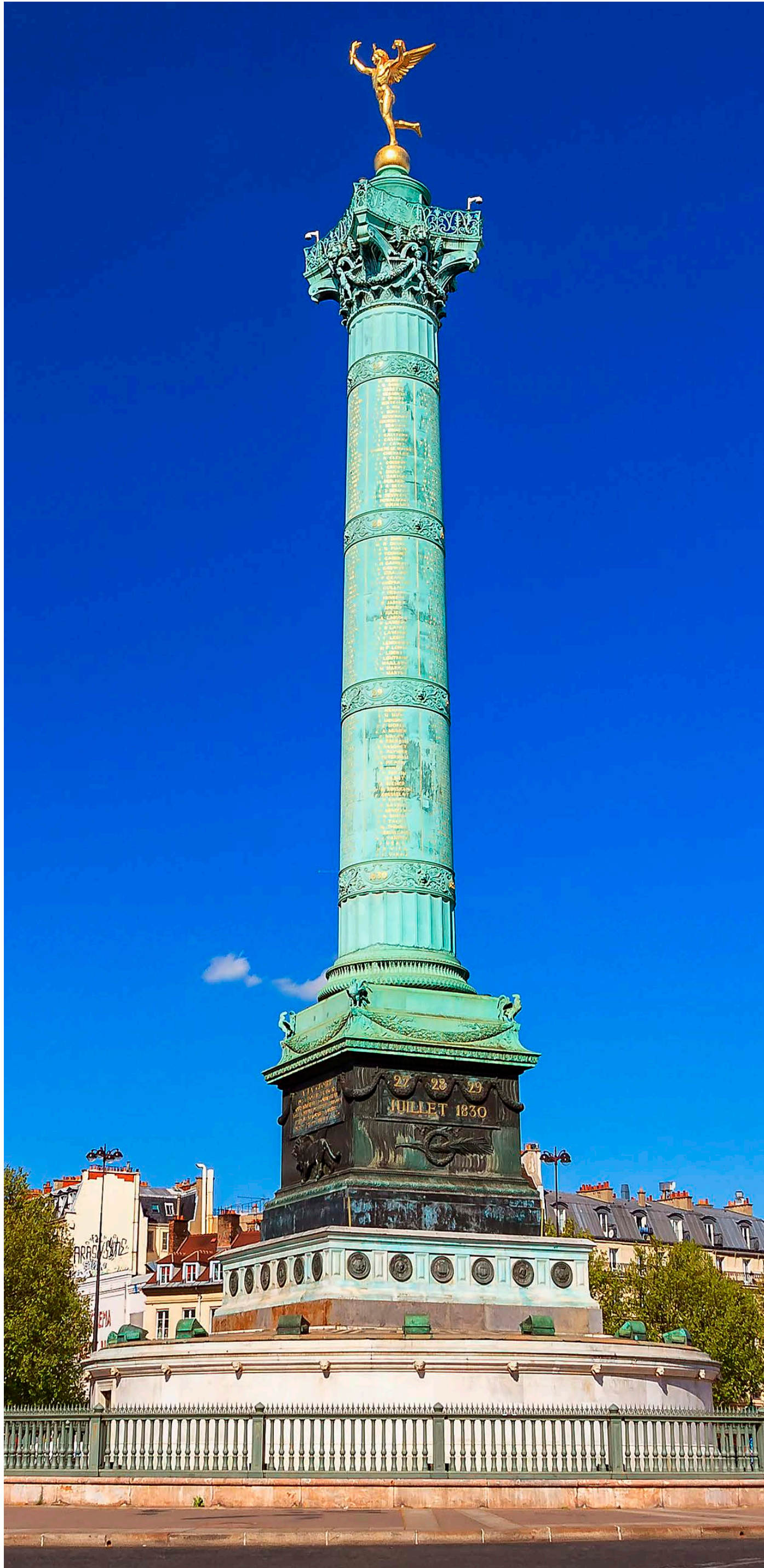


WEEK 29, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES
**ARTS &
CULTURE**

DENNIS VAN DE WATER/SHUTTERSTOCK



The Place de la Bastille and the July Column where the Bastille once stood.

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THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH AND TRADITION

REFLECTIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS

A R E T E

THE PRACTICE OF EXCELLENCE

JEFF MINICK

In the 2003 television pilot for “Joan of Arcadia,” a young man claiming to be God approaches teenager Joan Girardi (Amber Tamblyn). Once he convinces Joan that he is indeed the Almighty—he knows every detail of her history, including the private promises she made to God if he would let her older brother survive a car accident—the two walk together, and Joan blurts out, “I’m not religious, you know.” “It’s not about religion, Joan. It’s about fulfilling your nature.” “Oh ... Oh ... I definitely haven’t done that.”

Exactly.” I spent my middle school years at Staunton Military Academy, now long defunct. It was 1963, and our math teacher, Lieutenant B., was a recent refugee from Castro’s Cuba. One time, probably as punishment for misbehavior, my friend Charlie was sweeping the floor of the classroom while the rest of us worked at our books. Charlie must have said something to Lieutenant B., who threw a blackboard eraser at Charlie’s head and fortunately for him, missed. “You have the highest IQ in this classroom,” Lieutenant B. shouted. “And you have the lowest grades!”

Fulfilling our nature. Meeting our potential. Striving for excellence. Like Joan, Charlie wasn’t making the cut.

Excellence and the Arts

The ancient Greeks had a word for this idea: arete (ah-reh-TAY). For the Greeks, arete was freighted with meaning, encompassing excellence of any kind, moral virtue, and the realization of potential.

Great artists of the past—Michelangelo, da Vinci, Caravaggio, Vermeer, and others—pursued arete in their work. Regardless of their personal failures, they demanded excellence from themselves in their compositions and in their quest for beauty and truth in their art.

The same holds true for the writers, poets, and playwrights whose works, even after hundreds of years, we still revere. Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Leo Tolstoy, and a battalion of others: Whether they had ever heard of arete is immaterial. They practiced it in their craft, and their books endure.

Works of art themselves are said to contain arete. Michelangelo’s painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Jean-François Millet’s “The Angelus,” Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The

Canterbury Tales,” and Thomas Mann’s “The Magic Mountain” all possess arete because of the skill and insights their creators bestowed on them.

