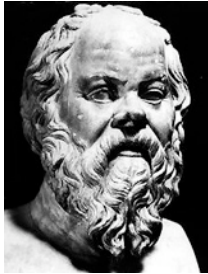




I W C Newsletter

Concord House, 1407 Chapala St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101
www.worldculture.org



“And if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul must be immortal, and one must take courage and try to discover – that is, to recollect – what one doesn’t know, or, more correctly, remember, at the moment.”

Socrates, in Plato’s “Meno”



The Revolutionary Possibilities of Socratic Education

At a forum led by Institute member and Professor Phillip Greene, the aims and possibilities of Socratic education were explored. Although Socrates, through the voice of his star pupil Plato, paints a pessimistic portrait of the ignorance, corruption and mental laziness of his fellow Athenians, he does point to a path out of the psychological slavery depicted in the Allegory of the Cave. The critical tool for an upward ascent into the experience of Truth and insight into the harmonious order of nature is reason. Each must learn to apply reason to the great questions of life, particularly those with serious moral implications using a dialectical method of education.

In an article on “Socratic Education” (in *Philosophies of Education*, Routledge, 1998) Professor Paul Woodruff has summarized the method of Socratic Education as follows:

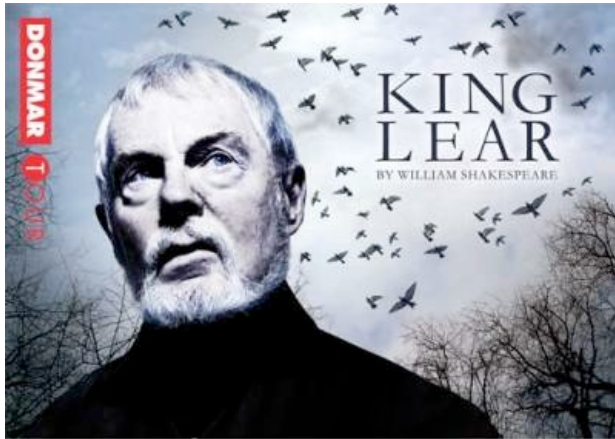
Note: () indicates author’s annotations below.

1. Philosopher denies he is a teacher and takes the attitude of a learner
2. Lectures uttered by Philosopher are rare and when given are framed in such a way that Philosopher is not responsible for their content (i.e. some wiser source of wisdom guides the Philosopher)
3. Questions from Philosopher to potential student are the main form of interaction
4. Students are held responsible for any answers that emerge
5. Questions may aim at an answer that would be evidence to support student’s knowledge claim (that hopefully is truly his own and reflects prior knowledge and inner resources not some familiar social belief)

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Theme for 2011: The New Learning: Pathways to Global Culture
Aim 9. To assist in the emergence of men and women of universal culture, capable of continuous growth in non-violence of mind, generosity of heart and harmony of soul — Declaration of Interdependence

UPCOMING EVENTS



Learning from Shakespeare's King Lear

Forum: Saturday, March 5

4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

**Concord House, 1407 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara**

In preparation for the forum, interested students might want to purchase a ticket to the filmed showing of King Lear presented in the landmark Donmar Warehouse in London's West End and starring Derek Jacobi. The next showing will be **Wednesday, March 2, at 7:30 pm** in **Campbell Hall (UCSB)** under the sponsorship of UCSB's Arts and Lectures program. Tickets are \$18. They can be purchased by calling the box office (893-3535) or going online at the following website: www.artsandlectures.ucsb.edu.

Attending the film is not required for forum participants but only encouraged – as is reading the play.

For more information: (805) 967-1055



Internet Education: Perils & Possibilities

Forum:

Saturday, March 26th

2:00 - 4:30 p.m.

**Concord House, 1407 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara**

Presenters:

Gerry Kiffe and Robert Kiffe

Has the Internet transformed the information age into the disinformation age and left us confused and vulnerable to web spin and polarized opinions? Has the Internet democratized education by making it universally accessible? What are the skills necessary to safely navigate your Internet learning into the future? How might the Internet make schools obsolete? Come join in a discussion about the perils and possibilities for education on the Internet.

Photo of Computer Class from the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya School.

