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| May 1-27 | Biology and Physical Science |
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HOW GEORGE WYTHE PREPARED ME FOR LAW SCHOOL, Part II

By James C. Ure

Because the law is a self-regulating profession, all law students must take a course called Professional Responsibility. This course reflects the system's best efforts at instilling moral virtue in future lawyers so they are prepared to deal with all of the opportunities for subversion and dishonesty that will certainly greet them in the future. On the first day of my class, Dean Read took a poll of the class to see how many students thought it proper to teach morality in a law school classroom. About 15% thought the morality aspect of the course worthwhile. Most students expressed interest in knowing the bright-line rules and punishments, but did not think delving into the moral roots of the rules was very worthwhile. I was surprised when I found myself among the ranks of the 85%.

To clarify, I do not think the classroom is an *inappropriate* place to teach virtue as several of my classmates did. I agree with Montesquieu's view that just as honor should be the goal of education in a monarchy, and fear in a despotism, virtue should be the very sum and substance of education in a republic.¹ However, I think that teaching virtue from a textbook is just not very *effective*. Here, I agree with Adler, who suggests that "learning to be good and to do right is quite different from learning how to read and write." "Moral virtue," he says, "is not intellectual

perception or practical skill and thus is unlikely to be built through memorizing copybook maxims or listening to sententious moralizing. It seems to me that moral virtue cannot be taught directly.”² Thus, teaching morality to students is like teaching your grandfather good manners—it can probably be done, but only if done indirectly.

Teaching Virtue. So how do you teach virtue indirectly? In an April 2004 article I suggested some of the *skills* I gained at George Wythe which prepared me for the law school experience. In the year since that article I have become increasingly grateful for the *virtue* instilled in me under the roof of George Wythe College. In this article, I will discuss how two themes that GWC mentors and curriculum impressed upon my mind indirectly increased my personal virtue, and I will briefly discuss some effects this shift in virtue has had on my law school experience.

First is the importance of having a sense of *personal mission*, a sense that springs from being aware of and appreciating one’s own inherent gifts. The second is a sense of *submission*, and springs from an understanding that our personal mission is part of an overarching plan that comprehends every other person’s mission. Because “mission” is generally a more common theme than “submission,” I will delve more deeply into the latter in this article.

Personal Mission. So what is a sense of personal mission? Many of the philosophers I studied at George Wythe flirt with definitions. Plato’s discussion of “The Good Life” seems to convey that personal mission is knowing the purpose for which one was created.³ The Apostle Paul’s discussion in his letter to the Corinthians suggests that mission is knowing the unique gifts you potentially bring to the table, and seeking after those gifts.⁴ Emerson suggests in *American Scholar* that a major factor determining our personal identity is our personal experience.⁵ He suggests that we can project our past experiences with personal gifts onto the future to predict our gifts’ greatest potential uses. This reasoning intimates that the greatest potential use for our individual gifts defines our personal mission. Finally, Samuel Johnson (amongst others) adds that personal mission is also defined by how much courage we have because we will only be true to the difficult aspects of our mission to the degree we have the courage to do so.⁶ The truth

is that personal mission means something different to each person, but exposure to how the greats have described it helps the individual clarify his or her personal understanding.

Note, however, that every definition of personal mission presupposes a great administrator at the head who gives some gifts to one and some to another, all in view of some overarching scheme. George Wythe’s emphasis on personal mission therefore becomes a clarion call to modern academia. At a time when America says education and God are mutually exclusive, George Wythe is rooted in the theory that only God fully understands each individual’s personal gifts, and He is therefore the only one who fully understands what type of education is best suited to each of his children’s development.