Everyday Excellence

Of course, we can find people practicing arete in any field of endeavor. The chefs at Baked, a coffee shop and pie company in Asheville, North Carolina, produce pies that bewitch the taste buds; a young father I know here in Front Royal founded and operates Enable, a website design company into which he pours his heart and soul; a local woodworker builds tables and bookshelves that glow with the care and craft he bestows on them.

We can invest even the smallest tasks with arete: a well-tended garden, the clothes we select to wear in public, an evening barbecue with friends.

To bring arete into our lives, to aspire to excellence in the jobs we do, or to our moral practices is less difficult than we may imagine. Here are some helpful pointers I’ve gathered from watching others who strive for excellence.

First, a Warning

Though it is good and noble to pursue excellence, we should avoid becoming slaves to perfectionism. We must try to do our very best, but if we aim at perfection in every task and in every encounter with others, we’ll soon find ourselves frustrated. We should set our sights on high achievements, but we must recognize that in this world the “perfect” is rarely attainable.

An example: Every couple of days, I clean my kitchen, wiping down the countertops and the island table, washing dishes, scrubbing out sinks, dry-mopping the floor. Man, that place shines. But by the next evening the mail, books, and stray paper towels litter the island table, the sink has dirty dishes, and bits of dust and food dot the floor. Were I a perfectionist, I would strive always to keep the kitchen sparkling, but that effort would waste time I could give to other tasks, such as writing this column.

Now for some positive tips.

Slow Down

In our fast-paced world, we all too often dash from task to task, meeting our obligations with a lick and a promise. Instead, we might adopt the motto of the Roman Emperor Augustus: “Festina lente,” or “Make haste slowly.” In other words, we’ll keep moving forward, but we’ll give our attention fully to the work at hand.

Excellence comes with time and patience. Festina lente.

Like Penelope, we can seek moral excellence, striving to follow a code of ethics that will not only sustain but also elevate us.



Most would say that Johannes Vermeer achieved arete with his famous painting “Girl With a Pearl Earring.” Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague.

Pride and Pleasure

By taking pride in what we do, we add to our storehouse of arete. Often when I finish mowing the acre of grass here at my daughter’s house, I will pour myself a drink—coffee in the morning, a glass of chardonnay in the evening—sit on the front porch, and revel in the sight of the clipped lawn.

This happiness is a byproduct of a job well done, a reward for trying to do our best. Here’s another example: A woman here in town has a reputation among her friends for delivering meals during a crisis: sickness, the death of a family member, the birth of a baby. The delicious recipes, the attention she lavishes on special dishes and homemade bread, even the careful packaging of a casserole or a cake along with a personal note all convey a message of love and, I am sure, bring her a deep sense of satisfaction and joy.

Mindfulness

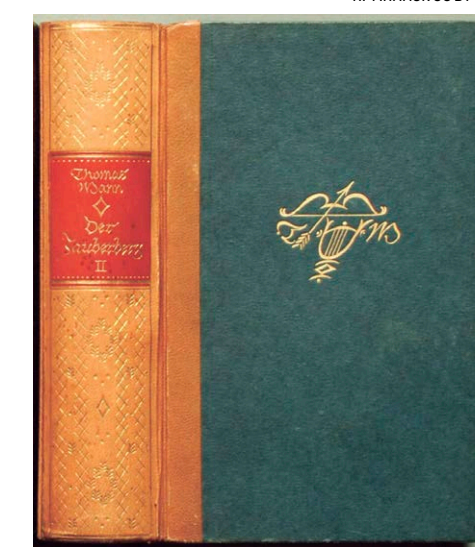
Arete can deepen our personal relationships. Years ago, at a Long Island wedding, I watched a man in his mid-20s standing curbside, opening the car doors of arriving guests, greeting them, and escorting the elderly or the infirm into the synagogue. Even after all this time, I remember being impressed by his sincerity in conversing with the wedding guests, his tenderness toward those who had physical difficulties. This young man was entirely in the moment, a model gentleman and greeter, and from the looks he received from the wedding guests, I could tell they too appreciated him.

That is arete in action.

This practice of arete also applies to the realm of morality and virtue. In “The Odyssey,” for example, Homer presents Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, as a model wife, refusing the hands of suitors and remaining faithful to her husband despite his long absence. Like Penelope, we can seek moral excellence, striving to follow a code of ethics that will not only sustain but also elevate us.

The Code

In “Movies Make The Man: The Hollywood Guide to Life, Love, and Faith



“Der Zauberberg” (“The Magic Mountain”), 1924 German edition, by Thomas Mann.

“Men live by a code.

“They may lack the skill to articulate that code. They may even be unaware that they live by a code.

“But all men worthy of the name live by a code.

“This code is a man’s set of principles, often quite simple and plain, shaped from his breeding, background, education, and experience. A man’s code is that set of rules which he cannot break without compromising his very soul. It is his Ten Commandments, his Constitution, the precious offering on the high altar of all that he holds real and good.”

