

Truth and Friendship:

Reflections on a Paradox of Academic Community¹

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If we look deeper into the nature of things, a virtuous friend seems to be naturally desirable for a virtuous man.²

Among the various objects Aristotle identifies in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as goods associated with the most virtuous and therefore the happiest and most successful human existence are *friendship* and *contemplation*. For Aristotle, the contemplative life is the most pleasant and most humanly fulfilling imaginable, but even such an intrinsically satisfying existence would be incomplete, he says, in the absence of virtuous friends. Assuming that he is not far from the mark, it is only a small jump to imagine that an academic community – more specifically, a college or university in America in the early 21st Century³ – should offer its members just such an ideal combination of intrinsically satisfying activity and supportive companionship: a life of “learning among friends,” as Kenyon College states in its promotional materials.

Despite their quirks and idiosyncrasies, academic communities are about ideas and ideals. They also are about people. The ideals are lofty, the people imperfect. We all are fallible human beings who frequently, to borrow from a Jewish prayer, find ourselves “poor in word and deed.” Even so, academic communities are places where magical transformations occur on a yearly, monthly, and daily basis – transformations with surprising and far-reaching effects in the lives of students and faculty members too. Academic communities certainly have their unique dynamics, and they require their own special forms of nurturing from those of us in leadership roles – whether we hold administrative posts or are members of the faculty, board of trustees, or alumni. My aim here is to reflect on one aspect of these social dynamics and propose an analytical framework that may be useful to academic leaders as we think about this primary responsibility: fostering an effective academic community.

Academic communities and truth

At least in principle, an academic community is a social structure that affirms and supports its members in the pursuit of a set of defining values centering on the search for truth, one that makes possible the enterprise of teaching and learning envisioned in the various mission statements of our colleges and universities. Within this context, the central commitment to truth-seeking is modeled by the teacher-

¹This article was developed from a plenary address to the Conference on Leadership in Liberal Education co-sponsored by the American Conference of Academic Deans (ACAD) and *Phi Beta Kappa* at the College of Charleston, Charleston, SC on October 25, 2003. An abbreviated version appears in *Liberal Education*, V. 90, No. 1 (March 2004). The present version is published on the ACAD web site by arrangement with *Liberal Education*.

²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Richard McKeon trans., in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. McKeon ed. (New York: Random House, 1941), p.1089 [1170a 13-14].

³In defining community in this way, I am placing a premium on its instantiation in individual colleges and universities, as opposed to the extended international academic community that itself comprises the various

scholars who comprise its core – the faculty – who not only have devoted their professional lives to this quest in their own disciplines but who make it their responsibility to inspire a similar commitment in the second most significant, but more transient, population: their students.

Let me pause to acknowledge that such an unapologetic appeal to truth might strike our highly developed post-modern sensibilities as a bit old-fashioned if not hopelessly naïve. The concept of truth has come in for some hard use in recent years, perhaps as epitomized by a passage in Kurt Vonnegut’s novel, *Breakfast of Champions*:

“You have no use for truth?” said Beatrice.

“You know what truth is?” said Karabekian. “It’s some crazy thing my neighbor believes. If I want to make friends with him, I ask him what he believes. He tells me, and I say, ‘Yeah, yeah – ain’t it the truth?’”⁴

Unfortunately, there is some truth to this caricature of truth: communities (academic communities included) build connections around beliefs, and affirming those beliefs is frequently part of the price of admission. It is easy to find examples in which this function of social bonding cancels out other possible functions of this concept.

But an academic community should be committed to the notion that Vonnegut’s formulation is wrong (or, at best, incomplete). The members of such a community should believe, instead, that what persons think or create actually matters, that some ideas or scientific hypotheses or works of art are better than others, that there are many different ways to interrogate, question, challenge, criticize, and evaluate such cultural products. Some of these ways involve appeal to evidence – i.e., some claims are more empirical. Others are tied less directly to specific facts or observations and are more dependent on their theoretical context. Neither does this mean that any theoretical idea is as good as any other. Even in the humanities, there are standards of decision-making, accepted ways to separate better-grounded claims from less well-grounded ones. If we want to argue about those standards, as we *should* do periodically, then we fall back upon other shared understandings. No particular belief or claim may be beyond challenge, but it is not possible to challenge every background belief at once.⁵ Theorists who criticize the notion of truth itself typically have specific concepts (theories) of truth in mind; and even if they don’t, in their discourse they implicitly make truth-claims for which they argue or provide other evidence. In short, they simply can’t escape the concept of truth as regulative ideal guiding diverse processes of inquiry. And neither can we.