Gaining a Sense of Personal Mission. But how does someone gain a sense of personal mission? Buddha said that the first part of your mission in life is discovering what your mission in life is. It seems to me that a sense of personal mission arises to the extent we are aware of and appreciate our own unique, inherent gifts—both latent and patent. As we discover our gifts, we discover the purpose for which we were created. After all, if a designer creates a watch that has the ability to work underwater, it is because she foresees that the watch will be used underwater at some point. Gifts exist to be used. As we learn what our gifts are—why we were created—we hone our sense of what our personal mission is.⁷

At George Wythe, I learned about what my gifts are through a broad range of experiences: one-on-one discussions with mentors, small group discussions where we could share insights we had into each other, and a myriad of different simulations. As these experiences increased my perspective into my personal gifts, my sense of personal mission increased.

As a caveat, our mission is not static. It will partially depend on how we use our free will when we are presented with more than one “right” way to use our gifts. The chaos-theorist Margaret Wheatley suggests that the exercise of our free will plays a role in creating the pattern of our life mission right alongside what inherent gifts or governing values we have.⁸ Additionally, consider that the Great Organizer divides up gifts “to every man severally *as he will*.”⁹

Apparently, some of this is just left up to us.

The Impact a Sense of Personal Mission Has on Personal Virtue. So how does a sense of mission impact personal virtue? The connection is indirect, but certainly exists. The more we learn about our gifts, the more likely we are to see that more nobility exists in using them how they were designed to be used rather than for self-gratifying purposes. If the peasant rebels of the French Revolution would have understood the beauty of the royalty's artwork, they would have certainly recognized better uses for it than keeping warm on a cold night. This increased incentive to be true to our gifts increases our virtue because, as Plato says, doing what you were designed to do is the very definition of virtue.

This additional virtue impacts my life at law school every day because it helps me take the long view when circumstances require a choice between being true to my birthright gifts and consuming a delicious bowl of this-is-how-everybody-else-does-it pottage. Two brief examples. First, my friends cannot understand why I so willingly share the course outlines I have created with other students. But I learned long ago back at George Wythe that my gifts are brought to bear under a system based on synergy much more than one based on competition. I know that to the extent I have the abundance mentality, my grades will be high. Indeed, my two lowest grades were from the classes I was most protective of my work in. Second, my friends cannot understand why I refuse to do anything law-related on Sundays. But I learned in an economics course that for maximum long-term results, land needs to lie dormant one year out of seven, debts need to be forgiven once every seven years, and family land needs to be restored once every 49 years. This study made me question why this one-in-seven cycle would not also apply to the soil of my mind. It turns out that it does, and knowing so has been key in keeping my intellectual gifts rejuvenated and strong. These are just some nominal examples of how I benefit daily from the virtue that indirectly results from understanding my own gifts and personal mission.

Submission. In addition to the virtue that results from a sense of mission, I'm grateful for that which springs from the sense of *submission* I gained at George Wythe College. What is a sense of submission? Dr. DeMille gives the word an interesting double entendre: it means

both that we need to *submit* ourselves to be woven into the fabric of some overarching plan, and it means that all personal missions are really *sub*-missions to that plan. This submission theme has taken more time to wrap my fingers around. It is not easy to see the connection between ourselves and some great plan. The poet describes it as a process: "To the young mind, every thing is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things, and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground, whereby contrary and remote things cohere, and flower out from one stem."¹⁰

Gaining a Sense of Submission. So how do we gain this double sense of submission? We come to see the connections spoken of by the poet—connections between our personal plan and the great overarching plan. Seeing connections increases our willingness to submit our individualism because connections reveal the beauty and complexity of the overarching plan and also reveal how important our personal role is in it. To demonstrate this difficult point, I will show you how the writings I studied at George Wythe by the scholar and poet Emerson and the psychologist Ken Wilbur have been particularly instrumental in helping me discover the roots running under the ground that connect all of our personal missions into one grand purpose. I will show you why these writings have helped me stay afloat in the individualistic Libertarian flood swirling over most American youth.

