

Editor's Introduction

Laura Kicklighter

Lynchburg College

As liberal arts education appears to be at increasing risk in today's cultural climate, it is especially gratifying to present the 2017 issue of the *Agora* Journal. It is clear that there is much insight and inspiration to be gained from the study of core texts in the college environment. In this edition, we are fortunate to have contributions from both textual submissions and student presentations at the Student Conference for the Association of Core Texts and Courses. The work found in this edition range in subject matter from physics to philosophy to literature and demonstrate the richness that a liberal arts education offers and the keen insights of those who pursue it.

In our first entry, **Austin Monson** of Midwestern State University, presents a fresh analysis of Homer's character of Penelope in "Subversive Penelope". This essay applies the heroic paradigms of *kleos* and *nostos* to Penelope's story, making a case that she too can be seen as a hero in the epic. Monson artfully combines queer theory with traditional patterns of the hero narrative to demonstrate a new way to understand Penelope in the epic. Monson is the recipient of the Peggy S. Pittas Lynchburg College Symposium Readings Award for the best essay dealing with a social problem in the 2017 *Agora*.

Moving on to a philosophical analysis of history, **Michael Pallotto** of St. Thomas University presents us with "Freely Chosen Freedom: The Benefits of Hegel's View of History over Nietzsche's". Mr. Pallotto vividly compares and contrasts the philosophies

of Hegel and Nietzsche on the subject of history, providing a compelling argument for the superiority of Hegel's view. Pallotto is the recipient of the Kendall North Award for the best essay in the 2017 Agora.

Following the award-winning works from Mr. Monson and Mr. Pallotto, we are pleased to present five essays which were delivered by students at the 2017 Student Conference of the ACTC. Students presenting their work at this conference were encouraged to discuss how their liberal arts education has influenced their lives in academia and beyond.

The first essay selected from the conference presentations is **Serah Welborn** of Midwestern State University, "Learning Self Reliance with Ralph Waldo Emerson". This essay explores the author's experiences in education, religion, and social issues through the lens of Emerson's "Self-Reliance". Welborn describes how grappling with Emerson's injunction to "trust thyself" influenced how she navigated an important time in her life. Continuing with this theme of self-discovery, **Amber Kelley** of Assumption College reflects upon learning to love the argument and the evils of misogyny using Plato's *Phaedo* in "My Encounter with Plato and the Greatest Human Evil". Kelley describes how she was forced to confront the realization that she shared many of the tendencies attributed to Socrates' companions in the *Phaedo*. Through this self-reflection, Kelley identifies the many stumbling blocks that often deter students from delving into the argument describes her newfound appreciation for it. Our final essay along this theme is presented by **Hunter Hart** of the University of Tulsa. Hart's "Philosophy, Spirituality, and Academic Ambition" uses Kant's *What Is Enlightenment* to illuminate his motivations in academics and in life. Hart describes how Kant's

philosophy advanced his thinking about reason, certainty, and ambition in both academic and personal life.

Our final two pieces illuminate the cross-disciplinary nature of liberal arts education, showing how making connections across academic disciplines enhances our understanding. **Sophie Luks** of Boston College, in “Gaining Enlightenment through Sympathy for the Devil”, describes how reading Milton’s *Paradise Lost* enriched her understanding of religion and led to an academic interest in theology. Luks describes how Milton’s portrayal of the Devil character in his epic poem helped move her beyond her previous, simplistic understanding of religion. Finally, in “Pliny and Newton: Filling in the Gaps with Physics” **Charles Rose** of Lynchburg College explores the ways in which the work of past scientists continues to influence the attainment of knowledge today. Rose traces the historical progression of scientific discoveries over time to demonstrate how important past thinkers can be to present-day endeavors.

Congratulations to all of this year’s authors and special kudos to Michael Pallotto and Austin Monson on their awards.