

January 2015

## Socrates and St. Ignatius: The Madman, the Monk, and the Philology of Liberation

Thomas E. Strunk

*Associate Professor, Department of Classics, Xavier University, strunkt@xavier.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe>

---

### Recommended Citation

Strunk, Thomas E. (2015) "Socrates and St. Ignatius: The Madman, the Monk, and the Philology of Liberation," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*: Vol. 4: No. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol4/iss1/2>

This Praxis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed Journals at ePublications at Regis University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal by an authorized administrator of ePublications at Regis University. For more information, please contact [epublications@regis.edu](mailto:epublications@regis.edu).

## Socrates and St. Ignatius: The Madman, the Monk, and the Philology of Liberation

Thomas E. Strunk  
Associate Professor, Department of Classics  
Xavier University  
([strunkt@xavier.edu](mailto:strunkt@xavier.edu))

### Abstract

Jesuit education is founded upon the traditions of both Ignatian spirituality and Humanism, which can be traced back to classical antiquity. The lives of St. Ignatius and Socrates are thus fundamental to learning at Jesuit institutions, because they represent two pedagogical models by which we can come to know ourselves and our place in the world: self-reflection through the application of the senses and philosophic inquiry in dialogue with others. When these methods are applied to works of philosophy, literature, and art, they provide a reflective space for self-transformation and produce a philology that is liberating.

Two and a half millennia ago, an eccentric and intellectually discontent Athenian inquired into his society and himself, inspiring his friend Chaerophon to set out to the mountains to seek wisdom and find answers from Apollo's oracle at Delphi.<sup>1</sup> The answer that came back—no one is wiser than Socrates—provoked more questions than answers and initiated a journey of self-discovery that would reveal to Socrates not only his own true nature but also that of his society. That journey would lead to a public condemnation and a sentence of death, hardly the end any person would seek. Yet Socrates had followed the Delphic mandate—"Know thyself"—and offered a model and a method for societal and personal self-transformation.

Two thousand years later, another young man would be led on a similar journey of self-knowledge. Ignatius of Loyola, leveled by defeat and war wounds, lay bed-ridden to contemplate anew his purpose in life. Upon recovery, he set out for Montserrat (the serrated mountains), where he would rededicate his life to serving God and society rather than his own vanities.<sup>2</sup> He placed his sword aside at the statue of the Black Madonna and made his confession before setting out on a spiritual life that would change the face of Europe and Catholicism. This would-be soldier inadvertently became one of the great educators in the West.

Now the question comes: where do we as Jesuit educators stand in this progression? How do we see ourselves? My discipline—classical studies—has had to do a lot of self-reflection in recent decades as the study of antiquity has moved from the center to the margins. This shift has been witnessed more at the university level than at the high school level, but wherever one is, it is certainly countercultural at this point to study Latin or Greek. Several years ago in a volume of *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, on the core curricula at Jesuit universities, Editor Father Raymond A. Shroth, S.J. prefaced the volume by likening a classics scholar who resisted the inevitable shifts in curricula to the mad Sergeant Markoff in the film *Beau Geste*, "propping up corpses on the fortress battlements" to deceive the assailants.<sup>3</sup> Having seen *Beau Geste*, I have been struck by this image ever since.

Many times, I have pondered what separates me from that mad general or from the mad classicist fighting a rearguard action against the study of antiquity. "Do people really study that anymore?" "How can there be anything new to teach or write about a poem two thousand years old?" "How many students are in that class?" These are often the voices, real or imagined, that can haunt the classicist, whether student or teacher. I have even heard them in my own head from time to time.

A more benign and meaningful image I have often pondered is that of the medieval monk copying

his manuscripts by candlelight in the hopes of transmitting the wisdom of the past to the present and future. There is much that is noble in this image; the preservation and maintenance of civilization does not happen automatically whether one lives in a digital or analog age. I have had many moments when I have felt that my life's true calling is to preserve the wisdom of the past for some more appreciative future. Each year of students represents another year that Cicero, Plato, and Tacitus will not have vanished into the mists of time. Although this image of the diligent monk has its virtues, it is more of a baseline operation: transmission, making sure that the books on the library shelf are in order, well dusted, and straight of spine in case someone should come looking for them—"Yes! There's the Vergil, right below the Seneca and a row over from the Pindar."

