

GOODNESS AND KNOWLEDGE
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Over the years I have heard a succession of Principals intone the Founder's words about goodness and knowledge from the charter that Samuel Phillips wrote for Phillips Academy in Andover. These words have been imbued with the stature of a founding covenant, the basic principles of our enterprise. It is always worthwhile to consider our heritage and roots, and to review the notions that inform our assumptions about ourselves; after all, the unexamined life is not worth living (Plato, *Apol.* 38a). Yet the more I applaud the effort to engender discussion on the basic premises of the Academy's educational undertaking, by so much the more must I speak up to point out what I see as the foreshortening and foreclosure of our field of vision on the philosophical problem whenever we start from Samuel Phillips' statement about goodness and knowledge.

It is important to put Mr. Phillips' statement in context and to indicate the major alternative relationships of goodness and knowledge that the Charter of the Academy neglects and sidesteps as a result of its protestant heritage, though in this case the protest was not only against the Catholic Church, but more pointedly a protest against the idealism of classical philosophy. As Myron Williams suggests on p. 24 of *The Story about Phillips Exeter*, there may well be mixed sources for the charter as a whole, but the majority of it comes out of English empiricism as represented especially by John Locke (1686). One of the central passages is Samuel Phillips' statement on Goodness and Knowledge (1777): "though goodness without knowledge (as it regards others), is weak and feeble, yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous." Williams reports that Darcy Curwen pointed a parallel and possible source in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* ch. 41 (1759): "Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful."

I offer two further parallels: one derived from the same Lockean fount and the other from the Classics. The first is Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* ch. 21 (1847): "Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition." The other parallel, and possible cultural, if not specific, source demonstrates that such ideas are not modern, but did indeed arise to clear expression in antiquity; that parallel is Plotinus' *Ennead* 1.3.6.15 (ca. A.D. 260): "(goodness without knowledge is imperfect and deficient, but knowledge {wisdom} without goodness is impossible.)" Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* I, ch. 6 (1726) shows clearly the dichotomy and opposition that English empiricism saw between goodness and knowledge: "In choosing persons for all employments, they (the Lilliputians) have more regard to good morals than to great abilities; .. they thought the want of moral virtues was so far from being supplied by superior endowments of the mind, that employments could never be put into such dangerous hands as those of persons so qualified; and at least, that the mistakes committed by ignorance in a virtuous disposition, would never be of such fatal consequence to the public weal, as the practices of a man whose inclinations led him to be corrupt, and had great abilities to manage, and multiply, and defend his corruptions."

Three or more decades ago when I first studied the background of Samuel Phillips' statement on goodness and knowledge, I arrived at the following position: "The Phillips dictum is in the cautious compromising spirit of the checks and balances of powers and expectations or rights seen politically in the Constitution; that is, there is no need for democracy, if reason is

self-sufficient, and no need for authority, if goodness is ubiquitous. Thus the Phillips dictum or its antecedents attempt to counterbalance two contravening intellectual movements of the times: pietism and rationalism. In the 1740s New England had its first outbreak of evangelism in the Great Awakening,- a harbinger of Romanticism as was Rousseau (1712-1778) who was almost exactly contemporary with Hume (1711-1776) who provided a purified philosophical statement of that scepticism which erodes the confidence of rationalism and which had already been adumbrated in Swift's Lagoda Academy, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Johnson's *Rasselas*. But at this time American faith in reason was still strong, if cautious; reason was no longer the sole and supreme guide of the Age of Reason trying to batter down the ramparts of Tradition; rather, reason itself was only a tool that needed a guide,- or at least a restraint. Still, it was man's sharpest tool, and widely honored as such in the Age of enlightenment while the two strains of European thought (Continental rationalism and British empiricism) were preparing to meet in Kant (1724-1804)." Locke, of course, was one of the fonts of this, in his empirical appraisal of knowledge, and in his assessment of the prior importance of virtue.

