

ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

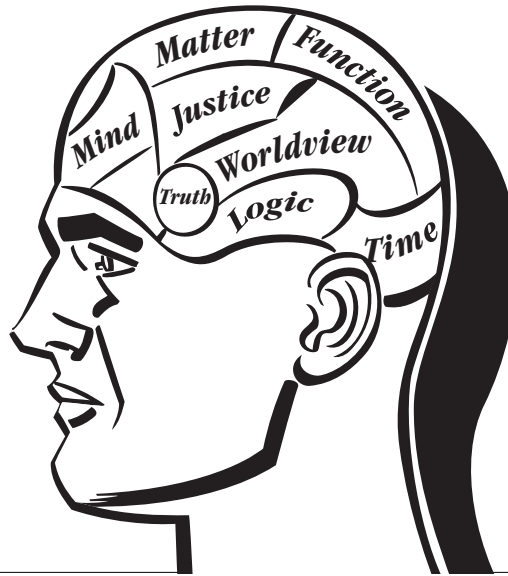
A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

January 2004

GREAT IDEAS *by Bradley Finkbeiner*

uniors and seniors at Rockbridge are in a two-year course entitled "Great Ideas."

The program is designed to help students get a more thorough understanding of the ideas central to western thought, from various conceptions of 'matter,' 'time,' and 'mind' to those of 'beauty,' 'truth,' and 'justice.' Students will read from the original writings of men such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Newton, Rousseau, Hume, Kant, Marx, Darwin, Russell, and a host of other such intellectual giants. By discerning how various ideas function within a thinker's overall system, students will learn to associate a given idea with a logically related "worldview," i.e., a school of thought distinguished by how it interprets the overall nature of things. These studies will equip students for a number of important, "real life" tasks. When they venture out into the marketplace of ideas—which, in America, is more like a stadium swap meet or one of those international expos—students will be able to identify the worldview with which an idea has been historically associated, explain why the idea is logically connected to that worldview, and, most importantly, offer a clear and compelling explanation of whether and why that worldview holds water. Students will also acquire confidence in articulating their opinions on topics of unusual subtlety, and to do



ARISTOTLE MAINTAINS THAT
MEN CAN BE DISTINGUISHED
BY THE DIFFERENT ROLES
THEY PLAY IN LIFE.

so within the contexts of daily class discussions and monthly formal presentations, both written and oral. The skills learned in these contexts will empower students to sort through and contend with the flurry of ideas awaiting them in college and their future careers. As the instructor of this course, my personal hope is that each of these young men and women will become independent thinkers, possessed of deep-probing minds subject only to Christ. But enough with generalities. I'm sure a concrete example of what occurs in

class would be more instructive. We are currently wrapping up a study of Aristotle. The following dialogue is an adaptation from one of our more recent discussions of his famous work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I trust you'll find it thought provoking.

Mr. Finkbeiner [*leading question*]:

As is clear from yesterday's reading, Aristotle maintains that men can be distinguished by the different roles they play in life. Some are doctors, some bakers, others are horse breeders, and so on. Each of these crafts or vocations is characterized by a function to perform. So far so good. There's nothing profound in these observations. But Aristotle then goes on to say that men as such have a function. Now, it is one thing to say that a man, *as a painter*, has the function of painting, or that a man, *as a teacher*, has the function of teaching; but what can Aristotle mean by saying that a man, *as a man*, has a function? And what would it be?

Emily: What exactly does he mean by "function"? I think we need to nail that down first.

Dave: On page 45 Aristotle states that men have a function in the same sense that an eye has a function. The function of the eye is to see things.

Justin: He also speaks of the function of artificial instruments, such as a flute or

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GREAT IDEAS...continued

a knife. The function of a flute would be to generate a certain range of sounds. The function of the knife would be to cut something.

Rebecca: But flutes and knives are things that men have invented. The function of a knife depends on the fact that it was invented.

Justin: What do you mean?

Rebecca: If someone asked me how I knew the knife's function was to cut, I would have to say, "Because that is what men made it for."