Although I believe that the voice crying in the wilderness can be helpful to get the rest of us back on track, and although every time I open a Greek or Latin text I quietly say a prayer of gratitude for the monk who might have preserved the work for posterity, I believe both of these models, the madman and the monk, do not capture the full intention of our work. We are not propping bodies up on the barricades to deceive some administrator; we are not merely passing on the wisdom of antiquity.

### **The Shared Lives of Socrates and St. Ignatius**

Let's turn back to Socrates and St. Ignatius, for their lives have meaning for all Jesuit educators—not just classicists. We may want to view Socrates and St. Ignatius as the more dynamic alternatives to the madman and the monk. Although this paper will not reveal any profound insights on the fascinating ways that Socrates and St. Ignatius lived parallel lives or that Socrates had a direct influence on St. Ignatius, the two teachers do share a number of similarities. I want to suggest that we are the ones who connect these two lives and give meaning to the juxtaposition of Socrates and St. Ignatius by being Jesuit educators. I will explore the implications of that observation, but first, let me turn to the few things St. Ignatius and Socrates share in common. Perhaps we could think of these as the things they would talk about if they were to meet in some celestial café.

To begin, we need to consider that Socrates and St. Ignatius were condemned to interesting times: Socrates lived during the glory of fifth century Athens and the tumult of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC); Ignatius through the Reformation and Counter Reformation. (Incidentally, Ignatius was wounded at Pamplona on May 30, 1521; Luther had been excommunicated less than five months before on January 3, 1521. In addition, both Socrates and St. Ignatius were soldiers and both on the losing side. We often associate St.



Statue of St. Ignatius, Xavier University. Credit: Steve Yandell

Ignatius with his time as a soldier, because it had such a profound impact on his life.<sup>4</sup> Yet Socrates was also a soldier; the *Apology* and *Symposium* record how Socrates fought with bravery at Delium and Potidea during the Peloponnesian War.<sup>5</sup> Still, the military did not have a strong impact on Socrates' philosophy. Instead, the military was just another venue for Socrates to display his philosophic virtues, at least as Plato's dialogues record it.

Further, both men ran afoul of the law and were imprisoned. In addition to corrupting the youth, Socrates was charged notably with a religious crime: impiety. Socrates, of course, was sentenced to die while in prison. Although Ignatius never faced such dire straits, he was arrested by the Inquisition several times while in Spain.<sup>6</sup> His major offense was preaching and giving spiritual advice while unordained and without theological training. These two men felt passionate about their purpose in life, and they were willing to take risks to see it through. That is a powerful lesson for any of us, certainly for our students.

St. Ignatius and Socrates also share significant affinities in their personal connection to the divine. In the *Apology*, Socrates attests to a personal *daimon*, who informs him of the right thing to do and directs him in his life.<sup>7</sup> Where this *daimon* comes from and from which god it is sent is unclear, but certainly Socrates experienced a connection to the divine that seems to have been lacking in the lives of his contemporaries. Moreover, in the *Symposium*, Socrates describes Eros, Desire, as a philosophic *daimon* leading one from ignorance to knowledge; the philosophic impulse is therefore closely identified with the spiritual impulse.<sup>8</sup> St. Ignatius likewise felt an intense closeness to God, but the way he experienced that closeness with God and the means by which he passed on a paradigm for all of us to become closer to God is nothing short of revolutionary. The *Spiritual Exercises* and the Ignatian vision of seeing God in all things are powerful tools for understanding how God works in our lives. The desire in Ignatius to pass on these tools for growing closer to God really marks him as a teacher. Ignatius is not just a blessed fellow who had a mystical experience with the divine. He distilled that experience and dedicated his life to helping others along that path. The *Spiritual*

*Exercises* have changed Catholicism and many individual lives, hopefully ours included.

Out of this personal connection to God, St. Ignatius and Socrates develop a real concern for liberation. I am not writing primarily about political liberation, although the trial and death of Socrates and the martyrdom of many Jesuits prevent me from excluding that dimension of liberation. Nonetheless, I am especially thinking of the Socratic method and Ignatian Spirituality as attempts to free us from delusion, from the vanities of society, from desires that seduce us away from virtue and from God. I want to emphasize this concern for liberation, because it leads to the heart of what I want to convey in this paper. And yet, in many ways, the two men diverge at this point. They start out in the same place, striving for liberation, and end up at the same goal: personal liberation, but their journeys take them by opposite paths. Therefore, I would like to turn to what distinguishes Socrates and St. Ignatius.