So I hope we can agree that an individual college or a university is a particular *community of discourse* or *community of conversation* whose primary loyalty must be toward the process of inquiry itself. Maintaining the possibility of discourse must stand among our highest values, which is why we can permit

disciplinary communities. However, much of what I say here could apply *mutatis mutandis* to these broader contexts as well.

⁴Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Breakfast of Champions* (New York: Delacorte Press/Semour Lawrence, 1973) p. 209.

⁵See W. V. O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View*, W. V. O. Quine (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1961) and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M.

(and, in fact, should encourage) vigorous dissent and criticism but not actions that would disrupt or silence discourse. This means that those of us in leadership positions must take special care that the conditions necessary to maintain a community of discourse actually obtain. Some of these conditions are material (e.g., adequate salaries, equipment, library resources). But other and equally important conditions are social, having to do with the form of life of a given community itself. As such, these latter conditions have to do with attitudes, with ways of interacting, with the subtle subtexts of discourse including what philosophers have termed *conversational implicatures* – the unstated intentions or beliefs we infer or presuppose (sometimes without articulating this inference or presupposition at all) from what someone actually says.⁶

Academic community and friendship

Turning to the concept of friendship, let me relate an edifying tale. In the spring of 2002 in Victoria, British Columbia, a young woman at the margins of a university community experienced a tragedy that any academician would dread. A part-time lecturer at the University of Victoria, Linda Olsen suffered a fire in the trailer she had been using as an office and as a storage place for family heirlooms and clothing. The flames consumed all these along with her professional library as well as

20 years of research on medieval literature, including handwritten notes she'd taken over the course of four years in British libraries, and two nearly complete journal manuscripts.⁷

Although she was able to rescue her blind dog, she could not save even her laptop computer. None of her files was backed-up. In addition to her own materials, she lost 177 books from the university library – virtually its entire collection on medieval women – for which she later received a bill for \$5,744. There was no insurance on the trailer's contents.

Even prior to the fire, Olsen's personal story is noteworthy. A high school dropout, she earned her equivalency diploma by correspondence and then enrolled in junior college. She eventually moved on to the University of Victoria, winning an award for academic achievement. She then studied in Britain on a prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship (working with rare manuscripts of Augustine's *Confessions*) and in 1999 won the Medieval Academy of America's Van Courtland Elliott Prize for the best first article in a scholarly journal. For family reasons, she turned down several offers from prestigious American universities and found herself in that trailer near the Pacific Ocean, with a post-doctoral scholarship from the University and teaching whatever courses needed an instructor. Nonetheless, she certainly had defined herself as a serious scholar and legitimate citizen of the academic world – an admirable accomplishment, given the obstacles she faced.

More remarkable still was the academic community's response to her plight. University colleague's donated clothing and shoes. A graduate student interrupted his dissertation research to develop a web-

Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: J. & J. Harper Editions, 1969).

⁶See H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, V. 3 (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 43-44.

⁷Janice Paskey, "What the Fire Taught Her," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 26, 2002, p. A56. My account of these events is taken from this article.

based book registry – like a bridal registry – listing 300 book titles she had lost so that people could purchase replacement copies. (The registry eventually was taken over by the University Bookstore, which offered the books at a discount.) The University’s development office set up a fund so that contributions could be tax-deductible. Student volunteers photocopied lost articles and digitally input her dissertation giving her electronic access to it. The English Department and the Dean cooperated to defray part of the cost of the library bill, and there was hope that the library would forgive the rest. By July of 2002, colleagues at the university and scholars around the world had donated \$2,500 and 500 books. The English Department even found her a shared office space. Her research back on track, Dr. Olsen was completing plans to publish a co-edited text with the University of Notre Dame Press, which previously had offered her any of its own titles free of charge.

Such a story reminds us of the better angels of our collective nature and can make all of us proud to be members of this special world, which is above all a gathering of human beings. Seen in this light, an academic community resembles the following description of the early American republic offered by Joseph Ellis in *Founding Brothers*:

First, the achievement of the revolutionary generation was a collective enterprise that succeeded because of the diversity of personalities and ideologies present in the mix. Their interactions and juxtapositions generated a dynamic form of balance and equilibrium, not because any of them was perfect or infallible, but because their mutual imperfections and fallibilities, as well as their eccentricities and excesses, checked each other in much the way that Madison in *Federalist 10* claimed that multiple factions would do in a large republic.

Second, they all knew one another personally, meaning that they broke bread together, sat together at countless meetings, corresponded with one another about private as well as public matters. Politics, even at the highest level in the early republic, remained a face-to-face affair in which the contestants, even those who were locked in political battles to the death, were forced to negotiate the emotional affinities and shared intimacies produced by frequent personal interaction. The Adams-Jefferson rivalry and friendship is the outstanding example here, though there are several crucial moments when critical compromises were brokered because personal trust made it possible. Though the American republic became a nation of laws, during the initial phase it also had to be a nation of men.⁸

At their best, academic communities likewise provide a setting for collective achievement that is strengthened by a diversity of perspectives and that also works, in part, because of the life-long professional and personal relationships established among its members. In brief, a well-tempered academic community does instantiate Aristotle’s twin virtues of contemplation and friendship.