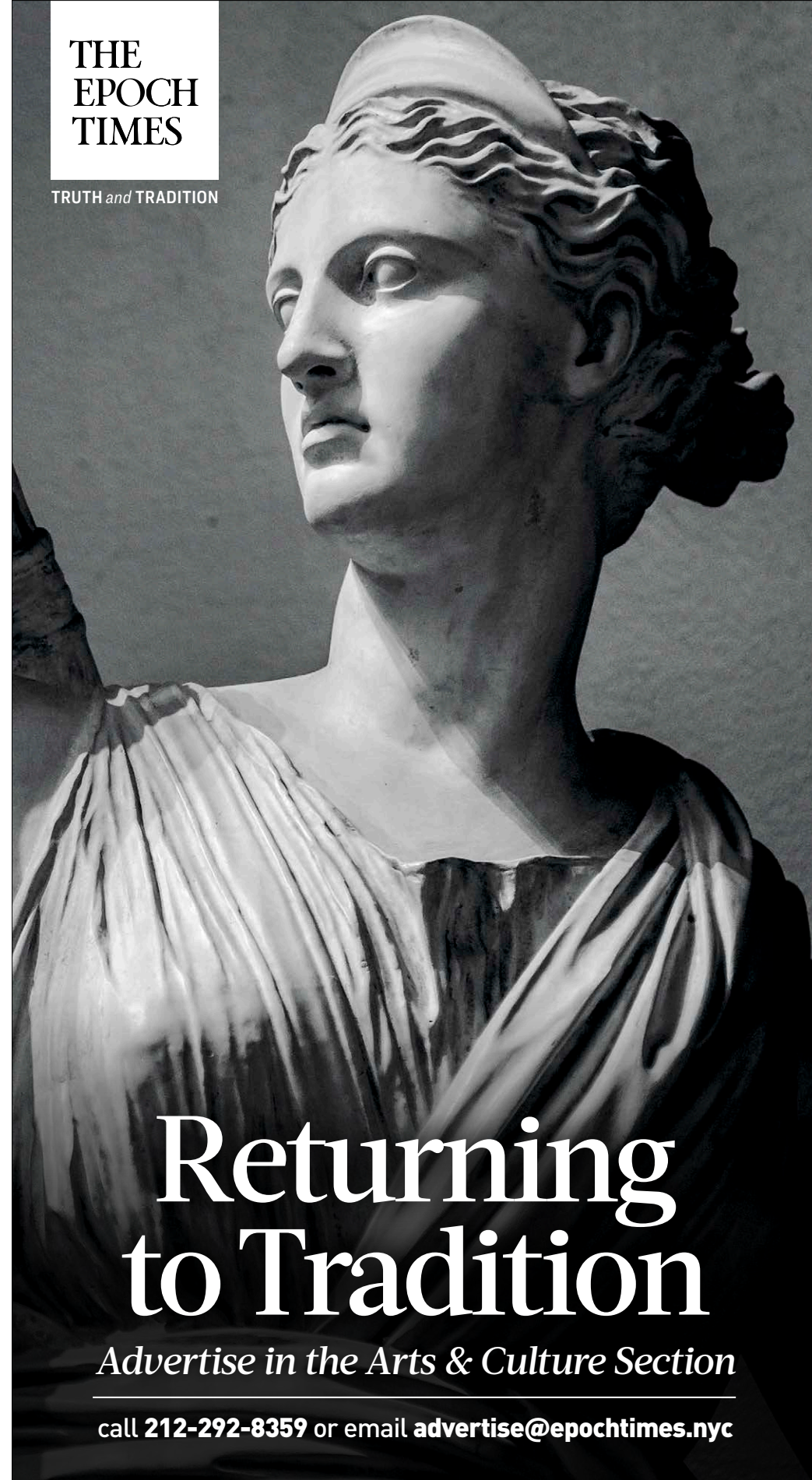
At the time, I didn’t realize I was describing arete. But there it is.

Often we fall on our faces in our pursuit of arete—I certainly have kissed the sidewalk more than a few times—but the end of the race is not the point. The race itself is what matters, the yearning to do our best, the desire to improve (however minuscule that improvement), who we are, and what gifts we can bring to the world.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C., Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

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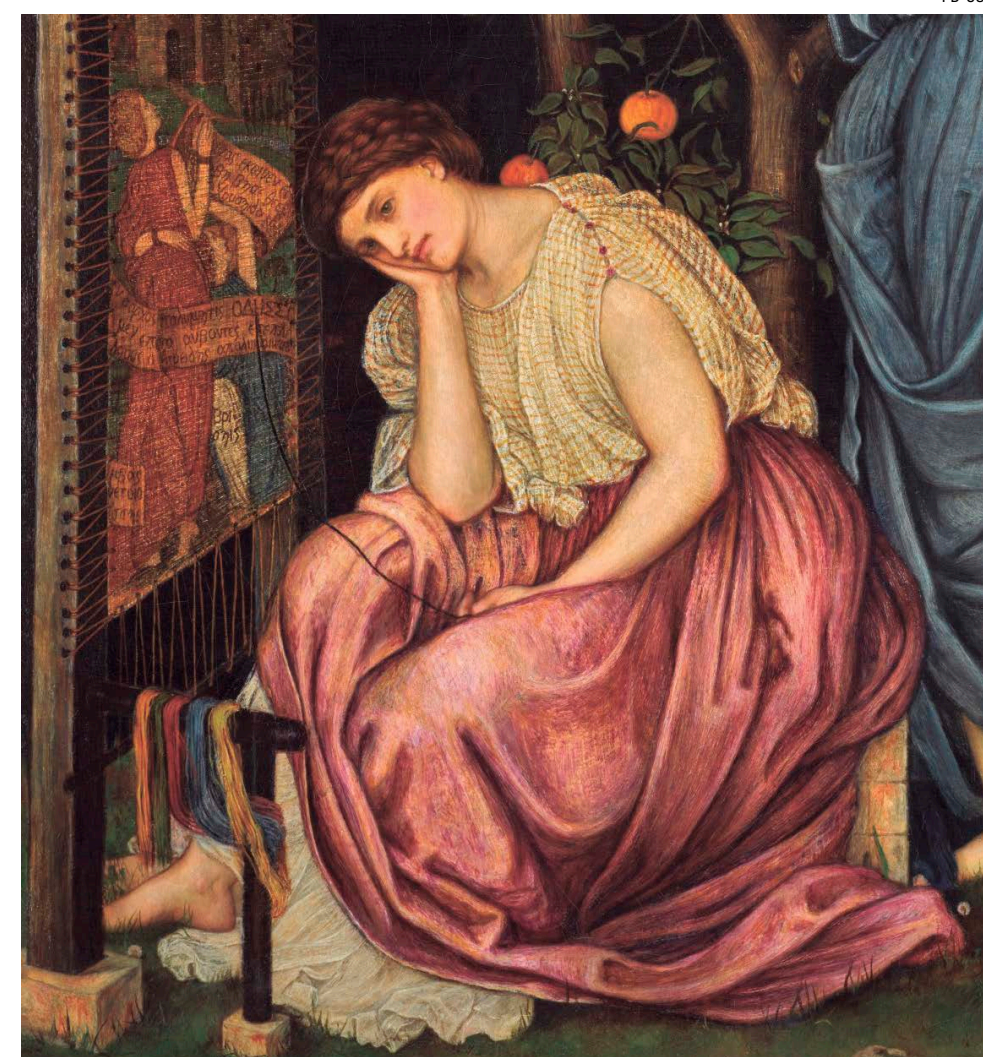
TRUTH and TRADITION



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Penelope, Odysseus’s faithful wife, puts arete into action. A detail from “Penelope,” 1864, by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope. Sotheby’s November 2017.