### **The Distinct Lives of St. Ignatius and Socrates**

In my description of these distinctions, I will probably do some violence to the practices of both Socrates and St. Ignatius, particularly the latter, as I am not a Jesuit nor a theologian. I would like to begin with the trajectory of their lives. Perhaps their most basic distinction, though not unimportant, is where they spent their lives. We could spend many months or even years traversing the geographical terrain covered by St. Ignatius—Pamplona, Montserrat, Manresa, Jerusalem, Barcelona, Salamanca, Paris, Rome. We could cover the geographical terrain covered by Socrates in a generous few weeks—Athens, Delium, Potidea, the Piraeus.

They differed also in the arc of their lives, metaphorically speaking. It seems Socrates journeyed from a position at the center of Athenian society to the margins of that society. Socrates grew up the son of a capable tradesman. We can easily imagine how Socrates, equipped with his inimitable courage and intellect, could have become a leader of the Athenian *demos* (the people), a general, or a well-to-do merchant. Yet he becomes none of these. He dies an enemy of

the *demos*, which tired of his relentless questioning of the traditions of Athens during times of great distress. St. Ignatius, on the contrary, moves from a position of nobility, some wealth, and great promise. He gives all that up at Montserrat and pushes himself to the margins of society at Manresa, where he lives in a cave along the Cardener River, unkempt and unconcerned with his appearance.<sup>9</sup> Yet he does not stay there. He journeys back into the heart of things. He goes to Barcelona then Jerusalem, where they tell him he is crazy and ship him back to Barcelona, where he studies Latin.<sup>10</sup> He then moves to Alcalá and Salamanca where he is hounded by the Inquisition then travels to Paris and then to Rome and meets the Pope. He becomes respectable (thankfully, for us). We must be mindful of his times; the Reformation was in full swing. He could have easily turned hostile or indifferent to the Catholic Church after his run-ins with the Inquisition, which included several imprisonments of some duration. Ignatius could have easily found other outlets for his restless energies, yet he does not. He takes these energies and directs them back into a revitalization of the Catholic Church, and we are glad he did so.

Along with these divergent intellectual journeys, these two teachers' place in society came to be different as well. Socrates came to operate outside the system; he was antagonistic to Athenian society. Although Socrates refused to abandon Athens by running from his sentence of death, as the *Crito* famously relates, he does not appear to be particularly loyal to the state. He disobeyed when Athens was a democracy, he disobeyed when Athens was a tyranny, and that disobedience cost him his life. St. Ignatius, on the contrary, seemed to want into the system; even while he was being interrogated by the Inquisition, he seems to have wanted acceptance into Catholic society. In fact, most of his actions after returning from Jerusalem indicate that this was his goal. St. Ignatius' desire to shape Catholicism from the inside rather than abandon his faith is an important lesson for our own tempestuous times.

Perhaps paradoxically, Socrates sought an intense engagement with society as a means to knowledge and understanding while St. Ignatius set up his *Spiritual Exercises*, which called for intense personal reflection as a means to achieve the same goal.

The arena for the Socratic method is the noisy public square, the Agora of ancient Athens, filled with travelers, merchants, and philosophers from all over the Greek world. The setting for the *Spiritual Exercises* is an interior space of silence and solitude.

I do want to be careful here, because on this point, I do open myself up to some critique, as the Jesuit mission clearly teaches direct engagement with the world. We need only scan our campuses to know that, and, if we need further proof, we can look to the many Jesuit martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for peace, for the poor, and for the outcast. But I am still going to stand by my assertion that integral to Ignatian spirituality and understanding is the inward journey best exemplified by the *examen*, the discernment of spirits, and the silent retreat. I go back to my celestial café, and I envision Socrates pressing Ignatius on some important matter, and Ignatius retreating from this blabbermouth to spend some quiet reflection on the question before becoming ensnared in the Socratic examination. Socrates is the last person I can imagine on a silent retreat. He just does not stop talking. Recall the end of the *Symposium*: he has been up all night drinking and conversing. His last two conversation companions, Agathon and Aristophanes, drift asleep just after the roosters crow, and Socrates then heads directly to the Lyceum and spends the day as he spends all his days, in conversation with others.<sup>11</sup>

