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**Childhood is the embodied practice of adulthood.
The adult will know what the child experienced.**

Three essays on teaching our children to joyfully inquire and reason, draw upon the comfort of stories and tradition, and practice the principles of intellectual hospitality, so that one day they may create their own community for eudaimonia, or, human flourishing.

1. 2. Narratives: Seeking Truth in the Classroom

A Life Lived in Passionate Pursuit of Truth

We greeted the farrier to the farm like the circus coming to town. The farrier's truck was cavernous—a tool shed and forge on wheels. His voice was legendary—his “halloo” to the barn could be heard clear to the house. His arms and shoulders were massive—when he leaned, the horse moved. The only small part of him was his legs—short enough to fit under the horse and save his back, he joked. He was born to the job.

The farrier commanded respect from all. I remember watching him stare down a two-year-old colt toe tapping all over the barn floor with one command: “Son. Stand up.” The colt stood. Once, at the county fair, he was telling a group of men a story and when he bellowed his famous line: “Son! Stand UP!” every horse in the vicinity who'd ever been his client stood to attention and then glanced around side-eyed to find his location. I never asked him why he called all difficult horses, son—though I'm guessing it may have had to do with his own wild brood of boys (and that he had a soft spot for girls whom he allowed to ask as many questions as they wanted so long as they sat very still on bales of hay placed out of the reach of dancing hooves).

Aside from teaching twitchy foals their manners, the farrier only cared about, only talked about, one thing. To fit true. Did the horseshoe fit true to the hoof? Was the horse fit true to the task? There were two kinds of fit—shape and purpose—and he was driven in pursuit of both.

I remember the day he let me look inside the back of his truck. A hoarder's paradise, the rows upon rows of suspended horseshoes explained the faintly musical sound his truck made as it bounced up our drive. That was the day I learned what it was to fit something true. Anyone could shoe a horse, he explained. But a farrier fit the shoe true. Every time he met a new horse he had the owner walk the horse around so he could see their gait and identify their needs. Was the horse pigeon-toed or splay-footed? Did it step short or long? Had the horse foundered in the past, deforming the shape of the frog and thickness of the hoof wall? All of these issues should be addressed with the right trim and the right shoe. He trimmed hooves and fit horseshoes as part of his larger *telos*, or purpose, in improving the gait and function of the horse.

Once he showed me mammoth draft horse shoes with cleats welded onto them. He explained that these types of shoes were for weight-pulling competitions and that they were put on just for an event, then taken off afterwards. He explained that racehorses had similar super lightweight versions of gripping shoes to protect their hooves and keep them from slipping around corners as they came pounding down the track. These shoes, as much as the ones for correcting a poor gait, also had a distinct purpose.

Our farrier didn't merely put shoes on horse hooves. He outfitted the horse for a purpose. He fit the shoe true.

Triple A Truth

Augustine's essay "On Ideas" from *83 Different Questions*, question 46, says that Ideas, also translated as Forms or Reasons, are eternal and immutable and therefore rational since God, who is rational, eternal, and unchanging, created them from the divine mind. The human mind, since it was created by God and has the capacity for intellect, can understand these ideas. Furthermore, the closer we are to God the more accurately we can reason, and thus determine ideas to be true. When Augustine includes Reason or Form as similar forms of an Idea, I see the connection between the truth of a thing, or the very idea of it, and its purpose (reason) or function (form) (Excerpts 25). But, I find a far more compelling description of truth in the writings of Aquinas.

Aquinas, in *Disputed Questions on Truth*, begins his work with the question, "What is truth?" In answer he states, "truth is the adequation [conformity] of the thing and the intellect [understanding]." Or, truth may be understood as the "fittingness" of the thing that exists, its being, with an understanding of its purpose. It is in that very "fit" that assimilation of knowledge of a thing occurs. Just as my understanding of the purpose of a horseshoe was manifested by my handling of a giant horseshoe fitted with cleats, so the act of knowing becomes more accurate, or more true, when the mind can envision the application of a concept (Excerpts 19).

Aristotle's approach to knowledge begins by identifying the *form* of the thing. From there, we make categories to show what *conforms* to an idea. If it does not fit, we may say it is *deformed*. The farrier believed he was fit to his task, both in the sense that his short legs and strong arms made him physically suited to his job, but also in the sense that he understood everything there was to know about a horse, including its desired purpose, gait, and temperament. Because he had a deep understanding of the correct form of a horse, he was then able to spot deformities and find solutions that brought conformity (Excerpts 31).

The Narrative of Truth

Which did you find more compelling—my opening story about the farrier or my attempts to summarize Aristotle's, Aquinas', and Augustine's definitions of truth? Which did you find more readable? Both are narratives, one in story form and the other in descriptive form. Both offer definitions, though one had far richer examples.

A classical education should explore narratives of all types, for a wide range of purposes. We need clear definitions of concepts as much as we need examples illustrating those concepts. Mythology, from the ancient Greek stories to the modern day versions by J.K. Rowling, give rich descriptions of what humans experience in pursuit of abstract concepts such as love and power. Good historical accounts do the same. Great thinkers from Plato to MacIntyre help us define what it means to reason about our world. All of these types of narratives are beneficial.

However, we must remember that a narrative is not only restricted to a story or description we read. In the context of a pedagogical practice, narration is the act of a student reciting back what he or she has heard, remembered, and understood. In that sense, narration *is* the ultimate act of knowing. Having students engage with the text in this manner is a key part of the process of learning.

In summary, written narratives we explore in books can fit the purpose of conveying truth. And, to go deeper, when students engage in the act of narration they are assimilating the truth of a concept into their own understanding by first holding onto its image and then speaking it forth in their own words. Narratives, therefore, are incredibly powerful both as truth-conveying tools and truth-making practices.

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