Emerson presents his idea that all are interconnected in his essay *The American Scholar*. To Emerson, all men inherently desire to be able to do all things, but are limited in life to choosing one path. However, he believes the universe's Great Organizer provided possible satisfaction for our desire to do all things through the method by which he organized mankind. This organization apportioned to each person a few select functions. As each person faithfully performs the functions entrusted to his care, all mankind will act together in harmony as one great body. This great body, *collectively*, is the only true "man." Thus, a farmer planting seeds in the field should not see himself as performing some menial task relegated to him, but should enjoy his dignified position as Man-

Farmer. The same applies for Man-Mechanic, Man-Tradesman, Man-Priest, and the subject of his essay, Man-Scholar. As an aside, even though Emerson speaks of mission in terms of profession (e.g. farmer, merchant, scholar), I think this is only accurate to about the same degree that Euclidean geometry accurately describes nature. Mountains are not cones, clouds are not spheres, trees are not cylinders, and our profession is not our mission, but we can still get some reflection of reality by treating them as such.

It is likely that in expounding this idea Emerson drank from a well dug by the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote to the church in Corinthians, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts [such as Man-Farmer] have more abundant comeliness.”¹¹

Understanding the nature of the universe generally, however, has brought home this concept of connectedness in the most forceful way. Although we could discuss piece-meal religious authority to describe the universe’s connectedness, the psychologist Ken Wilbur gives a very coherent and cohesive description in his Q-and-A article titled “The Pattern That Connects.” He begins by establishing that the term “holon” refers to an entity that is itself *whole* and simultaneously a *part* of some other whole. “If you start to look closely at the things and processes that actually exist,” he explains, “it soon becomes obvious that they are not merely wholes, they are also parts of something else. They are whole/parts, they are holons.” For instance, “a whole atom is part of a whole molecule, and the whole molecule is part of a whole cell, and the whole cell is part of a whole organism, and so on.” Each of these entities is both a whole *and* a part. “And the point is . . . [t]here are only whole/parts in all directions, all the way up, and all the way down . . . There is no whole that isn’t also simultaneously a part of some other whole, indefinitely, unendingly.” Every living thing in the universe is simultaneously an independent agent *and*

an agent of some thing greater than itself.

The Impact a Sense of Submission Has on Personal Virtue: Wholeness. Once we gain a sense that we are only a part of an incomprehensibly large system, how do we keep from losing a healthy sense of individualism? According to Wilbur, this is a balancing act in which each holon seeks to simultaneously maintain both its “wholeness” and its “partness.” Our first question then is why a holon needs to maintain its *wholeness* and what we can learn from this about submission. “[A holon] has to maintain its own wholeness, its own identity, its own autonomy, its own *agency*,” because “[i]f it fails to maintain and preserve its own agency, or its own identity, then it simply ceases to exist.” If the holon is not true to the purpose for which it was created, it is nothing. Thus, the lasting holon will “maintain its own wholeness in the face of environmental pressures which would otherwise obliterate it. This is true for atoms, cells, organisms, ideas.” It is also true for law students and farmers, for priests and parents: if we are not true to the purpose for which we are created—if we will not *submit* ourselves to the roles we should play in the best interest of the whole body—we are essentially worthless to the body. For all important purposes, we cease to exist. As Emerson said, once you discover the function you should play in the body, “it becomes [you] to feel all confidence in [yourself], and to defer never to the popular cry. [You] and [you] only know the world.”¹² This understanding helps me to hold tight to my birthright instead of selling it for the pottage offered by the reasoning of the world.

The Impact a Sense of Submission Has on Personal Virtue: Partness. In addition to maintaining its wholeness, why does a holon also need to maintain its *partness*, and what can we learn from this about submission? Maintaining partness for a holon means finding its place in the organism and fitting it. Wilbur calls this fitting in with the holon’s *communions*, working together with the part of other wholes. “It’s own existence,” Wilbur says, “depends upon its capacity to fit into its environment.” Perhaps this principle may also be transcribed into the arena of submission. If we put our gifts at the disposal of our own governing intelligence, our own intelligence will certainly use them to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Money, fame, ease, and gratification will become the ends sought for. What good are we then to the body?

