

Very Like a Whale
September 11, 2018

“And it came to pass, that when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.” - Genesis 15:17

“Hamlet: do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in the shape of a camel?”

Polonius: By th’ mass, and tis like a camel indeed.

Hamlet: Methinks it’s like a weasel.

Polonius: It is backed like a weasel.

Hamlet: Or like a whale.

Polonius: Very like a whale.” -Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3: Scene 2

While teaching a seminar at Stanford in the fall of ‘69 Raymond Wolfinger encountered one student’s dismissal of another student’s fact, calling it a mere “anecdote.” Wolfinger readily quipped back with what soon became an oft-quoted aphorism: “The plural of anecdote is data.” It’s interesting to note the year this rejoinder was used by a university professor, intellectual, and “political scientist,” it practically demarcates a cultural shift, the moment a story became fact. The plural of anecdote isn’t data. The plural of anecdote is anthology. An anecdote is simply a story recalled: “here is a story, that slightly ties to the theme of our conversation, you might find interesting.” And an anthology is a collection of stories from one or many authors/storytellers. After all, a synonym of anecdote is “yarn”, a synonym for data is “facts”. Anthology comes from the Latin “anthologia” which is also Greek for a “collection of poems”, but literally to “gather flowers”; it’s an aesthetic, a work or practice of beauty, entertainment, amusement that may serve to contextualize—an anecdote is merely one flowery reminiscence.

From the mid-sixties on, there has been a cavalcade of stupidity passed-off as wit in academe. Whether some vague impromptu slogan or a decontextualized, flat out misunderstood quote from Shakespeare. Seriously, the amount of times someone belches out “to thine own self be true” when speaking of “personal truths” or “brevity is the soul of wit” when optioned long-form debate is astounding. Let us not forget who uttered these lines: the solipsistic corporeal dunce-wagon that is Polonius voice-boxed these sentiments. Polonius is the antagonist in Shakespeare’s Hamlet—the one that is not only wrong about everything in this play, but ultimately gets everyone killed. He is overly concerned with the appearance of things as well as surreptitiously advancing his own agenda by playing off peoples’ emotions (hence the meaning of the “to thine own self be true”: Advance your agenda because you are the most important and your ideas are the most real, disregard the facts.) But it is the phrase “brevity is the soul of wit” which “to thine own self be true” can set ablaze true tragedy: a catastrophe. It is something anyone can spark-off, spread like wildfire. Just because you say something simply doesn’t mean it’s simply right.

Not only is such non-think burning through the minds of academe but now the American cultural conscience and conversation. For instance, assimilation of immigrants is something condemned in the eyes of a growing many. There is no “come here, to the land of opportunity, embrace our culture, and lift yourself out of your woes.” It is now, “Come here! Teach these detached Capitalists your exquisitely rooted ways.” Because—you know, the evil, elitist American should be obsequiously bowing to such diversity of palate and behavior; such genuflection toward every

culture but our own is obscene at best and disheartening at worst. Fact is, when a flood of unvetted cultural, ethnical, and racial backgrounds breach the borders of a country that has a growing young population being indoctrinated into a cult of revulsion for its own principles, norms, and mores you find that country soon in a cultural identity crisis; terse phrases like “my own truth” or terms like “personal truth” become the new “Truth.” Facts and data are considered “elitist” and anything that contradicts the fiery narrative breathed by the growing population of storytellers is considered not true; when the data conflicts with the story, the data is considered abusive, bigoted, tyrannical even. Stories are becoming more oft’ used to supplant facts, instead contextualize them. We must return to the understanding that stories and sets of facts are distinct—you can narrativize a set of facts, but your facts better support your narrative, or your narrative better reflect the facts; at best, lest someone catch on to the glaring contradictions; at worst, the contradictions result in deadly consequences within reality. Stories and reality are real but in completely different ways. Stories serve the reality of the individual. Facts are the reality. Stories are derived from our values. Facts are derived from our observation of the material world. Science is the study of things. Storytelling is the study of the human condition, and an act of appreciating and orienting.

