



Academia

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Augustine School's Monthly Academic Newsletter

Welcome to a new issue of *Academia*! In this issue, I explain the new grading scale, answer a frequently asked question on why we memorize and recite, and share some excerpts from C. S. Lewis' writings that will relate to my talk at the first Augustine School Parent Formation and Education Event, Thursday, August 27th from 6:30-7:30 (aka "Family Night Out").

Blessings in Christ,
Seth Drown
Dean of Academic Affairs

New Grading Scale

In the spring of 2008, the Board of Trustees received a report on the school's grading scale. The previous grading scale was a ten-point scale (90-100 = A, 80-90 = B, etc.). The report indicated that most schools in Jackson, both public and private, use a stricter grading scale. It also explained that our elementary curriculum was geared towards a stricter grading scale. The main concern was that a ten-point grading scale appeared to contradict our stated claims to pursue and celebrate academic excellence. The Board voted to adopt a grading scale more in line with schools in the area. The following scale is the one currently used at Augustine School (beginning in August 2009):

- A (Excellent) = 94-100 (6-point spread)
- B (Very Good) = 85-93 (9 point spread)
- C (Competent) = 75-84 (10 point spread)
- D (Struggling) = 70-74 (5 points spread)
- F (Failing) = Below 70

The Board of Trustees, faculty, and administration hope that this grading scale will provide a more accurate assessment of student performance and will insure that Augustine School is known for having standards of excellence that are *at least as high as* other schools in the area.

If you have any questions about the new grading scale, please see Seth Drown.

Academics FAQ

Why does Augustine School place such an emphasis on memorization and recitation?

Memorization and recitation are important aspects of classical Christian education. We memorize to internalize worthy models of wisdom and eloquence. Students tend to imitate and understand that which they know by heart, so we want them to be intimately familiar with the best of western thought and culture. Our students memorize Scripture, hymns, songs, poetry, and catechism questions each quarter. Older students also memorize famous historical speeches. Recitation is an important complement to memorization, as it helps the students become comfortable and skilled speaking in public and reminds them that knowledge is not just for one's own benefit but for the benefit of others as well.

Excerpts from the Works of C. S. Lewis

From C. S. Lewis' *Abolition of Man* (1943)

Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could *merit*, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or our contempt . . .

St Augustine defines virtue as *ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind and degree of love which is appropriate to it. Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has been thus trained in 'ordinate affections' or 'just sentiments' will easily find the first principles in Ethics; but to the corrupt man, they will never be visible at all, and he can make no progress in that science. Plato before him had said the same. The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful. In the *Republic*, the well-nurtured youth is one 'who would see most clearly whatever was amiss in ill-made works of man or ill-grown works of nature, and with a just distaste would blame and hate the ugly even from his earliest years and would give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart. All this before he is of an age to reason; so that when Reason at length comes to him, then, bred as he has been, he will hold out his hands in welcome and recognize her because of the affinity he bears to her.' In early Hinduism that conduct in men which can be called good consists in conformity to, or almost participation in, the *Rta*—that great ritual or pattern of nature and supernature which is revealed alike in the cosmic order, the moral virtues, and the ceremony of the temple. Righteousness, correctness, order, the *Rta*, is constantly identified with *satya* or truth, correspondence to reality. As Plato said that the Good was 'beyond existence' and Wordsworth that through virtue the stars were strong, so the Indian masters say that the gods themselves are born of the *Rta* and obey it.

The Chinese also speak of a great thing (the greatest thing) called the *Tao*. It is the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road. It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things

everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar. 'In ritual', say the *Analects*, 'it is harmony with Nature that is prized.' The ancient Jews likewise praise the Law as being 'true'.

This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity simply as 'the *Tao*'. Some of the accounts of it which I have quoted will seem, perhaps, to many of you merely quaint or even magical. But what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are. Those who know the *Tao* can hold that to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions at the moment, but to recognize a quality which *demand*s a certain response from us whether we make it or not. I myself do not enjoy the society of small children: because I speak from within the *Tao* I recognize this as a defect in myself—just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or colour blind. And because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value or responses to an objective order, therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we feel liking for what ought to be approved) or out of harmony with reason (when we perceive that liking is due but cannot feel it). No emotion is, in itself, a judgement; in that sense all emotions and sentiments are alogical. But they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform. The heart never takes the place of the head: but it can, and should, obey it.