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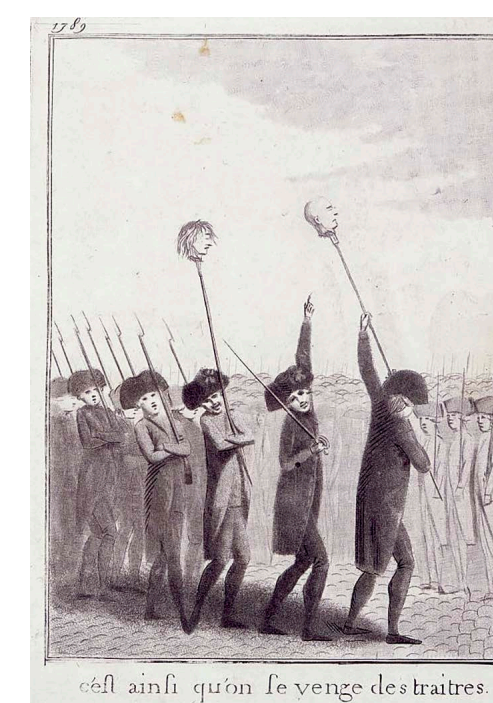
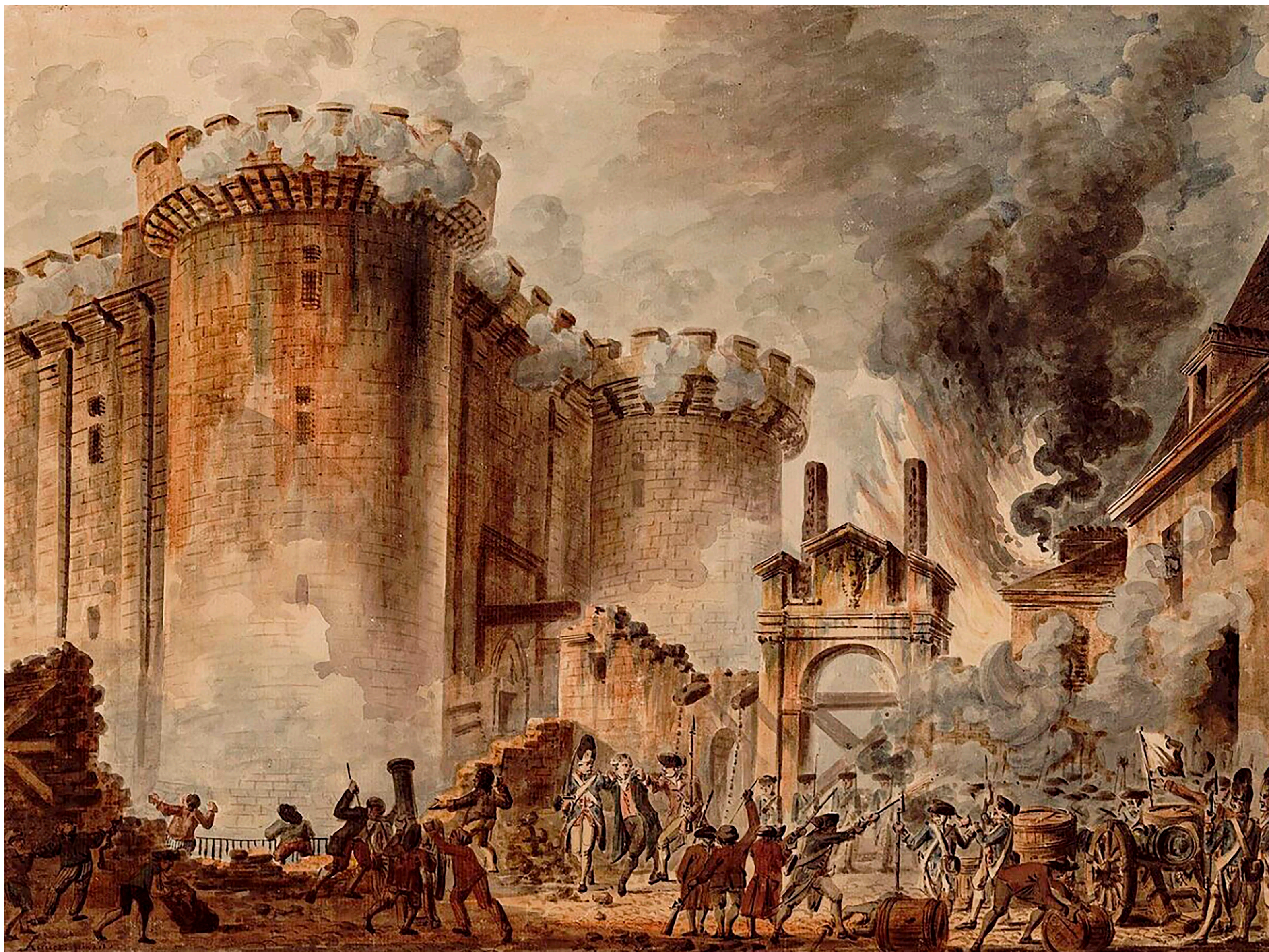
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Militia hoisting the heads of Jacques de Flesselles and the Marquis de Launay on pikes, after they were killed on July 14, 1789. The caption reads "Thus we take revenge on traitors." Engraving, circa 1789. U.S. Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division.

a moment in history which—because of the great repression of the people by the Court and the Church—enabled the great heresy, the great myth of human perfectibility (the Pelagian heresy) to be born again. Only whereas the Pelagian heresy hid under the cloak of Christianity, pretending it was Christianity before being exposed and rejected as a heresy, the resurfacing here was able to function by denying religion overtly. This was partly due to the Church itself having become corrupted, and partly because of the century's prior devotion to Enlightenment "rationality." But like Pelagianism (though denying spirituality), this revolution still liked to wear its clothes: Indeed, its "liberty" and "fraternity" were moral substitutes for loving one's neighbor.

"Storming of the Bastille and arrest of the Governor M. de Launay, July 14, 1789," 1790, by Jean-Baptiste Lallemand. Museum of the French Revolution, Vizille.