Let us return to arguably the most significant difference between Socrates and St. Ignatius: their methods for gaining understanding and knowledge about the world, the divine, and ourselves. Socrates' dialectical method has become, in some respects, a pedagogical model for all educators to draw out of our students the knowledge and understanding we know they can give expression to if guided in the appropriate manner. Closely aligned with this dialectical method is an unremitting questioning of fundamental assumptions in the search for definition and clarity. Socrates attacks the big questions head on—what is justice? What is courage? What is piety? These are not questions for the timid, especially when we know that the easy, timeworn, predictable answers will not be acceptable to this inquisitor. Socrates' willingness

to confront these big questions demonstrates genuine courage and stamina. Socrates would get chased out of many a university if he showed up and started asking directly, “What is friendship? What is love?” if not for our unwillingness to commit to an actual answer then for our unwillingness, like many a Socratic interlocutor, to engage in the drawn-out conversation. Most of all, who has the courage to provide a definition of justice and stick by it while enduring all the slings and arrows that would come with it? We live in an ironic age that delights in deconstructing threadbare platitudes but has little will or courage to build up something in their place.

After reading Plato’s real rigorous dialogues—the *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus* – as exhilarating as it may feel, I sense a mental weariness, an intellectual fatigue. Perhaps I am a philosophic lightweight, but if I then slip into an Ignatian mode of being, then my soul feels genuinely soothed. Not that St. Ignatius is not asking us to think about difficult and challenging things. Anyone who has contemplated the choice of the Two Standards in the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises* knows that this is no small matter. Still, it is no gross exaggeration to say that it is an exercise of the heart as much as it is of the head, of imagination as much as it is of the intellect. The meditation on hell in the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* is not a logic problem; it is an exercise of the imagination: what do we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch in hell? These are not Socratic questions expecting universal responses but rather a multiplicity of answers as varied and numerous as the exercitants contemplating the scene. In fact, much of philosophy is about overcoming the senses which so easily deceive us; Ignatian spirituality embraces the senses as a means for getting closer to God.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, we are asked to engage the historical moment. There we are, the shepherd beside the manger of Jesus. What are people saying, what are people wearing, are we cold, are we tired? By putting ourselves in that setting, we understand the Gospel in a more profound sense, which in turn means we understand ourselves and God in a more profound way. That is the real radical pedagogy of St. Ignatius, and it feels a million miles away from the typical philosophic or

theological ways of knowing. It’s visceral; it’s personal.

I have contrasted Socrates and St. Ignatius, because I want to suggest the value in seeking a synthesis of these dichotomies. As Jesuit educators, we are supported by these two pillars of our tradition. We are the ones to bridge the gap between them. Something about Plato that has always fascinated me is the genre he chose to capture the philosophic method of Socrates. I suppose we could ask which came first, the dialectical method or the dialogic genre. The brilliance of the dialogue as a genre is that it creates a dramatic setting—the Piraeus, the Agora, the symposium after a dramatic festival—and then it invites us into that setting. Every time we read a Platonic dialogue, the whole conversation happens again for the first time. We are able to respond differently from the interlocutor and even differently from ourselves the last time we read the dialogue. The Platonic dialogues specifically encourage this type of interaction, and this interaction is really the bridge between the rigorously logical approach of Socrates and the more imaginative, reflective approach of St. Ignatius. This is why I am not the mad sergeant of *Bean Geste*, for I have an answer to the question, “How can there be anything new to learn or write about a work of literature over two thousand years old?” Of course, the classics do not change—we do! For example, reading Thucydides on September 12, 2001, is different from when we read him on September 10, 2001. We changed, just in that single day. But what did we change from and what did we change into? These are important questions to answer, although it is not easy to do so. Yet reading an author like Thucydides in that context inspires reflection and a response. This is not exclusive to classical literature; any great work of human thought can open up this reflective space when approached with a receptive mind.

Thankfully, Socrates and Ignatius have given us some tools for sorting out such questions. The Jesuit spiritual practice of the daily *examen* asks its practitioners to evaluate their day as a means to knowing their lives and the divine’s movement within it. That appreciation of introspection is very much congruent with the Delphic mandate—“Know thyself.” We have inherited these tools to

better know our own lives. I would like to suggest that there is real value in approaching our studies with a broader perspective on the process of self-knowledge—where we have come from, who we are, and who we wish to become. I firmly believe that rather than approaching our studies with “scientific” detachment, we should see our lives in dialogue with our studies. Some may say this compromises the scientific element of our work as scholars. I say it is essential to find both God and ourselves in our studies. Whether we understand this through classical antiquity’s understanding of a broad education for the public citizen or through the Jesuit commitment to be women and men in service to others, we are called to look beyond the immediate horizons of our classes and of our discipline.