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UPCOMING EVENTS**Shop Class
as Soulcraft****Book Circle:****Tuesdays, March 1 -****May 17, 2011****7:30 - 9:00 p.m.****Concord House,****1407 Chapala St.****Santa Barbara****Coordinator:****Joseph Miller**

In line with the Institute's 2011 theme of education and "the emergence of men and women of universal culture", a book circle is forming to take a deeper look at physical labor and related issues, as touched on at the January 29 forum. (Please see next page for "Reflections on the Forum: *Shop Class as Soulcraft*".)

Matthew B. Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft* (Penguin 2005) is an eloquent paean to the dignity and independence of skilled manual work, as opposed to routinized and enervating managerial and clerical jobs that are supposed to carry the status and rewards of "white collar". Crawford

also argues that the "friction" experienced when working with physical objects aids in a psychological "un-selfing", that is the root of morality.

Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work* (Penguin, 2005) explores the typically overlooked and underrated dimension of intelligence that is developed and employed in such diverse jobs as waitress, carpenter, and electrician.

Finally, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* (Holt, 2001) is a chronicle of the author's own fearless experiment of discovery regarding the truth of entry level jobs in America. The well-known and beloved journalist put down her pen for a time, and instead tried to eke out a living through holding a series of low-paying jobs including waitress, hotel maid, and house cleaner. The book is an unparalleled profile of the social and economic realities of the working poor in America.

Some IWC members have also suggested we look at the ideas of Mohandas Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, and

John Ruskin, who all wrote about the dignity, health and moral stature of physical work. I am open to supplemental readings in this regard.

The Book Circle began Tuesday, March 1st, 7:30 - 9:00 pm. It will meet weekly on Tuesday nights at Concord House, 1407 Chapala St. We plan to spend four meetings per book.

Please contact Joe Miller, coordinator: joe@worldculture.org to join. There is no cost for joining, except your purchase of the books. I would suggest ordering locally through Chaucer's Bookstore.

Looking Ahead...**"The Voyage of
the Sorcerer II"****Saturday, April 9th**

Russ Lewin will present a lecture on highlighting the genomic research
Craig Venter is doing on ocean microbes, with reference to applications (clean energy production, medicines, new materials & eco-intelligence).

**Reflections on the
Forum:
Shop Class as Soulcraft**

The IWC hosted a lively forum on Saturday, January 29, focused on Matthew B. Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft*. A variety of topics were touched upon including education, the internet, student performance pressures and the power of attention or, what Crawford calls "focal practice". Yet coming away from the discussion, with many more questions opened than closed, my mind keeps gravitating around another idea, a more abstract and elusive entity. I keep thinking about 'truth'. I think, above all else, perhaps Crawford's tightly argued, entertaining, and often cutting, cultural polemic did more to resuscitate and vitalize my notion of moral truth than anything else has. Such is the 'soulcraft' dimension of skilled manual work; the interior crafting that is all but overlooked when we are fixated on externals.

How, one might ask, does a book written "to elaborate the potential for human flourishing in the manual trades" perform such a service to moral

philosophy? Aren't its hands a bit too covered in automotive grime for that? Yet Crawford is not fleeing the material world to gain glimpses of abstract truth, but rather he is arguing for the blend of both worlds. His ideal is the melding of head, hands and heart. He is pointing to a moral virtue of seeking truth that is exactly where it should be: right in front of us, in the very circumstances that surround us. The more conspicuous the truth, the closer it reflects the objectivity of objects rather than the fantasies of mind.

Crawford writes, "The moral significance of work that grapples with material things may lie in the simple fact that such things lie outside the self" (p.16). The self left to its own devices tends to a narcissistic disengagement from objectivity, a retreat into the squishy world of opinion and preference. This retreat leaves a vacuum in public discourse filled by contemporary mass media skilled in the trafficking of spin and the re-interpretation of both language and facts. The result is a fog of confusion, a dense network of evasive claims and counterclaims and

reason's employment as rationalization rather than as a guide to careful inference. All of this management of a message constitutes what a Gandhian would call 'untruth'. A sense of responsibility is diminished the more one can hide from definite standards. The easy access to image and information via the internet, exacerbates the confusion. By contrast, Crawford states: "[Intuitive interface] introduces as little psychic friction as possible between the user's intention and its realization. It is such resistance that makes one aware of reality as an independent thing." (p.61).