The Fable of the Bastille

And so the events of the Bastille triggered a series of actions, and more importantly a mythology of equality and human perfectibility, that are with us today. But the mythology is false. Unlike the Greek or biblical myths, these stories reflect no profound spiritual, moral, or psychological truths. Over 200 years of modern history has demonstrated just how wrong they are. In fact, they are not mythological at all, as really understood; they are fables. And fables tend to be tales telling of immorality or foolishness at the heart of human behavior.

moderns like to go faster!

First, Rome is established and has kings—monarchs—who finally prove so bad (the last was called Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, or "Tarquin the Proud," which says it all) that they are replaced with a Republic. The Republic, throughout its long existence (over 500 years), is in an almost permanent state of war. Thus, eventually, the most successful military general of the Republic (Julius Caesar, passing to Augustus) converts it into an empire, which continues in the West for another 400 years.

We can see in this an exact parallel with France. First we have the kings and their increasing decadence. Then Bastille Day and the French Revolution, leading to the founding of a Republic lasting a decade which, while it lasts, seems also to be in a permanent state of civil war. But then the strong military commander, Napoleon, creates an empire, destined only to stumble in Russia and finally at Waterloo. However, the difference between the two scenarios, aside from the brief timespan of the French experience, lies in the overt philosophy—summed up in the phrase "Liberté, fraternité, égalité, ou la mort" (Liberty, fraternity, equality, or death)—which enabled the mythology to spread so widely, and way beyond the French borders.

We Are All Equal, Brothers

The key word in this is "égalité," or what we now recognize as the equality movement. The liberty or freedom and brotherhood of man stuff is the window dressing that creates that warm, fuzzy feeling that politicized words are wont to do. Christianity itself would agree with liberty and brotherhood, as in St. Augustine's formula "Love and do what you will," which about covers it.

But equality? As Dorothy L. Sayers observed: "We cannot but be sharply struck by the fact that two of our favorite catchwords have absolutely no meaning in Heaven: There is no equality and there is no progress." Furthermore, except in the two specific senses of equality of souls before God, and equality of treatment under the law, there is no equality to be found among human beings, and the idea that there could be goes against all experience and all human history.

The storming of the Bastille, then, was

Nowhere is this better seen than in the works of the (ironically) socialist genius George Orwell, especially his two masterpieces, the fables of "Animal Farm" and "1984," in which the hollowness and falsity at the heart of the equality (and communistic) worldview are exposed with ruthless precision. Those who know those works will surely recall in "Animal Farm" that wonderful expression: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Then, in "1984," we get an explanation of "Newspeak," which is politically correct speech in which all "unorthodox" political ideas have been removed. This is something we have observed in all communist and socialistic states, and which we are observing now in our own Western countries: Language starts meaning the opposite of what it actually means!

Fanciful? Hardly. Following the storming of the Bastille in 1789, in 1793 the Committee of Public Safety was convened to run the country. And surprise—surprise, just when we had a government committed to "public safety," so began the infamous Reign of Terror and the guillotine! Words began to mean the exact opposite of what they meant, and human beings became lost in a quagmire of dubious uncertainties.

Bastille Day may be celebrated as the liberation of the French people from dire oppression, which is true, but sometimes cures can be worse than the disease. In this instance, the events on Bastille Day unleashed a full-on European War, and its false philosophical basis has corroded world history ever since.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Bastille Day, From Myth to Fable

July 14, a date central to contemporary history

JAMES SALE

Every so often something happens in human history that has massive repercussions, implications and effects out of all proportion to what it seems to be in itself, and which might be described as a turning point in history or, indeed, one of the most important events in history. Such is Bastille Day.

There is an apocryphal story about Mao Zedong that when he was asked about whether the French Revolution had been successful, he replied that it was too early to say! That is always the danger in assessing contemporary or more recently historical phenomena; we have a sort

of proximity bias. Because it is near us, therefore it must be important. We cannot turn on the news today without learning that some woman winning a tennis match is a historical moment or that some man running a tenth of a second faster is making history, or that a rock band is getting together again after 20 years, and this too is a history-making moment.

But Bastille Day truly is a history-making moment; one has to go back as far as the Reformation in Europe to think of something as significant.

And bizarrely, perhaps the only contemporary event that matches it is—paradoxically—its opposite: The American Declaration of Independence. This is strange because the American Revolution is often seen as the precursor and inspiration for the French Revolution, as if one were the offspring of the other. And in some ways, of course, they are deeply connected. For example, the crushing debt the French government incurred supporting the American rebellion led quite directly to popular discontent at home because of its oppressive and iniquitous taxation system. (In passing, one notes that taxation, too, sparked the revolt of the colonies.)

Twin Revolutions?

However, the American Revolution was the opposite of the French Revolution in terms of the profound but different effects each produced: The Americans took on board democracy in that pragmatic way that the British did and do. Sure, the Bill of Rights and the other developments led to a different kind of democracy from the parent country, but given some solid principles to start with, the practicalities of democracies were worked out from

"The Storming of the Bastille," 1789, by Jean-Pierre Houël. Watercolor. National Library of France.

the ground upward. This is quite different from the French Revolution (and the Continental mindset generally), which starts with theory and then attempts to make reality fit theory.

By the middle of the 20th century, America had become the most powerful empire in the world, superseding its British antecedent in much the same way that the Roman Empire superseded and became more powerful than the Greek, which preceded it.

But interestingly, who were the powers then—and now—standing against American dominance? Why of course, the children of the French Revolution: The Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution of 1949 (not to mention Cuba, North Korea, et al.)—all stand against the USA! And behind their economic and military power, comes the most important thing of all: their philosophies, or philosophy, because for all the minor differences, the major thrust is clear. Here we have countries deriving their stand from the consequences of the French Revolution and its principles. Without the French Revolution as their model, could they have happened?

To put this metaphorically, the two revolutions spawned two siblings who are intent on destroying each other, but if we get more precise about it: The French sibling and philosophy is very much the Cain who resents and envies his brother Abel.

And that is why Bastille Day on July 14 is so central to contemporary history. In essence, it was the initial spark that became the conflagration that was the French Revolution. The Bastille itself was a Parisian fortress-prison that represented all that was wrong with the monarchy and the Estates of France. Here, one could

arbitrarily be imprisoned by royal warrant and the basis for one's imprisonment never disclosed.