Ian: Exactly. It derives its function from a function-giver. We can say that such-and-such "has a function" because purposeful agents gave it that function; we created it to perform some task; we designed it to fulfill some purpose, to attain to some goal, to achieve some end. But how can Aristotle say that? He doesn't believe we were created.

Gavin: Yet Aristotle also said that eyes have a function, and obviously men did not invent their eyes. So some natural things have a function too. In fact, Aristotle argues that if the parts of a man have functions (e.g., the ears, the hands, the heart, etc.), then the man should have one too.

Dave: That's the fallacy of composition. It's like arguing that since each brick in the house is light, the brick house as a whole must be light.

Janet: How, then, can Aristotle prove that men have a function?

Josh: He can't. It's not possible without presupposing a Function-Giver.

Janet: Can Aristotle even go so far as to say that the eyes have a function?

Josh: Not really. He can only say that the eyes do see. He cannot say that seeing is what the eyes are "for." He cannot say that we have eyes "in order to" see.

Amy: I have a question. Even if we granted Aristotle the premise that men

have a function, how would he go about determining what that is?

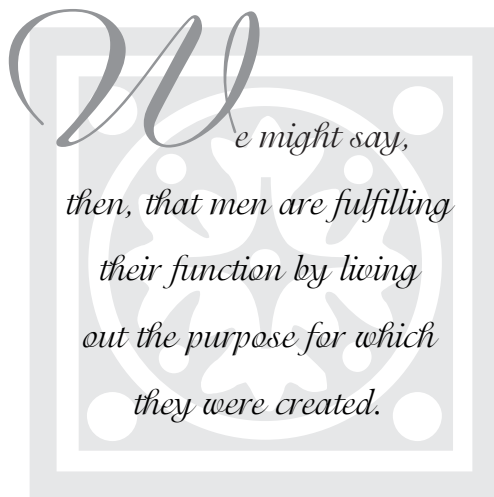
Dave: I'm not sure how he would decide that, but he does say that man's function is to live a life governed by reason.

Gavin: Like professional criminals?

Dave: What do you mean?

Gavin: Professional thieves make a living by stealing, don't they?

Dave: Yes.



Gavin: And don't they employ reason to do so? Don't they use reason about the safest and most efficient ways of stealing things?

Dave: The successful ones do, anyway; guys like Thomas Crown.

Gavin: So what's to keep Aristotle from saying that the life of Thomas Crown is a life governed by reason?

Amy: That's what I was trying to get at. Men live different kinds of lives. Just compare Mother Theresa and Adolph Hitler. Which one of them is fulfilling "the function of man"? Maybe world domination is the function of man. If so, then Hitler came closer than most to fulfilling the function of man, and Mother Theresa failed pretty badly. In any case, Aristotle cannot praise the one and condemn the other until he can first prove what the function of man is.

Ian: That's an excellent point. In the case of a knife, for example, we can say that the knife is "good" if it cuts well. For we know that the knife's function is to cut. If the knife were dull and brittle, we could then call it a "bad" knife. But if we don't know man's role, we cannot determine if he's playing it rightly or wrongly.

Mr. Finkbeiner: You have done a fine job at exposing some of the problems with Aristotle's ethical theory. But isn't there a baby somewhere in all of this dirty water? If so, he should probably stay in the tub. Hasn't Aristotle hit on some notions that fit well into the Christian philosophical framework? I'm thinking in particular of his notion of "function."

Justin: I was thinking the same thing. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. In Aristotle's terms, this would be man's "function."

Emily: We might say, then, that men are fulfilling their function by living out the purpose for which they were created. A "good" man would be one who fulfills their function well.

Janet: And since only Christ accomplished that, we could say that only Christ is a truly good man. But whether Aristotle would agree is a different story, I suppose.

By way of closing, permit me to express my gratitude to the 11th and 12th grade students who have made these conversations possible. I count it a genuine privilege to have watched them grow over the last five years. These nine students in particular will retain a special place in my heart. Forgive me for flattering myself, but I always suspected that young minds were capable of rising beyond the limits modern society has so foolishly imposed upon them. My suspicions were duly confirmed by these marvelous young men and women.