The failure to be aware of the independence of reality is, in the extreme, insanity. Crawford traces the word 'idiot' back to its Greek meaning: a private person. Moral life is a matter of overcoming idiocy by learning communication, sharing, measuring and being measured, giving and receiving. Truth reflects a willingness to challenge and overcome any self-enclosure that protects ignorance.

The great internal advantage of manual work, the soul-advantage we might say, is

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Shop Class as Soulcraft

that it aids this 'unselfing' of the mind. It gets us outside our head. Crawford borrows liberally from Iris Murdoch when he says: "Anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity, and realism is to be connected with virtue." (p.99). A carpenter's opinion matters very little when it comes to working with the level or plumb-line. To be effective, he must blend his mind with the standards, principles, tools and measuring instruments of his craft. When practicing a craft personal opinion matters little, or not at all; ineffectiveness cannot be interpreted away. To learn carpentry, then, requires humility, a setting aside of self, in order to attend to the needs of "reality as an independent thing." Crawford points to "the craftsman's habitual deference ... toward the objective standards of his craft. ... This is a rare appearance in contemporary life -- a disinterested, articulable, and publicly affirmable idea of the good" (p.19).

Why is this crucial moral dimension of practical work often overlooked? With our disposition toward externals, we tend to conflate the rich physico-cognitive world of a skilled trade with its most concrete practitioner, the work 'man' seen more in terms of the Latin manus (hand) than the Sanskrit manas (mind). To judge a carpenter as all muscle and hammer makes about as much sense as judging a

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In March

Anniversaries

- 3rd Georg Cantor, German mathematician b. 1845
- 3rd Alexander Graham Bell, Scottish scientist, inventor b. 1847
- 4th Antonio Vivaldi, Italian composer, priest, violinist b. 1678
- 6th Michelangelo Buonarroti, Italian painter, sculptor b. 1475
- 6th Elizabeth Barrett Browning, English poet b. 1806
- 7th Piet Mondrian, Dutch painter b. 1872
- 7th Maurice Ravel, French composer b. 1875
- 8th Oliver Wendell Holmes, American jurist, U.S. Supreme Court Justice b. 1841
- 12th George Berkeley, Irish philosopher, metaphysician b. 1685
- 14th Johann Strauss, Austrian composer b. 1804
- 14th Albert Einstein, German-born theoretical physicist b. 1879
- 15th Julius Caesar, Roman political leader d. 44 B.C.E.
- 18th Stéphane Mallarmé, French poet, critic b. 1842
- 18th Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Russian composer b. 1844
- 19th David Livingstone, Scottish explorer, medical missionary b. 1813
- 20th Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), Roman poet b. 43 B.C.E.
- 20th Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian playwright b. 1828
- 23rd Pierre-Simon, marquis de Laplace, French astronomer, mathematician b. 1749
- 24th William Morris, English designer, artist, b. 1834
- 26th Edward Bellamy, American author b. 1850
- 26th Robert Frost, American poet b. 1874
- 27th Wilhelm Konrad Roentgen, German physicist b. 1845
- 28th Teresa of Avila, Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun b. 1515
- 30th Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon), Spanish rabbi, physician, philosopher b. 1135
- 30th Francisco de Goya, Spanish painter, printmaker b. 1746
- 30th Vincent van Gogh, Dutch Post-Impressionist artist b. 1853
- 31st René Descartes, French philosopher, mathematician b. 1596
- 31st Johann Sebastian Bach, German composer, organist b. 1685
- 31st Joseph Haydn, Austrian composer b. 1732
- 31st César Chávez, Mexican-American farm worker, labor leader, civil rights activist b. 1927

Shop Class as Soulcraft

writer as all ink and quill. Both perceptions are absurdly external, albeit necessary linguistic shorthand for skilled activities that are primarily cognitive.