This synthesis of the Socratic and Ignatian ways of knowing pertains to us as much as to our students. As Parker Palmer has argued, teachers need to reflect upon their work in the classroom. In “The Heart of a Teacher,” Palmer writes,

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look into that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. . . . We need to open a new frontier in our exploration of good teaching: the inner landscape of a teacher’s life. To chart that landscape fully, three important paths must be taken—intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—and none can be ignored. . . . By *intellectual* I mean the way we think about teaching and learning—the form and content of our concepts of how people know and learn, of the nature of our students and our subjects. By *emotional* I mean the way we and our students feel as we teach and learn—feelings that can either enlarge or diminish the exchange between us. By *spiritual* I mean the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected

with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching.<sup>12</sup>

What Palmer is stressing here is *cura personalis*, but a *cura personalis* of the self that starts inside and emanates outward to our students and our disciplines. Palmer is really talking here about the union of the Delphic mandate and Ignatian introspection.

### Greek 203

I would like to say a few words about my own attempts to incorporate these concepts into my teaching, because I would like to be practical in thinking about this. A number of years ago at Xavier University, I taught a second year Greek course on Plato’s texts surrounding the trial and death of Socrates.<sup>13</sup> I think there would be little argument if I asserted that these texts raise some of the seminal questions in understanding what it means to be human. The course focused on reading Plato’s *Apology* in Greek and *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* in English. Therefore, we explored the life, trial, imprisonment, and death of Socrates. We closely read our Greek texts with an eye on grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic matters, as is always needed in a Greek course. For if we truly believe that we can find God in all things, then we must be able to find God in the second declension, the passive periphrastic, and the genitive absolute. God is in those details. The challenge is to find God in them. We also examined the political, social, and philosophic context surrounding the trial of Socrates. Students were asked to read modern scholarship on the life and death of Socrates, give an in-class presentation on a topic of the student’s choosing, and then write a 5-7 page paper. All of this was fairly standard for a Greek course of this kind.

What we did that I found particularly valuable, and I believe our students found valuable, was take time to reflect on some of these higher questions. Our method for exploring these ideas of liberation were both Socratic and Ignatian. In order to spur reflection on liberation and the life and death of Socrates, students kept a journal throughout the semester. In these journal reflections, students interrogated themselves as





The author and his Greek 203 class. Credit: Steve Yandell

Socrates might to gain a clearer concept of what liberation might mean and look like. But we also proceeded by an Ignatian use of the imagination—that is, the application of the senses—in order to see ourselves in the courtroom where Socrates was condemned, in the prison where Socrates was held, and in the room where Socrates was executed surrounded by his students, and to do so from all sides (the prosecution, defense, and jury). Through this application of the senses, I wanted students to gain both a greater insight into the experience of Socrates and his contemporaries as well as the Ignatian application of the senses. For these journal reflections in which students used their imagination, I did not emphasize matters of historical accuracy and authenticity but rather the need to get into the emotional space of a courtroom, a prison cell, and so on. In the belief that *cura personalis* starts with the self, I also prompted students to examine their lives as Greek students, as people who are at a Jesuit institution,

and as individuals who are called to find Beauty and God in all things.

At the same time, I did not want to leave aside those challenging questions that the Socratic Method tackles head-on. So I alternated between Ignatian questions and Socratic questions, such as “What is liberation?” “Who are you?” “Where do you find God in your Greek studies?” I want to cite only one example of how students answered that last question:<sup>14</sup>

“One of the things I enjoy so much about [Greek] is the communal translation of the class. It almost feels like these texts were meant to be read with others, and we are afforded the opportunity to do so in great company. . . . Certainly one way in which I find God in my Greek studies is in [this] community aspect that I have been talking about.”



I think that is the best thing I have ever heard about any of my classes. Certainly, all of our classes have the potential to be places where our students find God and community.

### Conclusion: The Philology of Liberation

What unites these two ways of knowing—the Socratic Method and Ignatian Spirituality—is what I call the “Philology of Liberation.” The Platonic works surrounding the trial and death of Socrates paradoxically focus on Socrates’ liberation from the political, spiritual, and intellectual restraints of his society. This theme of liberation in the midst of imprisonment is an important one to explore, and I feel that it is a theme often overlooked when we leave it solely to the philosophers. We can trace the origins of the liberal arts back to the ancient Greeks, especially Socrates and Plato. Since these studies are intended to be liberating, we can explore what this may mean for us. How may we be liberated intellectually, politically, and spiritually by coming into contact with such writings and ideas? Moreover, as we undertake our liberal studies at a Jesuit institution, we must also consider what liberation means in an Ignatian context. Are there special demands put upon us as members of such an institution to bring about our own spiritual liberation? Are there also demands upon us to participate in the liberation of others, particularly the oppressed?