Europe Trip 2004

THERE'S STILL ROOM!

Rockbridge Academy will visit Europe in 2004! This trip is open to Rockbridge

Academy's rising seniors and to all Rockbridge parents and grandparents. First stop, Greece! We will be visiting Athens, Corinth, Sounion, and Delphi. Then, we'll be traveling to Italy, visiting Rome, Assisi, Siena, Florence, Ravenna, and Venice.



Trip Dates:

May 31–
June 13, 2004

Cost: \$3,150 per person

Price includes: Airfare, hotel reservations, transportation throughout, dinner and breakfast daily, and all entrance sites fees.

Payment Schedule:

Deposit—non-refundable upon sign-up	\$300
First Payment (Jan. 15)	\$1,475
Final Payment (Mar. 30)	\$1,375

Brochures and registration forms are available in the school office.

OPEN HOUSES

Rockbridge Academy will be hosting an Evening Open House on Friday, January 23rd and February 6th at 7:00 p.m. We offer a K-12 program. Prospective parents are invited to browse the curriculum, meet board members and staff, and listen to a brief lecture on classical and Christian education. Parents may contact the school at (410) 923-1171.

BASKETBALL NEWS

Both boys and girls middle school basketball teams have begun their first season. The boys team won their first game against St. Anne's, with a score of 29 to 15. *Congratulations, boys, on your first victory!*

Congratulations also go to the girls who, while not winning their first game against St. Anne's, played hard and with great character and determination. Rachel Crawford scored the team's first 2 points of the game! Thanks, girls, for being the first Rockbridge basketball pioneers!

Inclement Weather?

What should you do in case of snow or severe weather? Turn your radio dial to either WRBS (FM 95.1) or WBAL (AM1090). Rockbridge Academy announces all early dismissals or school closings on both of these radio stations. You may also check our website at www.rockbridge.org or call the school office. We will leave a message on our answering machine to indicate whether or not we will close by 6:00 a.m. As always, we respect your decision to do whatever you feel is necessary for your family.



Rockbridge Academy Concert Choir at the State House on December 5, 2003

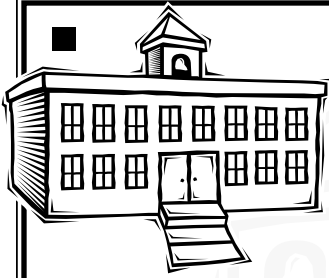
Rockbridge Students to be Commended

Congratulations to Emily Cusimano, Justin Horst, Palmer Horst, and David Sheir! These Rockbridge Academy students were all selected to become members of the All State 2004 Senior Chorus. A record number of students throughout the state, nearly 1500, auditioned for the chorus. Of these, 350 students were selected. We commend our students for their hard work, diligence, and for using the gifts God has given them. Thanks go to Mrs. Horst also, for the time and instruction she provided for preparing our students to audition. We are thrilled to see our students accomplishing great things. *Way to go!*

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Volunteer positions needed: Publicity Manager (in charge of publicity), and Concessions Manager (delegate the running of the concession stand during performance nights). In addition, volunteers are still needed to help with almost every aspect of the play. Please contact Cheryl Heemstra (410-431-5255) if you'd like to be a part of this production.

Performance dates: March 11–13.
Location: Chesapeake Arts Center, Brooklyn Park.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- JAN 8-9.....Photo Sale 2-4:00 p.m.
- JAN 14-16Mid-Term Exams for Dialectic/Rhetoric Students
- JAN 16End of 2nd Quarter
5th Grade Colonial Ball
- JAN 19.....SCHOOL CLOSED—Teacher Workday
- JAN 23.....Evening Open House @ 7:00 p.m.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

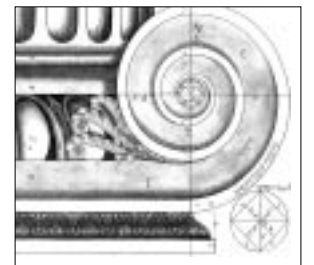
*Aut disce
aut discede*
("Either learn or leave")

—MOTTO OF OXFORD'S
WINCHESTER COLLEGE

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