While I would probably want to revise some of that reconstruction, I still accept its main point, namely that from the point of view of English empiricism goodness and knowledge are two distinct and often opposed entities. However, I must now add a whole new skein of yarn to the tapestry. We know that Dante was studied assiduously at Harvard in the generations after Samuel Phillips' attendance; if Samuel studied Dante, then we have another very important source. In canto 26 of his *Inferno*, Dante introduces Ulysses. Ulysses and Dante's guide, Vergil, are the only two persons not of Dante's own generation with whom he speaks in the underworld. Ulysses represents that inchoate spirit of the Renaissance that Dante had as a young man and which as the author of the *Divine Comedy* he now abhors and condemns,- Ulysses is in the eighth circle of Hell for the sins of fraud, and he is near the bottom of that circle among the false counsellors. Since Dante did not know the *Odyssey*, he follows Horace (*Ars Poetica*) in describing Ulysses, as one *qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes*. For Dante he was one who yearned (26.98) *a divenir del mondo esperto / e de li vizi umani e del valore*, and he would gain this knowledge of good and bad by travel, visiting the cities of men. A few lines later (111) Ulysses addresses his men in words reminiscent of Aeneas' in Vergil (*Aen.* 1.199): Dante- *O frati, dissi, che per cento milia / perigli siete giunti a l'occidente*; Vergil- *O socii, .. O passi graviora, .. per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum*.

Finally, at 26.117 Dante has Ulysses say: "*Considerate la vostra semenza: / fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.*" In Pinsky's translation "Consider well the seed that gave you birth: you were not made to live your lives as brutes, but to be followers of worth and knowledge." It is possible that Dante is using Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.128 ff. As his source. Throughout his argument that he should get the arms of Achilles, Ulysses stresses not only his martial prowess and *virtus* but also and especially his knowledge and cleverness in counsel. For example, at 205 he exclaims:

Longa referre mora est, quae consilioque manuque
utiliter feci spatiosi tempore belli.

And again at 235 he asserts:

amissamque mea virtutem voce repono.

Or perhaps Dante transferred to Ulysses Cicero's (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.42.100) description of Socrates and Theramenes as *praestantes viros virtutis et sapientiae gloria*. However that may be, Ulysses' goals here are goodness and knowledge, not as disparate objects found separately, but as a conjoined pair. Prescient though he may be of the basic outlook of the Renaissance,

Dante is not a Renaissance man; he is the champion here of medieval faith; more than Sophocles or any of the ancients he rejects the notion that man can stand alone on the basis of his own *virtute e canoscenza*. To make his point Dante changes the story about Ulysses: his voyage is a disastrous shipwreck and he never gets home, or reaches salvation. Man can not go it on his own, but needs god as his copilot. For Dante virtue without faith is weak and feeble, and knowledge without faith is dangerous; both are worthless without faith, even if united together. . If Samuel Phillips knew and was following Dante's condemnation of Ulysses' proto-Renaissance self-reliance, this condemnation may explain why he makes religious faith and piety so important in the charter. On the other hand, maybe both Phillips and Dante were following the Apostle Peter, the putative author of the second epistle of Peter (1.5) where the writer commands the faithful ἐπιχορηγήσατε ἐν τῇ πίστει ὑμῶν τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀρετῇ γινώσιον, .. (in the vulgate Latin: *ministrare in fide vestra virtutem, in virtute autem scientiam*; in the King James' English: add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge; ...). If Myron Williams is right that Samuel's first allegiance is to British empiricism, then perhaps in some sort of strange compromise Samuel is trying to serve two disparate masters.

Although Dante in his medieval maturity sees goodness and knowledge as essentially worthless however paired, apparently he does not see them as empirically opposed, but as classically conjoined. What does this classical conjunction mean? I have quoted Plotinus' statement as a very close ancient parallel to the Phillips dictum, and yet Plotinus is generally considered to be at the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum from Locke, Hume and the British empiricists. And he is. So what is going on here? Plotinus claims to be a close follower of Plato, and as we all know Plato says that "(virtue is knowledge)". And all that we know about classical idealism from Plato through the neoPlatonists reaffirms our belief that they believed in the confluence or even the cumulative, if not integral, identity of goodness and knowledge, not in their difference. This leaves us with three very distinct approaches to goodness and knowledge, and with several problems. The approaches are that 1) neither is central in education; 2) both are important but in different, counterbalancing ways; or 3) both are important in a common way because they are conjoined in some way. The first problem may just be my problem, and that is why do so very few people realize how limited, truncated, and potentially wrongheaded all our discussions are when we refuse to go beyond the Phillips presumption that goodness and knowledge are disparate, but complimentary goals. I believe that it is highly presumptuous to limit ourselves to the Phillips presumption. This leaves the second problem, the absence of any substantive consideration of the other alternatives. Apparently in this instance blindness and silence are politically correct.