I would like to conclude with a brief reflection. Put simply, we should read classical texts, and literature in general, the exact same way we read scripture. I do not mean that we worship these texts or put them on a pedestal that leaves them unquestioned or no longer subject to critique. I mean quite the opposite. When Christians learn to read scripture or to pray with scripture, it is with the hope, the faith, the expectation that there is something to discover that will change their lives. When I read the Gospels, it is with the understanding that Jesus is speaking to me. When Jesus talks about giving away our possessions to the poor, this is not simply a historical statement made two thousand years ago to a particular individual, rather, Jesus is making that demand of me now. This is a serious challenge, but it is also the beauty and the effectiveness of this type of reading. Although I am too much of a coward to give my possessions to the poor, we all know

people around us who have done it. In your very schools, there are individuals who have heard that message and responded to it. This message, this way of reading, has real power; it has endured with good reason for two thousand years.

The power of scripture comes in part from how we approach it, and if we approached literature with a similar spirit, I believe we would have the potential to recapture a purpose and a place for the humanities that has been lost through decades of pedantry. When we and our students read Plato and Catullus and Homer and Tacitus and Vergil, we all should expect to find something life changing in them. We should not expect merely to find lots of hortatory subjunctives, elisions, penultimate caesurae, and transferred epithets. They are there, and our students know that they are there, but are we able to find something that changes us in a real way? So I have read the *Odyssey* in Greek—so what? How has that changed my life? We can point to people who have read the classics and have been radically changed by them, and we need to invoke them more often. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. immediately jumps to mind.<sup>15</sup> If you have read *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, you will know that Dr. King read Sophocles’ *Antigone*. But did he sit and merely wonder about the use of the dual in the opening dialogue of Ismene and Antigone? No. He read that play and looked at it in its most expansive sense and believed when he read Sophocles that it could change his life. Not only did it change his life, but it also changed our world.

We could say, “Well, that is Dr. King. Let us not get carried away with all of this.” Perhaps we would be right. You and I may never go on to do anything remotely similar to what Dr. King did. But we have students who could. Our alumni registers are filled with the names of students who have led extraordinary lives, and we have current students who have the capacity to do so as well. If we as educators fail in providing them the opportunity to wrestle, not merely read or parse, but wrestle with some of the greatest minds and most profound ideas one can come upon, then we will have missed a great opportunity for ourselves, our students, and the very texts we claim to value. We owe it to our students and the great texts of ages past to start a conversation between them. We are scholars and teachers, indeed, but we are

also like hosts at some great dinner party with the task of introducing our students to these great minds and starting conversations for them with these ideas.

I want to conclude with a question, which I do not ask in any public relations sense at all. How does studying Latin and Greek at a Jesuit school differ from studying the same things at a non-Jesuit, even non-Catholic school? What is the difference between studying Latin at St. Ignatius High School and studying it at Whitney Young, besides the price tag? Between Loyola Academy and New Trier, the University of Cincinnati and Xavier University? That seems to me to be a question worth pondering, and if there is an answer to be found, I believe the conversation between Socrates and St. Ignatius is an integral part of it. 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Apology* 20e5–21e2; I would like to dedicate this paper to my former students in Greek 203. I had the privilege of teaching them every semester from the time we both arrived at Xavier until they graduated. As often, my students became my teachers. They will always have a special place in my heart. I delivered a version of this paper as a keynote address at the Jesuit Latin Colloquium in Chicago in November 2013, at which I received many useful comments. I would also like to thank the editor and the referee for their comments and support.

<sup>2</sup> *Rem.* 13–18. For the *Autobiography* of St. Ignatius, I use the translation of Philip Endean, who uses the title *Reminiscences (Rem.)* in *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 3–64.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., “Core Wars Worth Fighting,” *Conversations* 38 (2010): 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Rem.* 1–12.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Apol.* 28d10–29a1; *Symposium* 219e–221c.

<sup>6</sup> *Rem.* 58–70.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Apol.* 31c4–d6.

<sup>8</sup> *Symp.* 203b–212c3.

<sup>9</sup> *Rem.* 17–34.

