

The Gift of Fire: Quotes and Residuals for Discussion

- “I have habitually mistaken schooling for education.”
- “Reason and Unreason are never far from my mind.”
- “Any human being has what it takes to distinguish the better from the worse.”
- “Who do I know who is a better person than I? What makes them better? What do I lack?”
>>steadfastness, courage, loyalty, temperance, self-knowledge? What?
- “Persons can be good in a bad cause, and they can be bad in a good cause.”
- “We act on orders of the belly.” (preview of The Rider & the Elephant)
- Warring parties? How about Republicans and Democrats? True believers sadly sincere.
- The Land of No One at All (Habermas’s System World v. the Life World)
- Knowing? Or believing, imagining, supposing? What is knowable?
- “The work we call ‘art.’
- Is there in each of us a “permanent spring of good sense?”

AND SOME RESIDUALS

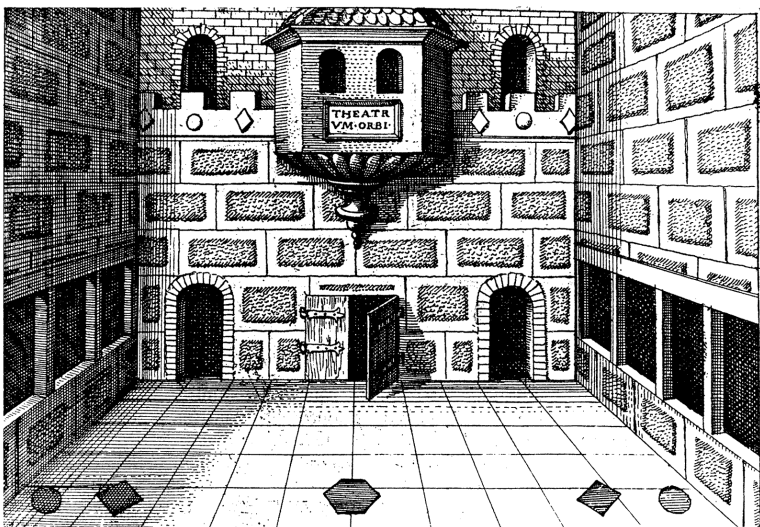
All of **Raven’s** residuals take us to important places. She wonders whether Reason as understood in Mitchell is an analog of Aristotle’s virtuous middle or moderation, or the ability or even interest in knowing (discerning) this virtuous middle, of living the examined life of virtuous moderation. Is Unreason, then, an analog to living in the extremes (Jesus on the one hand, Hitler and Jack the Ripper on the other). Are Reason and Unreason the good and bad habits of the mind, an examined life in the former and the unexamined life in the latter?

Tolstoy and Aquinas were not interested in finding meaning and purpose in life, but rather in the meaning and purpose of the one life to which they could give meaning and purpose. What’s the difference? Raven wonders how a shift

in perspective to contributing a meaning and a purpose from seeking to find these things might benefit college students.

Whose education is it? What's your role? What's my role? Is it to cast enough light that you may see something by it, if you happen to be looking? To provide an occasion not of education but for education.

The ending? "The largest and simplest definition of true education I can imagine is this: It is all that is absent in the lives of those who aren't composing *How to Live (I Think)*." Well, congratulations. You all are composing this book, creating this art, and, therefore, embodying true education. (And I know I just used "true.")



Maayan asks, "How does education begin? If knowledge is what we need, and applying it is the start of the pursuit of a good life, how do we go about doing this?" Perhaps we begin by constructing an increasingly facile, elaborate theater of the mind and endeavoring to make a few good commitments. Aristotle would call this forming good habits of the mind. Once constructed, we use our knowledge and reason to

choose good actions, moving from the theater of the mind to the streets of lived life.

Sarah wonders whether Mitchell's Reason and Unreason could be analogs to the mind and heart. Does our will choose among Reason and Unreason, the head and the heart (or belly)? And in establishing habits of good choosing, are we creating or pursuing a good or better life?

Sarah also rocked my world by wondering, "Is love reasonable?" Whoa. "Is the love of Romeo and Juliet reasonable? Why or why not?"

And Sarah paired Mitchell with Booth, finding their reflections on what education might be complementary. "If you do not know what you mean by the word knowledge, your mind is in disorder, and you will be an easy victim of any suggestion . . . that seems to promise . . . the satisfaction of some appetite." Booth similarly seems to believe in the value of knowing in describing the difficult work recovering, rejecting, and renovating those things we through dogged pursuit can claim to know.

Sterling remembered Kennedy when reading Mitchell: If people do not know themselves, can these same people exhibit the integrity that Kennedy describes? Does knowing require developing the studiousness Kennedy describes, a studiousness that corrects the vice of curiosity?

Moraima wants us to further explore Mitchell's distinction between schooling and education. Unwilling to throw schooling completely under the bus, she wonders if schooling can help us become better critical thinkers. What does it mean to be a critical thinker? How can one become better at it? To what end or aim? What does the critical thinker say to the person who claims, "ignorance is bliss"?

Berry will be for four years. Education will be, or should be, for life. Education, then, is an attitude and a disposition, and a collection of good habits and commitments. Picking up on these themes, **Kelsee and Riley** ask a delicious question: If we could scrap Berry's approach to schooling, what would we change to move what we do closer to education? How might we be made better capable of *knowing* rather than merely *knowing about*?

My answer: The world and its problems do not pay much attention to majors and disciplines. What if we began by abolishing majors and, even more urgently, departments and organized ourselves instead around these problems and questions? "Here's the question or problem, such as, say, climate change. Now, where can we find what we need to learn to solve the problem? What do we need to learn to be able to meaningfully address this problem? (More courses like ours, for a start!)"

As a natural followup, **Madeliene** wonders, if one has to ask oneself, "Why am I doing this (college, coursework, etc.)? How is this (college, coursework, etc.) contributing to my good, virtuous life," does one's college experience lack value and virtue? Are we afraid of the answer? What is the value and virtue of a Berry education? Who is responsible for its lack or its bounty in terms of value and virtue?

Moraima, Sarah and Mackenzie would like us to further contemplate Aquinas and the role of faith. Can faith be considered rational, as Aquinas claimed? Or is faith merely emotion in formal wear, disguised as Reason and trying to gain entry into discussions and pursuits that only Reason properly understood is or should be allowed?

Sage would like us to re-visit and perhaps update Mitchell's concerns that future generations might forget the Holocaust and the lessons of World War II, though he doesn't put it quite like that. How is this fear or concern relevant to the question of how to live? Does it have anything to do with repeating the

mistakes of the past by failing to know one's history? For example, by denying the Holocaust (or, more recently, Sandy Hook, Parkland, and even the California wildfires), by remaining so aggressively ignorant, do those who forget, including some even recently elected to Congress, increase most dangerously the probability of repeating the evil acts and even programs of the past, such as genocide?

Riley asks several rich questions about evil, including, does it even exist? Can evil be rational, as Mitchell suggests? Who gets to decide whether something is evil or not evil or perhaps even good? Can a forest fire that kills a baby deer be regarded as "evil"? (It's always the baby version, isn't it?) We will bracket these questions for now, knowing they will move to the center when we do Othello (and, really, Iago) in a few weeks.