In short, it was a model of perpetual injustice and the denial of basic rights and access to a fair trial. I hesitate to use the words "human rights" because these have become part of the mythology of this left-wing socialism (granted that these terms only emerged subsequently). But following the storming of the Bastille (in which, ironically, only seven prisoners were incarcerated at that time), in August of the same year (1789), the National Constituent Assembly abolished feudalism and also made The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

The Great Heresy Lives Again

There we have it: The Rights of Man, the myth of the Age of the Enlightenment, is the myth that endures down to our own day, humanistic, secular, atheistic, and in every way utopian, misguided, and lost. And this myth has not been invented in our own day; it comes from a long, long way back. One primary manifestation of it was called, in the early Christian era, the Pelagian heresy: It's fundamentally a belief in the perfectibility of human beings, and the accompanying notion that this can be achieved through education.

However, before considering this myth in a little more detail, let's consider Bastille Day and its consequence in terms of classical history. For I often think that what uniquely happened in France between 1789 and 1815 (a mere 26 years) more or less exactly mirrors what happened in Rome over a 1,100-year period (discounting the continuation of the Eastern empire till A.D. 1453). Quite a time compression—but let's not forget that the

The events of the Bastille triggered a series of actions, and more importantly a mythology of equality and human perfectibility.



REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Reaching for the Divine 'Souls on the Banks of Acheron'

ERIC BESS

As an artist, I mostly post art-related content on my social media outlets. Lately, I've been reading the content posted by the people I follow, and there's a lot of discord: Everyone is pointing the finger at everyone else.

Appreciating the value of a good question, I asked myself, "Is there any way we can regain and maintain harmony?" This question led me to consider our relationship to judgment, and I thought of Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl's painting "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron."

Hiremy-Hirschl and His 'Souls on the Banks of Acheron'
Hiremy-Hirschl was a Hungarian artist who was active during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His paintings focused on allegorical subject matter, calling to mind ancient Rome and its mythologies. His paintings fell out of favor with the advent of the avant-garde movement of the late 19th century.

Recently, however, with the resurgence of traditional artists and their methodologies, Hiremy-Hirschl's paintings are regaining popularity. Many of his paintings are now lost, but "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron" is one of his paintings that I've seen repeatedly discussed in representational art circles.

In "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron," Hiremy-Hirschl presents a scene from Roman mythology. The focal point of the painting is a standing figure to the right in the composition. This figure is dressed in a dark-blue robe, holds a staff in his right hand, dons a hat with wings, and has a halo of soft light around his head, all of which identify him as the Olympian god Mercury.

Mercury is considered a messenger god and often crosses the boundary between the world of the gods and the world of humans. He is also the god who guides the dead to the underworld. Here, Mercury is shown at the banks of Acheron, the place where departed souls await their ferry ride into the underworld.

A multitude of grayish figures—the recently deceased—reach for Mercury, who stands stoically and looks out in the distance. Some of the deceased weep, and others seem to have resigned themselves to their fate.

At the left of the composition, two figures awkwardly stand with their backs to Mercury. Their heads swing back, and their bodies seem to sway as if something is compelling them to move. And to where might they be compelled to move?

Are they compelled to board Charon's ferry (or Kharon), which can be seen to the far left of the composition? Charon was the ferryman who transported souls across the Acheron to be judged before beginning their afterlife. The righteous would be blessed to dwell in a paradise called Elysium, and the evil were condemned to stay in a torturous place called Tartarus.

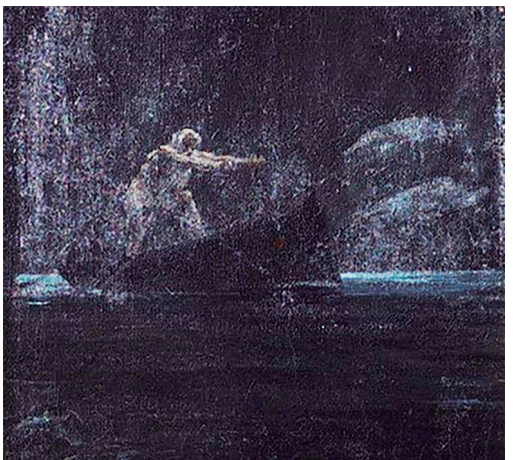
Too Late to Reach for the Divine?

In "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron," it seems clear that Mercury has transported a group of souls to begin their journey into the afterlife. These souls don't seem excited about this journey. They reach for Mercury as if they're pleading with him to take them back among the living.

I see this and think to myself: "How glorious the colorful, glowing god must look among the dark grays of death." To me, all of these souls are not merely reaching for Mercury to return them among the living, but they are reaching for what Mercury is innately: divinity.

Unfortunately, it is too late for these recently deceased. They waited too long to reach for the divine, and now they reach in vain. Their future—sowed by the summation of their character—will reveal itself on the other side of the Acheron, and few, if any, seem excited.

Hiremy-Hirschl's painting tells me a lot about our own deep desires. We wish to be



(Top) "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron," in 1898 by Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl. Oil on Canvas, 7 feet by 11 feet. Belvedere Palace, Austria.

(Above) The Roman god Mercury delivering the newly dead to the underworld, in a detail from "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron."

Here, Mercury is shown at the banks of Acheron, the place where departed souls await their ferry ride into the underworld.

Charon's ferry, coming to transport the dead to their final judgment, in a detail from the painting "Souls on the Banks of the Acheron."

godlike, and the act of self-judging is how we can reach out to divinity. If we judge our own actions appropriately, we can gain favor from God, and when we don't act appropriately, we fear God's judgment. Self-judgment, earnest self-assessment irrespective of culture, seems to me to have its origins in the divine.

Even those who profess themselves as nonbelievers are guilty of elevating themselves through the act of judging others, and yet, they, like most of us, fear judgment from God. Because we're insecure, we are quick both to judge and condemn and yet wish to avoid judgment and condemnation.

I imagine us now on the banks of the Acheron. What determines our fate? Did we waste our lives judging others whom we never met or judging a history or culture with which we have no experience? Did we vainly judge others to elevate ourselves? Did we, believing absolutely in our own superiority, judge and condemn all that is different from us?

Or did we spend our lives questioning and judging our own actions so that they might be worthy of the divine? Did we judge on the basis of building harmony instead of sowing discord?

On these banks, can we rest assured that peace will be in our hearts, or will it be too late to reach for the divine?

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

A Lonesome Stranger Rides Into Settlers' Lives

IAN KANE

Remember the simple, understated heroes of the Old West? The down-to-earth, courageous, and gutsy characters of a time now forgotten, drifting into the past like old tumbleweeds blowing across windswept plains?

