dreams deferred to the doctrine of nonviolent civil disobedience, copied from Ghandi, which had in fact originated in the New England, where King had first felt freedom.

Augustine, throughout his life, remained proud of his African homeland even while he communicated with every corner of the Roman empire and claimed fellowship, as America's Pilgrims, echoing him would later do, in a shining city on a hill. Shakespeare's life ended in the fertile fields of Avon where it had begun and, as his praise of several hundred kinds of its native flowers illustrates, from which it had never departed; further, his many encomia for his homeland and its historical personages go far beyond what state sponsored playwrights may be expected to script. Lincoln, who had wandered, chiefly with his father in the first half of his life, came at last to Springfield to open his law practice and to serve as legislator; he thereafter considered it his real home, and his remains were returned to it after his service to country ended in triumph and tragedy. Martin Luther King, Jr., more than the others, traveled the surface of our planet, and often found greater welcome elsewhere than in his native land and region; yet, ever he returned to the state whose unjust laws jailed him, whose officials reviled him, and whose soil now holds his remains.

All four persons found cosmic dimensions in their lives and times, and each, even the Catholic bishop and Baptist preacher, sounded themes voiced in Greek by a Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Shakespeare expressed it briefest and best: "there's a divinity
that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may". Seldom has any author in the Western tradition, from Thales to Heisenberg, radically abandoned both portions of that affirmation.

In our day the same four marks—a sense of self, of service or skill, of community or citizenship and of the cosmos—still distinguishes the educated person.

Aids to ponder and develop one's self are now more numerous than the genre of confessional writings. For a panoply of psychological and social psychological literature is available to us. This will supplement, but not entirely supplant such confessional works; see, for example, the use to which Neil Postman puts Quintilian in his popular book on the loss of childhood. In addition, it is useful to observe that words do not encompass every insight into the self; Plato held uneducated one who could not perform in a Greek chorus; and music and representational art, no less than drama, may exercise a therapeutic effect on the person. Further, if we are as clever as ancient Greeks, or Hebrew tradition and eastern gurus, whose goal was "sound mind, sound body", we shall not exclude courses in physical and dietary regimen from the general education curriculum's pattern of courses concerned with the self.

The rhetorician, according to Cicero, was to be acquainted with whatever was knowable; that is, he was in theory to be Aristotle's universally well educated person. Still, while an orator was quite skilled in language and analysis and, often enough, broadly educated in the arts and sciences of his day, in practice the orator specialized, as did Cicero in law and public service, Galen in medicine, Augustine in theology, Shakespeare in theatre, and Lincoln in government.

Some sixty years ago, Alfred North Whitehead, speaking at the inception of Harvard's School of Business, pointed out that professions exploded in number during the nineteenth century. Perusal of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, a hefty, multivolume opus, indicates that growth has not yet abated. Academic majors in college serve those specializations. Thus, while college students, through their academic major, will gain some professional identity from the service they seek to offer, they may also obtain various skills in natural and computer grammar, expression, and analysis; clearly these are, often enough, both fundamental to such professions and worthwhile in themselves. Finally, they are available from many collegiate units and at a variety of entry competencies.

While Stoics like Marcus Aurelius tended to concentrate on the citizen as an isolated individual in a vast, impersonal and international world, Plato and Aristotle, by contrast, recognized the individual as nurtured within an extended family or clan and finding community within a city of reasonable size. Our students, 90% of whom will live in communities larger than the Athens of Plato and Aristotle, will find part of their identity as citizens, but more of it, I suspect, as members of ethnic or neighborhood or professional communities, perhaps like the Japanese worker linked to the fortunes and fellowship of particular corporations. General Education courses, each devoted to some
fragment, aspiration or criticism of persons and communities so united, can obviously be drawn from most of our existing disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, literature.

Finally, the cosmic dimension has ever been present in Western education: Spielberg's *ET*, Lucas' *Star Wars* series, Sagan's *Cosmos* put into space gadgetry technicolor those themes of non-human minds and conflicts between hyper-human agencies found in Persian astral religions, in Homer, in the pleroma of neoplatonic, stoic and epicurean sages, in the cherubim of biblical literature, in Dante, Milton, James and Whitehead. Naturally, all philosophers, from Parmenides to Wittgenstein, but even those authors who appear to be concerned with humanity and only with humanity's estate—psychologists like Freud and Skinner, anthropologists like Malinowski and Foucault, economists like Adam Smith and Paul Samuelson—hold, explicitly or implicitly, views on our species' fundamental harmony or discord with all other existents. Students surely deserve to hear such views presented and defended, probably in a synoptic course offered them, perhaps in their senior year. Such reflections, whatever their contemporary outcome, are not a mere patina on an educated person but, to judge from our four paradigms, define one's very core.