<sup>10</sup> *Rem.* 35–56.

<sup>11</sup> *Symp.* 223b6–d12.

<sup>12</sup> Parker J. Palmer, “The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching” in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed., George W. Traub, S.J., (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 312–313.

<sup>13</sup> I taught this course as part of Xavier University’s Ignatian Mentoring Program run by the Center for Mission and Identity, which provided me with support and a mentor, Dr. Stephen Yandell. Both he and the Center were an immense help to me.

<sup>14</sup> Please see the additional journal prompts and responses in the appendix.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Dr. King and the classics, see Thomas E. Strunk, “A Philology of Liberation: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a Reader of the Classics,” *Verbum Incarnatum: An Academic Journal of Social Justice* 4 (2010): 124–144.

## Appendix

### Journal Prompts with Sample Student Reflections from Greek 203 - Plato

1. Existential Reflection: Where are you? How is it all going? How and why are you here at a Jesuit institution studying the liberal arts and Greek specifically? You should not have simple, one-word, one-sentence answers to these questions. If you do, you need to ask why again until you get another, deeper answer.

Sample: "I'm sitting in my bed writing, but I don't think I'm answering the question right. I'm sixteen, working a low-paying job, going to Xavier to attend a class on Plato. People think I'm smart for taking college courses, but I'm still learning to use this pen. I'm Catholic, I go to church when I can, I volunteer often in ministries. Despite all that, I'm not sure what my life is for. What am I here to do? How can I make my life mean more? How do I help the world with what I do when it isn't that big a deal? Is it one of those things where little things build up to big things? Where one action makes another action come into place? I don't know. Most likely humans aren't supposed to know what it all means."

2. Euthyphro: Imagine yourself as Euthyphro having just finished a conversation with Socrates. How do you feel about yourself? Refreshed, empowered, enlightened, confused, angry, etc.? How do you feel about Socrates? Where are you going when you leave Socrates? What do you see, hear, smell? What are your plans regarding your father? Feel free to address all or some of the above or add your own observations and thoughts.

Sample: "Maybe people can't be holy? Or maybe acts? No, that can't be...But is it the case that everything is either holy or unholy or are only certain things such? Why am I asking myself so many questions now?! Why am I suddenly so doubtful of my knowledge of the gods and holiness? This must be the reason why Socrates has been accused of corrupting the youth—he is not a teacher of truth but an inspirer of doubt. He is destructive."

3. On Liberation: What does the word conjure up for you? Think of some examples of liberation from your own life, history, art, etc. Provide a definition of liberation. What are some strengths and weaknesses of this definition? What is the difference among liberation and emancipation, human rights, freedom, or even personal development and personal growth? Why are the liberal arts called liberal? What is the role of classics in the liberal arts? What is the connection between literature and the arts and political or spiritual liberation?

Sample: “The liberal arts teach us how to use our own intellect to form our own ideas or combat another’s. This can occur in any of the liberal arts subjects, but I find that the languages free the text of the ancients from any bias that the translation might have. I particularly remember in high school translating the Gospel of Mark, and although the words could be translated as they are recognized in the Bible, they were not quite the same. This is why the Jesuits study the Liberal Arts. Because we have the tools to reach full understanding, but we need the desire and the knowledge to achieve this.”

4. The Jury: Imagine yourself in the Athenian courtroom as a jurist listening to Socrates. Of course, you will want to consider how you will cast your ballot, at least up to this point in the defense. But also consider the sounds you hear, the crowd of people gathered around you. What do your senses notice? What are other people doing? How does all this impress you? What do you see the prosecutors and defendants doing? Remember, write in the first person.

Sample: “Since I woke up today, there has been a tense vibe in the air, hanging and weighing down everything. It could be the heat or my stress over being a juror, but everything seems to bear down on me. As I walk the streets, I see the eyes on me, the murmurs of the people, and the half-hidden fingers pointing at me in the middle of whispers. The city is tense, and the people are certainly feeling the intensity. Everywhere I go, people seem to be talking about the case and the significance of the decision of the jury. And that is why all eyes are on me.”

5. Life as a Greek Student: How are you doing as a Greek student? Not are you getting As and Bs, but how does it feel to you, outside of class? What tedium and drudgery do you experience as a Greek student? What do you find liberating about your Greek studies? As students at a Jesuit university, we are charged with finding God in all things, so where do you find the divine in your Greek studies? If you want to be less theocentric, then where do you find Beauty in your Greek studies?