There has been a drastic reduction in the number of productions of Westerns since their heyday in the 1940s and '50s. So sometimes, it's nice to revisit that time in cinematic history and study its heroic archetypes (that many of today's superheroes are based on). One classic of these Old West pictures is "Shane," released back in 1953.

Enter the Man With the Past

Helmed by visionary director George Stevens ("A Place in the Sun," "Giant"), the film begins with sweeping long shots of a snowcapped mountain range. As things settle in, we are introduced to a homesteading family going about the usual business of tending to their land.

The patriarch of the settlers, Joe Starrett (Van Heflin) works outside while his loving wife, Marian (Jean Arthur), keeps herself occupied with busywork in their small, cozy home. Their only child, son Joey (Brandon De Wilde), alternates between playing with the various forms of livestock on their modest acreage and practicing his aim with his father's rifle.

One day, a mysterious stranger comes across their settlement on horseback. He wears worn buckskin and has a six-shooter strapped to his side. The man introduces himself as Shane (Alan Ladd) and exchanges pleasantries with the Starretts. Where Shane comes from or where he was headed isn't ever made clear, but it's hinted at that he has a somewhat checkered past.

But soon after Shane's appearance, trouble arrives in the form of the Ryker clan, who are local cattle ranchers. Since the Starretts have settled on land that used to belong to the Rykers (appointed to the Starretts by the government), Joe has been at odds with them.

Joe mistakenly assumes that Shane is part of the Ryker posse and sees him off just as the Rykers enter the property's front gate. The Rykers then engage in some veiled threats directed toward Joe and his family. Just when it seems that violence is about to break out between the two parties, Shane appears out of nowhere and backs Joe up, causing the Ryker party to disengage and ride off across the dusty prairie from whence they came.

Joe then apologizes to Shane for distrusting him and asks him to stay awhile. Shane accepts. He also agrees to Joe's offer of employment—Joe figures he needs an extra hand to tend to the burgeoning family farm. Shane seems to want to leave his gunfighter ways behind him and settle down, so it seems like a good pairing.

Other homesteaders who neighbor the Starretts' land are gradually introduced, including tall and lanky Axel "Swede" Shipstead (Douglas Spencer) and the small-but-tough Irishman Stonewall Torrey (Elisha Cook Jr.). The other men and their families are constantly antagonized by the Ryker clan and their minions, who want to run the homesteaders off what they still consider to be theirs. The Rykers were the original inhabitants of the area, who tamed the wildlands.

The Rykers regularly hang out in the nearby town, which serves as the only local place for the homesteaders to purchase supplies. Of course, the two factions eventually run into each other in town, which culminates in a barroom brawl between Shane and Joe on one side, and the Ryker clan and their men on the other. Amazingly, Shane and Joe manage to best the entire gang and then back their way out of town.

This causes the leaders of the Rykers—Rufus (Emile Meyer) and his



Young Joey Starrett (Brandon De Wilde) watches Shane (Alan Ladd) ride off toward the mountains, in "Shane."

(L-R) Brandon De Wilde, Jean Arthur, Van Heflin as homesteaders and Alan Ladd as a drifter, in "Shane."

'Shane'

Director
George Stevens

Starring
Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur, Van Heflin

Running Time
1 hour, 58 mins

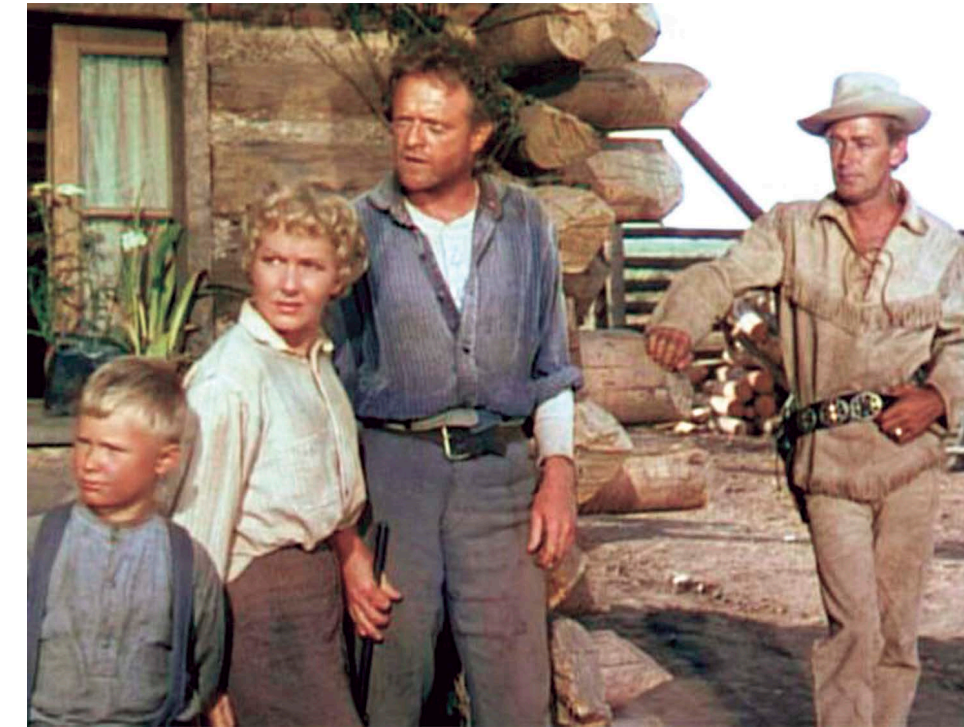
Not Rated

Release Date
April 23, 1953

★★★★★

Van Heflin (L) and Alan Ladd on the set of "Shane."

One classic of these Old West pictures is 'Shane,' released back in 1953.



brother, Morgan (John Dierkes)—to send for an out-of-town gunslinger named Jack Wilson (Jack Palance) to deal with the stubborn homesteaders. One of the first orders of business for Wilson is to brazenly gun down Torrey.

Things boil over from there in the film's third act, with the emergent leaders of the homesteaders—Shane and Joe—on a collision course with the Rykers and their minions, including the fast-drawing Wilson.

Throughout the film, little Joey becomes infatuated with Shane and considers him a hero for protecting his family. And a smoldering, just-beneath-the-surface chemistry begins to blossom between Marian and Shane, which doesn't go unnoticed by Joe.