Whether you consider the Bible a divinely penned account of all creation, acutely exacted here on earth, or simply accrued wisdom passed down through generations in an anthology of allegorical tales used as a metaphor to describe how individuals should conduct themselves in a society in order for a civilization to flourish we can all agree there is great truth to be found in its ancient sentiments. Stories are indeed an essential communicative modality for impressing upon individuals what works when comporting oneself amongst others as he gradually conceptualizes a personal teleology. Stories do not describe reality, they simply reveal truths about it—this is why fiction works, it does what facts can’t do: fiction extracts orderly essence by synthesizing abstract concepts in an incomprehensibly infinite realm of information. Stories/fiction deal with the realm of conveyance—a transportation device, a vehicle to the place where we figure things out on a personal level. Stories can unite the fragmented inner life of the individual, even communities and nations. Stories fill in the gaps when knowledge falls short of our innate, yet inarticulable understanding of the world’s mysteries. Stories work on such a fundamental level that they have archetypes and universalities that children with no real-world experience understand: children are moved when something kind or sad occurs in a narrative; they get upset when a wrong is committed; if the story be told well, they are engaged in a metaphor so real it renders them (and us adults too) spellbound and ultimately replenished once the narrative ends. We even tend to come away from a story with a better understanding of ourselves, our world, and our place in it. Storytelling is a taxonomy of the soul. Say, a problem has been plaguing you and after days, weeks, months even, you have yet to find any breakthrough after pouring through the data, studying your habits, talking to others about your issue, looking back at the steps that very well may have brought said issue to fruition, yet—nothing. Then you pick up a book, hear an anecdote, or come across a new film, or one you have seen several times, and within a few hours you’ve found a solution to your problem, a new remedy to deal with it, or simply a new orientation of mind instilling in you a sense of revitalization—awakening a dormant courage, or simply revealing it within you after shaking off the cloak of latency.

The most archetypal theme of stories is that of sacrifice. There is something truly universal to this concept, it’s everywhere—ubiquitous—in all cultures, all religions, all races, all ethnicities.

The concept of sacrifice predates the Bible, even Homer. Sacrifice was ritual before it was articulable. In many barbaric ways it was demonstrated to express humility and respectful servitude to gods via human sacrifice, which, through Judaism became animal sacrifice, and through Christianity became personal sacrifice—this is the fundamental evolution of sacrifice that shaped Western Culture. Voluntary sacrifice of one's life for a greater good is heroic (think soldiers in war like the late John McCain, genuinely good politicians like Lincoln, Churchill, and Thatcher, or a character like Gandalf the Grey in *Lord of the Rings*). We even have hierarchies of sacrifice: sacrificing time with family for volunteer work at a homeless shelter is held above sacrificing money for a charity. Sacrificing one's dreams for the reality of a better life for one's child is held above sacrificing love for independence. Sacrifice takes on many forms. All sacrifice isn't noble and/or heroic, some are downright self-serving, sometimes to the detriment of the one making the sacrifice and no good can come of it, unless those peripherally affected by it can conjure some story to make sense of a tragically ineffectual sacrifice—the power of story can turn a bad sacrifice into a lesson in *what not to do*. The story can serve to render an ill-fated sacrifice one not necessarily done in vain. There are ill-fated type 1/type 2 error scenarios—choosing the lesser of the two bad decisions because of previously ill-thought-out, or unconscious sacrifices (the ones you didn't realize you already made until you began to suffer and now possess the clarity of retrospect) or, and this is more the case anyway when dealing with reality, there are only not-so-good choices and you must choose the one with the least amount, or less severe of consequences.

“What causes people to learn,” William F. Buckley once asked Margaret Thatcher on his show *Firing Line*. Many facts can be gathered, analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized in a hypothesis and then theorized but sometimes more is required: “It comes to asking, why are people in politics?” Thatcher responded. She then spoke of “consensus” and “conviction” ultimately lamenting her predecessor Harold Wilson who said, ‘simply’, “What the British people wanted was a bit of peace and quiet—anything for a quiet life.” A very simple narrative concisely put; keen with brevity; marketable. “The great drag of democracy” Thatcher said, “is that people will say ‘does my voice count? Can I do anything?’ And therefore they [the people] leave it to a tiny, well-organized minority...and unpleasant things happen.” To take the story in order to live a simple, quiet life may sound appetizing—just, even. Yet imbedded in such a sentiment “anything for a quiet life” lay a latent, detrimental, sacrifice: freedom for a total, albeit, precarious, security. There is not only a hierarchy of sacrifice, but good and bad sacrifices. When things get whittled down into simple ideals, postcard philosophies, you tend to find a great deal of unconscious sacrifices, for the worse. Simplicity, although, well-earned in our modern speak, can be a damning spell cast upon our inner child. To protect our cherished childlike dreams of reaching a simplicity in reality without sacrificing our freedom to advance ourselves we must remain wary of the distinction between rhetoric and reality, fiction and facts, stories and stone. A lot of the time this means a long conversation is to be had, with precise, well-versed, prudent speech with each other that can be ferociously taxing (mentally and emotionally) and, at times, insufferably tedious. This is because when dealing with reality you aren't extracting the essence of facts but registering how those facts operate in reality and what the repercussions of these facts entail, and in prolonged conversation you must operate with logical, philosophical consistency.