Over against this stands the [modern world] In it the very possibility of a sentiment being reasonable—or even unreasonable—has been excluded from the outset. It can be reasonable or unreasonable only if it conforms or fails to conform to something else. To say that the cataract is sublime means saying that our emotion of humility is appropriate or ordinate to the reality, and thus to speak of something else besides the emotion; just as to say that a shoe fits is to speak not only of shoes but of feet. But this reference to something beyond the emotion is what [modern people] exclude from every sentence containing a predicate of value. Such statements, for them, refer solely to the emotion. Now the emotion, thus considered by itself, cannot be either in agreement or disagreement with Reason. It is irrational not as a paralogism is irrational, but as a physical event is irrational: it does not rise even to the dignity of error. On this view, the world of facts, without one trace of value, and the world of feelings, without one trace of truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, confront one another, and no *rapprochement* is possible.

Hence the educational problem is wholly different according as you stand within or without the *Tao*. For those within, the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate, whether anyone is making them or not, and in making which the very nature of man consists. Those without, if they are logical, must regard all sentiments as equally non-rational, as mere mists between us and the real objects. As a result, they must either decide to remove all sentiments, as far as possible, from the pupil's mind; or else to encourage some sentiments for reasons that have nothing to do with their intrinsic 'justness' or 'ordinacy'. The latter course

involves them in the questionable process of creating in others by 'suggestion' or incantation a mirage which their own reason has successfully dissipated.

Perhaps this will become clearer if we take a concrete instance. When a Roman father told his son that it was a sweet and seemly thing to die for his country, he believed what he said. He was communicating to the son an emotion which he himself shared and which he believed to be in accord with the value which his judgement discerned in noble death. He was giving the boy the best he had, giving of his spirit to humanize him as he had given of his body to beget him. But [modern people] cannot believe that in calling such a death sweet and seemly they would be saying 'something important about something'. Their own method of debunking would cry out against them if they attempted to do so. For death is not something to eat and therefore cannot be *dulce* in the literal sense, and it is unlikely that the real sensations preceding it will be *dulce* even by analogy. And as for *decorum*—that is only a word describing how some other people will feel about your death when they happen to think of it, which won't be often, and will certainly do you no good. There are only two courses open to [modern teachers]. Either they must go the whole way and debunk this sentiment like any other, or must set themselves to work to produce, from outside, a sentiment which they believe to be of no value to the pupil and which may cost him his life, because it is useful to us (the survivors) that our young men should feel it. If they embark on this course the difference between the old and the new education will be an important one. Where the old initiated, the new merely 'conditions'. The old dealt with its pupils as grown birds deal with young birds when they teach them to fly; the new deals with them more as the poultry-keeper deals with young birds—making them thus or thus for purposes of which the birds know nothing. In a word, the old was a kind of propagation—men transmitting manhood to men; the new is merely propaganda.

....

For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For [modern man] the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men.

From *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1941)

From its early association with the heroic court, there comes into Epic Poetry a quality which survives, with strange transformations and enrichments, down to Milton's own time, and it is a quality which moderns find difficult to understand. It has been split up, or dissociated, by recent developments, so that we now have to represent it by piecing together what seem to us quite unconnected ideas, but are really fragments of that old unity.

This quality will be understood by anyone who really understands the meaning of the Middle English word *solempne*. This means something different, but not quite different, from modern English *solemn*. Like *solemn* it implies the opposite of what is

familiar, free and easy, or ordinary. But unlike *solemn* it does not suggest gloom, oppression, or austerity.

The *Solempne* is the festal which is also the stately and the ceremonial, the proper occasion for *pomp* – and the very fact that *pompous* is now used only in a bad sense measures the degree to which we have lost the old idea of “solemnity.” To recover it you must think of a court ball, or a coronation, or a victory march, as these things appear to people who *enjoy* them; in an age when every one puts on his oldest clothes to be happy in, you must re-awake the simpler state of mind in which people put on gold and scarlet to be happy in.

Above all, you must be rid of the hideous idea, fruit of a widespread inferiority complex, that *pomp*, on the proper occasions, has any connexion with vanity or self-conceit. A celebrant approaching the altar, a princess led out by a king to dance a minuet, a general officer on a ceremonial parade, a major-domo preceding the boar’s head at a Christmas feast – all these wear unusual clothes and move with calculated dignity. This does not mean that they are vain, but that they are obedient; they are obeying the *hoc age* [lit. “do this”] which presides over every solemnity. The modern habit of doing ceremonial things unceremoniously is no proof of humility; rather, it proves the offender’s inability to forget himself in the rite, and his readiness to spoil for every one else the proper pleasure of ritual.