I will address only one of the other alternatives at this time, namely the Socratic alternative. And I will explore this alternative only in one small comment, a comment on the statement that the "highest version of virtue is virtue in action". First I will preface this whole discussion with a disclaimer; I do not automatically support and defend classical idealism; for instance, I have repeatedly argued against the use of the phrase 'Socratic method' to describe our ideal of what goes on around a Harkness table. I am not sure that the 'Socratic method' as Socrates practiced it in the descriptions of Plato is exactly the pedagogy that we should use here, at least in the Junior and Lower years. Nor were the great classical philosophers in total accord on this point nor on the point of the exact relation of goodness and knowledge. In many ways Aristotle's 'circumstantial' ethics was almost an exact reversal of Plato's; Plato saw ethics as the most exact science, while physics was only a probable story, and inexact at that. Aristotle reversed that assessment, and much of the rest of the world followed him, especially the twentieth century.

But there was one very important point on which Aristotle followed Plato completely; in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (6.5.3, 6.13.8, 10.7.1) he makes it clear that contemplation is more important, valuable, and serious than action, that speculative wisdom is more important and powerful than prudence, and that the highest version of virtue is contemplative curiosity, not decision-making, not problem-solving, not doing moral homework, and not acting virtuously. This strand of conviction holds constant from Socrates through Plotinus and through Augustine and Aquinas. In the religious controversies of Christianity this classical antinomy becomes the clash of faith versus works, or in the case of Dante between faith and our dynamic duo. And part of the fall-out from that clash is this Phillips presumption, that virtue or goodness is seen in terms of action or works. In terms of today's thought we might try to express classical idealism by saying that the reflective self, operating *sub specie aeternitatis* as conscience or superego or whatever, is a higher form of self than the empiric self, operating as the phenomenal quotidian adversarial self engaged in the hurly-burly of daily life without the long-view. Or we might see this as the superiority of the cerebrum over the mid-brain or of the strategic self over the tactical self.

An idealist would argue that the solution to this problem requires the confluence and merging of goodness and knowledge, not their separation into some sort of mental Apartheid, as is found in the Phillips presumption. In that state of equal, but separate, we divide the homeland of the mind into strictly segregated portions, one for discipline and one for academics, and the rules of engagement in each are very different. All that the Socratic challenge asks is that we consider, at first just in our mind's eye, what a fully integrated state might look like, a state or a school in which goodness was knowledge. What would this school be like, if we had the same rule of engagement for both discipline and academics? What if we did in fact consider intellectual and moral mistakes on a par? This is, of course, what we would do, if goodness were knowledge. Maybe we would see, as Plato did and then Aristotle, and even more Plotinus, that there are various levels at which goodness and knowledge intersect, and it is only at the lowest levels that they seem opposed and disparate. Perhaps we should try to raise our students above the level of cleverness and blind obedience where knowledge and goodness seem so different; perhaps we could get beyond the level of the cognitive and affective parts of learning. This may require that we re-assess the proper relationship of emotion and reason, of the feelings and will, and mind. This may require that we re-assess the role in education of talent, practice, and instruction, and the relative importance of each. In all of these undertakings, as a classicist, and thus as a conservative by profession, I would recommend that our first step should be to see what the past has to teach us. What did our ancestors do, and why? To do this we must first rid ourselves of the greatest prejudice of all,- that we are somehow obviously better than they, that basic humanity has somehow changed because of the scientific revolution.