In an age where big words are taken as pretension rather than precision, and precision rarely means concision the Twainian dictums “use the right word, not its second cousin” and “the difference between the right word and almost the right word is the difference between the lightning bug, and the lightning” are but vestigial obfuscations lost in the umbra of yesterday’s eclipsed wisdom (☺). The ability to sit and read through all matter of text is a waning art, particularly texts of the ancients. The ability to converse, civilly, and at great length, developing an idea (or a few), catching our footing or lending a benignant hand to one another as we inevitably stumble over and through difficult syntactical terrane with childlike delight in exploration of the new and unexpected journey of dialectical exchange, is now seen as a display of pomposity and considered an unnecessary, time-consuming burden. Yet, it is through these processes our stories come alive, revealing those greater truths, rendering the once unutterable into common place tongues. Simplicity in speech is reward for the drudgery of necessary complex discussion—and our easy manner of discourse is the result of thousands of years of orison, cogitation, conversation, and testing; what we can now say simply was once inarticulable intuition, imagistic dream, and acted out ritual. And still, just because we say things simply doesn’t mean what is simply being said captures what we wish to convey, most of the time ‘simply said’ is merely simplification for timely surface gist at the expense of penetrative correctness. When one engages in lengthy discussion it is inherent in the act that they are willing to sacrifice precious earthly time to clear the air. The art of lengthy, honest, open discussion is a sign of empathy and a demonstration of love for your fellow man.

In the words of Wittgenstein, the purpose of philosophy is “to show the fly the way out of the bottle.” Philosophy isn’t meant to confound and perplex—albeit, we find ourselves constantly trapped in the bottle of pseudo-problems conjured by stultifying syntax—it is meant to be a breath of fresh air, a release from the paradoxical claustrophobia of infinite existential dread, “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space were it not that I had bad dreams”, says Hamlet in a so-well-coded expression it’s meaning evades even himself; the bad dream is ambition; things could be different, worse or better. Do not linger in contentedness, resting on your laurels, skimming the surface of simple speak in the shoals of conversation. All shallow thinking is clear. It is better to be burdened by the knowledge that there is more to learn than to suffer the spiritual atrophy of thinking you know what is ultimately correct. It is the process of learning and confronting complexity that we must again appreciate.

To be fair, just because you have a lot you *want to* say doesn’t mean you have a lot *to* say. Loquacity too can be a circumlocutory dodge, a tactic to evade addressing a problem directly. This would be the subjectivist answer, which is more capitulation than it is problem solving; a protracted syntactical device for delving into the myriad possible interpretations of an idea solely with the purpose (whether consciously or unconsciously) of digressing from the real issue at hand with a revisionist end; it is a childish coping mechanism triggered by the revelation of absolute reality. It is a surrender to complexity rather than an appreciation of it. Only children are granted the luxury of such unconstrained thinking, which has no place in the world of adults, for reality is, if nothing else, the realm of constraint.

A subjectivist argument would be as such: “What are laws?” Which is a great question for clarification and establishing consensus if the inquisitor has altruistic and clarifying intent but it becomes malicious when the question is posited with the agenda of destabilization. So, the