Sample: “I do try to find God in everything, and Greek is no different. I find tremendous value in the classics as a whole. They teach me how to think critically and have an appreciation for things of the past.”

Sample: “I find beauty in every bit of Greek that I come across. Every verb, every adjective, and every noun. The way the words work together to form some of the best stories...Greek is an enjoyable painstaking labor. It brings joy and frustration to me every day, but I couldn’t imagine it any other way.”

Sample: “One of the things I enjoy so much about it is the communal translation of the class. It almost feels like these texts were meant to be read with others; and we are afforded the opportunity to do so in great company...Certainly one way in which I find God in my Greek studies is in the community aspect that I have been talking about.”

Sample: "Greek and I have an interesting relationship. I have to struggle to get through it, but I do think that I have come a long way since the first Greek class as a freshman. I sometimes actually enjoy translating by myself, because it's kind of like solving a puzzle. Greek is not something I ever thought I would be studying, but now that I am, I really see the benefit....Greek forces me to focus and really work hard for the first time in my life. But I really do see the value in the study. In my other classes, especially in theology, philosophy, and history classes. I feel that all of these classes including Greek have really opened my eyes to how the world is."

Sample: "I find beauty in Greek in seeing the explanations behind words or deriving their meaning. I wish I could be exposed to more of this!! I know that the more I study Greek, though, the better able I will be to notice these things on my own."

6. The Prosecution: Imagine yourself as one of Socrates' prosecutors. How do you feel going in front of the jury? How do you feel about confronting and being confronted by Socrates? Are you nervous, afraid, or filled with energy? What are your misgivings? But even more mundane: what are you wearing, how did you get to the courthouse, did you eat anything or meet anyone in the street beforehand?

Sample: "I should have seen it coming. I should have known it would end this way. Just this very morning, somebody random walked up to Anytus and me heading over to court and started asking us what we were doing. Anytus launched into his spiel, saying, "Meletus and I are bringing suit against that apostate Socrates." "Oh my, an apostate? What are the charges?" the stranger said. "Well, there are two," replied Anytus, before launching into an explanation. I didn't even know this stranger, and still, I was embarrassed. I just want to be a good friend to Anytus; I didn't want to get sucked into this crap. Wishing to be somewhere else, I started pushing a pebble around in the road with my toe. "And what about you?" said Anytus, interrupting my thoughts. "What do you hate about Socrates?" I don't hate Socrates! He just enjoys ruffling people's feathers. But I couldn't say that. "I hate Socrates, because he spreads his iniquity to children." Anytus nodded at me; the stranger looked convinced. He said, "Those are good points. I'll consider seriously what you have said." As he walked off, Anytus turned to me and said, "See! This is excellent. Our cause is true, our hearts are bold. We cannot lose." And with a wink, he was strided purposefully towards the courts. He's a charmer, for sure. He never could charm Socrates, though. Always got turned around in the discussions with Socrates, never could really say what he wanted to say. That lack of control frustrated him, I think. I don't really know, though."

7. The Jail Cell: Imagine yourself alone in the jail cell as Socrates. What are your physical surroundings? Again, what are your senses noticing? What thoughts are going through your mind? How are you feeling as you confront your imminent death? Do you have any regrets or are you proud and confident that you did the right thing?
8. Liberation: Where have you felt or experienced liberation first hand? How does this differ from someone (parents, teachers, civil authorities) granting you a right? What would liberation feel like to you



now? If you could do something liberating, what would that be? How is this any different from simply being relieved of stress?

Sample: "If I could do something liberating, it would be to join a monastery."

Sample: "My first major liberating experience in my life was my senior trip to Europe. Leaving my parents at the airport was the first step, and it was intimidating—even though there were chaperones going with me—I had never been more than two states away from my parents for longer than a week. However, I did not feel completely liberated until the second day of the trip. The tour guide gave us free time to go out on our own for the evening. During this time, I went with my two best friends and explored London on our own. Everything about this afternoon was liberating; we had no directions, no chaperones, and no phones."

9. The Death Bed: Imagine yourself at the deathbed of Socrates as a friend. Are you sad or angry? Who is in the room? How do they feel? Who is not in the room? Why not? What words are you hearing? What emotions do you feel? As a follower of a condemned man, are you frightened? What will you do after he has died?

10. The Liberal Arts: How do your studies affect your life? How has an idea ever changed your life? Write about a specific book, piece of music, or work of art that has changed the way you look at the world and yourself.