One participant raised the question: is Crawford saying that mental objectivity is exclusively the domain of physical work? What about mathematics and logic? Aren't they as objective as an open-end wrench? Can't students learn to 'un-self' as effectively by learning about a quadratic formula as, say, a radiator in auto-shop class? While it is not the case that students who drift away from the academic track are mental failures who may fulfill social needs as instruments of physical labor, the academically inclined student can experience truth also. Should not all students be encouraged to engage in the moral quest of awakening from private dreams and entering into shared worlds of thought? Some students can do this primarily in the abstract, through exacting mental disciplines. Other students require the concrete as a buttress for mental discipline. In all cases, the quest is the same. Yet, even this is overly simplified. It is more realistic to view every student as engaged in both abstract and concrete thought but requiring different proportions for individual growth. Consider, for example, the discipline of music. How do we classify that—as abstract or concrete? Clearly it seems to be both. Two violin students, comparable in development, might differ in focus as much as the academic student and the shop class student: that is, one might primarily focus on technique, the other on composition. Clearly, both need to

know about both. It would be as wrong to say that wood and nylon are merely a means to make music audible as to say that composition is merely fodder for the violin. The impact of music is in the balance of both tasks. Students of the future, one hopes, will not be artificially defined as mental or manual, but will find their own balance of head and hand. Then will truth be at hand, because we will see clearly how the hand serves truth.

Joe Miller

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Website: www.worldculture.org

In March

Observances and Acknowledgements

- 3rd (2011) Maha Shivaratri, Vigil Night of Shiva, celebrated in India
- 5th (2011) Tibetan New Year (Losar) celebration begins
- 8th International Women's Day sponsored by the U.N. honors the social achievements of women
- 9th (2011) Ash Wednesday, Christian holiday celebrating first day of Lent
- 10th Tibetan uprising against Chinese occupation of Tibet began in 1959
- 14th (2011) Commonwealth Day celebrating the Commonwealth of Nations
- 20th (2011) Vernal Equinox (23:21 UTC: 7:21 p.m. EDT)
- 20th (2011) Purim, Jewish festival celebrating victory over oppression
- 20th (2011) Holi, Hindu Festival of Colors, celebrates the beginning of spring
- 20th Nowruz, ancient Persian festival marking the new year; originally the most holy of all Zoroastrian festivals

Socratic Education

6. Philosopher introduces standards for knowledge, usually with student's consent

7. Questions may elicit positive statements of assent from student to which Philosopher also subscribes. (In this way some shared understanding is reached).

8. Consistency requires that student therefore reject an earlier statement.

A willingness to admit that one's thinking is caught in a contradiction is essential to learning. Otherwise the student stays stuck in some unexamined belief that blocks insight into reality and prevents the moral transformation that is a fundamental aim of Socratic Education. If some topics in Platonic dialogues seem metaphysically mysterious, they are to be bravely explored since according to Plato ethical reasoning is rooted in metaphysical presuppositions.

Ultimately Socratic education brings the student into wisdom and a vision of the Good, something of a mystical experience. But within the conventional circle of life in society, the aim of education is good citizenship based on the recognition of principles and a contribution to the education and well

being of one's fellow citizens, including the younger generation. Portraits of an Ideal society can inspire hope and the enthusiasm for transforming social conditions. Such a vision of what is Ideal can be provided by virtuous and creative leadership and may include therapeutic myths offered for reasoned interpretation. This leadership by the "guardians" is made possible by specially designed education. Through their development of balanced and effective integration of virtues, such as temperance, courage and wisdom, the leaders can know justice and be exemplars of just men.

Is this not what the protestors filling the streets of the Middle East in recent weeks are asking for? Do we not all benefit from these dramatic exposures of corrupt and tyrannical leadership that has been silently accepted for years in the name of stability? The dynamics of street politics and messages sent by modern media may not match the method of dialogue that Socrates presented; street protests with thousands of participants hardly seem like Socratic dialogues. Yet on closer examination, one can see a dialectic at work in the public square that leads us all into questions about the basis of justice and the methods of good governance. The calls for freedom by protestors willing to risk their lives are in

part a demand for opportunity to share in a dialogue about how a particular society can be transformed into a just one that provides conditions in which individuals can seek their ideals and participate as citizens as did Athenians in classical Greece. Interviews with protesters reveal a remarkable, philosophical understanding of the issues they depict with chants and posters. They know the value of human potential. So are not the lessons of Socrates embedded in contemporary, global dialogue and helping to unmask and topple tyrants? Thereby, a fresh cycle of the Great Transformation depicted by Karen Armstrong is inspiring human lives once again.

Carolyn Dorrance



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