subjectivist would break down (logically, mind you) “laws are governmentally enforced rules.” To which you would ask, “what are rules?” The well-intended, clarifying answer would be “a set of explicitly phrased expectations regarding individual behavior and conduct in a community/society/culture which allow the individual to go about their business without fear of other individuals without consequence molesting their sense of safety and well-being.” But the subjectivist intent would be revisionist, not clarifying: “Rules are established socio-cultural forms of oppression; so, if laws are governmentally enforced rules and rules are forms of oppression then laws are governmentally imposed forms of oppression. If laws are rules made, implemented, and enforced by the government then government must inherently be an oppressive system forcing oppressive laws as rules of conduct to keep its citizens powerless, and keep the elite law-making rule-enforcers who benefit systematically in power.” The revisionist narrative functions to destabilize understanding of the role of culture and government—anarchy sets in as a growing number of people embrace this story, a *consensus* regarding nation and rule based on oppression rather than a sense of as much order as possible without inhibiting individual freedom. The revisionist aims at moral absolutism, backed by moral superiority, their *conviction*, in argument by sacrificing order established in reality. You see, the fragility of a nation is unfathomably complex and ineluctably real; a well-told story can play on all the right emotions, hit all the right logical deductions, capturing both your childlike desires for all things to be equal and happy along with your matured sense of reason—but it all starts with the premise, and the premise is a parturient of intent. Even then, as well-meaning as your intent to establish a premise by gathering the facts and then weave a narrative can be, it may still lead to a personal or cultural stumble down the bottomless stygian doom-well of nihilism. However, no matter how far and how long down the well you have fallen its ringed sun-kissed surface is always within arm’s reach. One must practice great caution and circumspection when articulating the abstractions of their mind in order to better reality, or one’s place in it. Salvation lay within one’s ability to focus on *what is* and build from there.

Specificity. This is what is missing in our modern parlance. Specificity has been replaced by talking points, segues to either conformation bias or denunciation of the speaker/listener before the conversation can truly commence. Our real discussions begin where our agreements end. The red door isn’t just a red door—even if you both agree it should be painted black. The same way a scientist isn’t driven by a wish for utility but to satiate his curiosity we are not impelled by finding the beginning of an end but when we have stumbled upon the end of our familiarity—when we experience the uncanniness of a familiar face expressing penumbral thoughts; the scientist is driven forward in his experimentation when he reaches a point that calls him to think to himself, “hmm, that’s strange.” Scientists and medical professionals had their own literary genre as heroic biography at one point. When the vaccine for polio, discovered by Jonas Salk, was proven safe jubilation erupted in the streets. Everything shut down in celebration for this revolutionary medical advancement; it was practically treated as an impromptu American holiday: schools canceled, moments of silence were held, work let out early, churches filled up, and people even forgave longtime enemies all in recognition of one man’s sacrifice of his time and intellectual energy to remedy a disease that plagued thousands.

You see, stories serve as a laboratory where every facet of the human condition can be experimented with impunity—they illustrate what good and bad sacrifices can look like; they allow themes like sacrifice to play out in front of our eyes, show you how they evolve, devolve,

or come to formulate a life of good or evil, and how the world—no matter how big or small—is affected. The Abrahamic texts are littered with sacrifice and covenant, things given-up and promised. Abram becomes Abraham through the sacrifices he is called to make: “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will *show* thee.” The first thing God asks of Abram is to sacrifice his sense of comfort and security for freedom, exploration, and personal development—in the real world. To answer a call to adventure is in itself a sacrifice. A commitment to something inherently involves cutting things (and people) out, leaving other alternatives behind to pursue a specific kismet: a sacrifice is a commitment to the dream of that ideal version of yourself in order to better the world—sacrificing the present comforts for the betterment of your tomorrow, and the world’s. This is why great cogitation must come before any sacrifice. This is why thinking our actions out and discussing them with others is so important—so we can know what we are doing, why we are actually doing it, and what possible consequences of taking such an action and making such a sacrifice could potentially be. The books of the Bible depict a time when words were greatly considered before uttered, and actions were contemplated and discussed at great length before being put into motion. The stakes were higher. The stakes are high still, we just have the luxury of modern advancements in science, medicine, and technology to seemingly cushion a lot of our dimwitted decisions or distract us from making any kind of decision at all—which is an unconscious sacrifice in of itself. How the Bible ties together throughout its narrative is truly a marvel—you see the theme of sacrifice played out through generations, and how they are one day reciprocated: Abram (High Father) becomes Abraham (Father of Multitude/Nations), his posterity become the world, after much suffering; he is asked to sacrifice his son, and his blade is stayed by the hand of God—who later sacrifices his own son thousands of years later.