Open Prairies and Tough Settlers
Ladd is a short actor as the mysterious drifter, but his presence stands tall, even when next to the lanky, 6-foot-3-inch Palance. He plays Shane as a rugged, quiet-yet-imposing gunfighter in a role that would later be emulated by other actors

across multiple film genres. Likewise, Arthur and Heflin are believable as homesteaders who steadfastly refuse to give up their small parcel of land on the wild frontier—the fringes of civilization.

The film's cinematography is beautifully rendered, with ample long shots of the bluish-purple Rocky Mountains in the background, and trickling rivers that snake through rolling prairies and foothills. "Shane" was mainly filmed on location in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

The final scene (spoiler alert) shows Shane, wounded (to what degree is uncertain) following the final gunfight. He realizes that he is what he is; his destiny lies elsewhere. As Shane rides off into the night, Joey calls after him to "come back," over and over. The whole ending scene can be seen as a metaphor for a dying breed of cinema that may never return—the classic American Western.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com



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POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

The Power of Forgiveness

IAN KANE

Some faith-based Christian films have a reputation for being badly acted or a little too schmaltzy. “I Can Only Imagine,” directed by brothers Andrew and Jon Erwin, isn’t one of them.

The simple, extremely heartfelt true story follows the life of MercyMe head singer Bart Millard—from his youth as an abused child, throughout his turbulent high school years, on up to his eventual massive success.

Standout Broadway actor J. Michael Finley plays Bart, and the film begins in his hometown of Greenville, Texas. As a child (Brody Rose), Bart formed a strong bond with his mother, Adele (Tanya Clarke), who managed somewhat to mitigate both physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his father, Arthur (Dennis Quaid).

The film culminates with a heartfelt, tearful scene in which Bart sings the title song.

Arthur was a bitter man who had given up on his dreams of being a professional football player. As such, Arthur projects his own failures onto Bart, constantly telling the youngster that he’d never amount to anything, and to just give up on his dreams, as he did.

Even when Bart tries to emulate his father and thereby please him by playing high school football, Arthur puts him down.

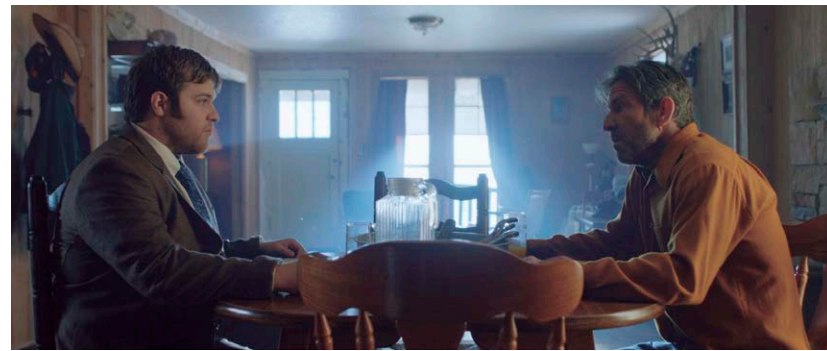
This abuse causes Bart to push himself past his physical limits, and he sustains some severe leg injuries. While mending, he is surrounded by a good group of friends, including his childhood sweetheart, Shannon (Madeline Carroll), who compels him to embrace another gift that he has—an outstanding singing voice.

Soon, Bart’s vocal abilities come to the attention of the Greenville high school drama teacher Mrs. Fincher (Priscilla C. Shirer), who hones his vocal skills further. But as Bart’s mother left the household when he was just a child (she couldn’t handle the abuse any longer), all of Arthur’s rage is focused squarely on Bart.

Unfortunately, the fractured father-and-son relationship causes Bart to hold back from fully engaging his girlfriend, Shannon. As soon as Bart graduates from high school, he hits the road for Oklahoma, leaving Arthur—and her, behind.

Bart is determined to prove his father wrong and joins MercyMe as their singer. As they tour through Oklahoma and surrounding states, Bart still manages to leave phone messages for Shannon, but she never answers his calls, as she is (rightfully so) still furious that he left her and abandoned their relationship.

While playing a low-budget gig, Bart’s band catches the attention of Nashville music producer Brickell (Trace Adkins). Bart somehow convinces Brickell to become the band’s producer.



▲ Singer-songwriter Bart Millard (Broadway actor J. Michael Finley) and his girlfriend Shannon (Madeline Carroll), in the film “I Can Only Imagine.”

▲ Bart Millard (J. Michael Finley) and his father, Arthur (Dennis Quaid), don’t see eye to eye.

However, when Brickell invites some fellow producers to hear the band, Bart shoots his mouth off about how great the band is, which causes the producers to disagree. In one riveting scene, the producers tell him to give up music and try something else, which causes Bart to experience some nasty flashbacks of his father doing the same.

Bart quits the band, but Brickell convinces him to not give up on himself. Bart undergoes an epiphany: He must return home to sort out his past grief with his father.

When he returns, he finds his father a completely changed man, who has even taken to reading the Bible. But Bart, unable to believe his father’s miraculous change of heart, pushes Arthur away.

An Uplifting Message
Will Bart reconcile with his father? Will he heal his wounds? Suffice it to say that he comes up with the titular song, which is the top recorded

Christian song in all of history.

Moreover, the film culminates with a heartfelt, tearful scene in which Bart sings that song, recounting his spiritual journey. The venue is packed and the audience goes nuts in their admiration of the beautiful song. The rest, as they say, “is history.”

Not only is Finley’s performance earnest and touching as an artist tortured by his familial demons, but Adkins is also great as the band’s manager, who manages to get some of the best lines in the film. This includes his advising Bart to let the pain from the past fuel his creative inspirations.

“I Can Only Imagine” is one of the best films that I’ve ever seen, and it’s also one that people who aren’t even religious will find uplifting and inspiring. In the end, it’s an emotionally powerful film about faith, the healing power of music, and ultimately forgiveness. This is one film you definitely don’t want to miss.

‘I Can Only Imagine’

Director
Andrew Erwin and Jon Erwin

Starring
J. Michael Finley, Madeline Carroll, Dennis Quaid

Running Time
1 hour, 50 minutes

Rated
PG

Release Date
March 16, 2018 (USA)

★★★★★

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

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