What good is the mouth, the faculty responsible for eating nourishing food, that refuses to eat anything but junk food? If the right eye offends the body, won't the body pluck it out?¹³ When all is said and done, what good are our gifts to the great governor of the universe if we will not use them to perform their proper function for the body? However, if we put our gifts at the disposal of the body, which is governed by the great governing intelligence, our gifts are certain to be employed for the best interest of the body and our place in the body is secured. This understanding has great potential to affect our lives. For example, because I know that on one level or another I am Man-Scholar, I need to think more about what I am learning for the body than how much money I am making for myself.

Transcendence. I conclude with a final point about holons that brings mission and submission into their proper perspective as powerful tools for eternal growth. Initially, the burden of maintaining the balance between wholeness and partness may seem restrictive. Wholeness requires us to develop our inherent gifts instead of just surviving off of others' gifts. Partness requires us to put the interests of the body before our own. However, eventually we learn that restricting ourselves to the bounds our creator has set for us is really the only way to be propelled forward and upward. If a holon is true to its role and performs the function it was created to perform, it will eventually master its role and transcend into new and greater. "Each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessors For example, the cell transcends—or goes beyond—its molecular components, but also includes them. Molecules transcend and include atoms, which transcend and include particles." Ponder the beauty of such a universe: "[S]ince all holons are whole/parts, the wholeness *transcends* but the parts are *included*. In this transcendence, heaps are converted into wholes; in the inclusion, the parts are equally embraced and cherished, linked in a commonality and a shared space that relieves each of the burden of being a fragment."

The principles of mission and submission have been powerful in my life. They motivate me in my pursuit of transcendence to discover more about my personal mission and to be true to that mission. They also motivate me to willingly submit my individuality to the good of Emerson's whole man, Paul's whole

body, or Wilbur's whole universe. Adler was right about not being able to *directly* instill students with virtue, but the themes of mission and submission have done so indirectly within me. So, do I think that it is possible for a Professional Responsibility textbook to somehow indirectly impact students' personal virtue? Maybe, but not very successfully. Do I think this is possible for excellent mentoring and a deep study of the classics to do so? Thanks to George Wythe, I sure do.

Notes

¹ Charles de Secondat Baron de Montesquie, *THE SPIRIT OF LAWS* (Prometheus Books, 2002) ("The laws of education will be . . . different in each form of government: in monarchies they will have honor for their object; in republics, virtue; in despotic governments, fear.").

² Mortimer J. Adler, "The Place of Moral Training in Liberal Education," *GREAT IDEAS FROM THE GREAT BOOKS*, p. 111 (Washington Square Press, 1966).

³ Plato suggests that virtue is hidden in our nature. Thus, the more we know about our nature, the more we can reveal the virtue lurking within.

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 ("Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally *as he will*.) (emphasis added).

⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar* ("[Experience] is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products. A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin.")

⁶ James Boswell, *SAMUEL JOHNSON: A LIFE* (quoting Johnson as saying, "Courage is reckoned the greatest of all virtues; because, unless a man has that virtue, he has no security for preserving any other.")

⁷ By gifts I mean those which are developed and undeveloped. I do not mean to say we cannot develop new gifts. For instance, our weaknesses also suggest our potential gifts because they reveal a character trait we have, and the mere presence of the trait suggests the ability to turn it into a positive one. Maybe instead of developing new talents from scratch, Christ meant for us to transform into strengths the traits we already possess in the form of weaknesses. After all, the wise stewards didn't make their increase from scratch—they made it by usery from the talents they already possessed. (Matt 25:14–29)

⁸ Margaret J. Wheatley, "Comprehending Chaos" ("We need to learn that chaos—in the guise of independent action and free will—can be the path to the creation of a harmonious pattern that we have set in motion by the clear articulation of building principles and values.").

⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:12 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ Emerson, *American Scholar*.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 12:18–23; see also verses 12–17 and 23–27.

¹² Emerson, *American Scholar*.

¹³ See Matthew 5:29.