When lost in the Mountains of Moria Frodo and Gandalf have a conversation where Frodo expresses contempt for Gollum who follows them in the dark. Gandalf tells Frodo his uncle Bilbo is the reason Gollum is still alive. Frodo says Bilbo should have killed him for pity sake, and Gandalf shoots back that “it was pity that stayed Bilbo’s hand. Many that live deserve death, some die that deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Do not be too eager to deal out death and judgement. Even very wise cannot see all ends. My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play here—for good or Evil. The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of men.” And it is near the end of the third volume that we find Frodo is incapable of dropping the ring into the fires of Mordor—it is because Gollum attacks him at the precipice, wrestles with Frodo and then falls with his precious that it ultimately is destroyed. But what seems eternally archetypal is when Frodo questions his predicament during his conversation with Gandalf and curses the day the ring came to him—wishing it had fallen into the palm of some other. Gandalf quickly responds with one of the most famous lines in all of fiction: “So do all who live to see such times but that is not for them to decide—*all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us*. There are other forces in this world, Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the ring, in which case you also were meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought.” Through this explicative moment the entire trilogy is tilted towards good. Tolkien, through the vehicle of narrative, via the character Gandalf, reveals that things build over time. What we are dealing with today is the result of ancient and contemporary sacrifices; things come to us in a series of complex events inexplicably interlocked over time, all we can do is decide what to do with what comes to us while we are here—it is worth thinking about and discussing with others

before we take action setting off another chain of events into the infinity of the future. After such revelation to Frodo, Gandalf orients himself in the caves and knows the way to head next—which ultimately leads him to his death. Gandalf the Grey sacrifices himself in a battle against the Balrog, a demon. He defeats it but at the cost of his own life. He is then reborn, but as a different entity. Gandalf the Grey dies. Gandalf the White is birthed to aid the will of good against the will of evil. He has vague memories of the individual who inhabited that form before him—this is what makes him heroic: he sacrifices everything. Someone else takes over to see complete the will of good. The narrative serves here, after Gandalf clarifies Gollum and the history of the ring to Frodo, as a means to flesh out complex realities and tilt them in the direction of good. The story as a guide to learn how to think about what it is you're going through, and maybe serve as a little window to your own moral compass, revealing a way to find your way, a reorientation, or serving as a boost of courage to search in those dark places within you, where you may already know the answer to your own riddle of self-realization and you just don't want to admit it because it's hard. These stories help us put simply what can't quite be articulated in any conversation alone—we *have conversations about the stories*. These stories are the labors of those who sacrificed their time to make sense of the world for others.

James Joyce worked half his life trying to depict reality in fiction only to realize that fiction/stories/narratives could never depict reality at all; this came to him when he finished his first magnum opus, *Ulysses* (which is modeled from Homer's, *The Odyssey*; our first written story). All he could do was get close to synthesizing what it means to figure out what to do with the time that was given to him—he dedicated the rest of his years to creating the most beautifully complex literature in the English language. He created a whole universe that, if one committed oneself to understanding it, one could understand their own place in the sublime natural world where friendship, love, coming home, and sacrifice are the keys to becoming the most realized version of oneself which will ultimately better the surrounding world—the rewards would outweigh the labors. When he completed his most complex work, *Finnegan's Wake*, he walked out of his apartment down the front pathway to the street and sat on a bench; for the first time in his life he didn't know what to do next. He was dead two years later.

Today we speak so simply so often that there is a growing consensus that reality is simple, and thus the solutions to problems we face are as well—and that's simply not true. We should be grateful when we can put things in so simple of terms, which is very rare. The news today will spin their negative narratives haphazardly and with great speed because in the realm of news dissemination every day needs to be a catastrophe, or at least a potential one—that's the desperate manner in which the news stays relevant: *it tells you it has the full story that will save your soul, and that of the world*. It gives it to you in short snippets, easy to grasp doom-spells to react to as you stay tuned for more. It preys on your desire to be in the know, and your inclination to make shortcuts to knowing without having to understand. Some things can never really be put precisely, we have to suffice it to utter capacious expressions such as “Thank You”, and with words such as “Love”—these can never fully encapsulate their colossal meanings. Whether it be God who sacrificed all to create the likes of Shakespeare, or the thousands of Shakespeares who created the Bible we must appreciate the sacrifices that go into contextualizing the inarticulable complexity of reality, the utility and power of narrative as we respect the concept of sacrifice, not propagandize it.

The couple centuries of United States of America's existence are over a hundred thousand years in the making. It is truly the most liberated, free-thinking, advanced society that has ever come to fruition. It was built on ideas, developed throughout history. Stephen Daedalus in Joyce's, *Ulysses*, utters the words "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to wake." This nation is the awakening from the barbaric nightmare of human history—there is no other place like it, and don't let anyone ever convince you otherwise with idiot stories like Marxism; only an academic intellectual could produce such a verbose tower of pseudo-philosophical justifications for a life of bad sacrifices, call it the economic system to end economic class and break the chains of the people, while exploiting the very workers he championed, borrowing money from everyone and never paying a dime back, dying boil-ridden from refusal to bathe, perspiring bitterness and antisemitism, an illegitimate child from his servant, nanny, and maid (whom he also never paid), a child that he never fully acknowledged. The fruits of James Joyce's labors lead to the liberation of literature from the constraints of censorship and a gorgeous corpus of work that is still studied and pondered over and revealing truths to this very day. The fruits of Marx's labors resulted in hatred from everyone who knew him in life and literally lead to over a hundred million corpses after his death in the 20th century. And only in a world where Marxism is taken seriously could academia contract the disease of French intellectualism that opened the floodgates for stupid expressions like "the plural of anecdote is data" to be accepted as credible, correct even. Seriously, Marxism/Socialism isn't just a wolf in sheep's clothing—it's the shepherd standing at the open gates of his farm gesturing in the wolf with a sheep in its mouth.

Get behind me sophist! Our modern-day Polonius is the terse affectations of ill-thought-out narratives, poison in our ears, killing us and our dreams in sleep, or driving us mad in our waking hours. Although anecdotal experience is entertaining, some beautiful even (passionate recollection can be misleadingly pretty), I'd much prefer to discuss the raw data. Bind together your anthologies once the facts have been dealt with appropriately. For now, listen for the slogans—they aren't nuanced. Keep your cool—those who pedal them won't. When they're done spinning their yarn of childish idealism, igniting it with passionate flames of trending catch-phrases and misquotations, simply say: "that's a spectacular story, now show me the spreadsheet."

Countless sacrifices were made by truly great people to build this great nation. The least we can do is appreciate and preserve it. The most we can do is improve upon it. Our nation recognizes the Bald Eagle as a symbol. A group of eagles is called a "convocation". That is the symbol of this nation: a convocation: a gathering of individuals for a common spiritual purpose and message—and anyone who works honestly to sacrifice for that purpose can contribute to such heaven on earth, that ever-evolving idea of a free people, sharing ideas, and in good humor finding the faults in our myopic and narrow-minded thinking; critique, not to condemn but contribute. These aren't battles between good and evil, *per se*, although those concepts do exist, but a battle of competing virtues that must be discussed openly. To be willing to talk our ideas out and test those ideas on a small scale where they can do the least damage. This is a time to again embrace our once core values such as: individuality, friendship, freedom to express oneself, and live by one's own fruits. To ask ourselves, honestly, for what values are we willing to suffer failure? For what sacrifices are we willing to suffer defeat? It is worth taking the time to talk to one another and not be so quick to deal out judgement, especially when we come to disagree. You will never reach anything of true worth if you aren't willing to sacrifice time in

order to say things as accurately as possible, even if it takes a long time—and, in the words of Tolkien’s Treebeard, “we [should] never say anything unless it’s worth taking a long time to say.”

And one day, somewhere far off in old age, we can look back at our choices, gage the sacrifices made, and, in the immortal words of Seneca, we can be “happy and cheerful as if in the best of circumstances. For they are best, since my mind, without any preoccupation, is free for its own tasks, now delighting in more trivial studies, now in its eagerness for the truth rising up to ponder its own nature and that of the universe... finally, having scoured the lower areas it bursts through to the heights and enjoys the noblest sight of divine things and, mindful of its own immortality, it ranges over all that has been and will be throughout all ages.” It all begins with a dedication to honest, penetrating conversation about what is, and what can be done about it. Celebrate what has been achieved, address what has suffered, remedy what needs to be ameliorated. We all have that hero within us, sometimes we need to look to someone or something else to model and mold it after; just because you can’t find every aspect of the hero in somebody doesn’t mean you can’t find an aspect of the hero in everybody—and that is an encouraging thought.