Unfortunately, as we know, this does not always occur. Personal and professional relationships within departments, within a faculty as a whole, and between the faculty and the administration can be marked by the most extreme forms of enmity, distrust, and rancor. Such unhappy breakdowns in the social fabric can undermine the collegiality necessary for scholarship and artistic creation and can even spill over to contaminate the experiences of our students. Academic leaders – both administrators and faculty leaders

⁸Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 17.

– surely are responsible for attending to these social relationships as well as nurturing an environment supportive of the quest for truth. So, to do our job, we need to be intentional in reflecting on these social relationships and develop strategies to improve them. But this project is more complex than just helping folks to get along – exhorting them to share their toys and play nicely with one another. For the relationship between truth and friendship may not be as straightforward or complementary as it might at first appear. To make this point, let me return to an intriguing but little-noticed comment Aristotle makes at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Truth v. friendship

During a preliminary discussion of the ethical theories of his predecessors, Aristotle includes the following paragraph:

We had perhaps better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it, although such an inquiry is made an uphill one by the fact that the Forms have been introduced by friends of our own. Yet it would perhaps be thought better to do our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers or lovers of wisdom; for, while both are dear, *piety requires us to honor truth above our friends*.⁹

The first time I cited this passage a few years ago in an address to the faculty at the University of Redlands, I saw it as little more than a terse (and rather obvious) historical gloss on our fundamental mission as academics. But as is so often the case in teaching, the odd throwaway remark becomes the one thought that one's listeners carry away. On that occasion, responses from a number of thoughtful and well-intentioned faculty colleagues focused on this comment in ways epitomized in the following e-mail:

You did say that truth is more important than friendship, didn't you? And then that discourse is central to [the quest for] truth. But isn't discourse predicated on friendship and therefore isn't truth developed through friendship? Are you really that fiercely Western man on a lonely quest for truth (a truth which is not far from context independent logic)?

Indeed.

My former colleague raises the spectre that only someone as detached from normal human intercourse as Plato's idealized character of Socrates or his more contemporary doppelganger, the *Star Trek* character, Mr. Spock – both of whom viewed our human emotional entanglements from an ironic distance – could hope to live up to Aristotle's expressed ideal. Here is the question in a nutshell: If academic community is necessary for the central work of teaching and learning, and if friendship or something like it is essential for the creation of genuine academic community, then how can we rationally “honor truth above our friends?” Does this paradox reside at the heart of the academic community itself? To begin untangling this question, let me pull back from the more idealized stance with which I began and admit what we know all too well – that, *pace* Aristotle, we academics are not always as adept at pursuing the truth as we would like to think we are.

An academic case in point

Perhaps the most celebrated instance of such infirmity is the case of the 20th-Century philosopher, Sir Karl Popper. Popper built a long and influential academic career on the proposition that neither science nor any

⁹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 939 (1096b 11-16), emphasis mine.

other human enterprise that advanced empirical truth-claims or claims with empirical implications (including, most assuredly, ethics and political theory) could ever conclusively verify even a single such thesis. The best that such enterprises could do, Popper argued, was to remain open to the possibility of falsification. In fact, the hallmark of those with the most intellectual integrity was to actively seek it out. They were to do so by carefully articulating hypotheses and conjectures that admitted of being contradicted by the discovery of recalcitrant facts. This openness to confutation, and with it a fundamental commitment to critical discourse, thus became for Popper the ultimate test of whether a process was scientific or even rational. His position, so described, represents a special case of the academic community's fundamental commitment to open critical discourse.

Ironically, by all accounts, Sir Karl himself was constitutionally incapable of living up to his own most consistently promoted ideals. Even those commentators most favorable to Popperian theories have been forced to admit that Sir Karl the human being was among the most irascible, self-centered, self-serving, and self-regarding philosophers in history. More to the point, he seemed unable to accept criticism of his work as anything but a misreading or a misunderstanding of his position – usually a willful one.¹⁰

In a poignant memoir of a youthful pilgrimage to meet with Popper at his residence in 1975, Adam Gopnik describes his own emerging realization that his heretofore-intellectual hero actually had feet of academic clay:

“Tell me, “ I said, “what criticism have you received in your career that has helped you – that you regard as really useful?”

He stared off for a long moment. “None,” he said. “I have never received any of this kind of criticism.” He looked away again.

...

It is difficult to convey, after all these years, the vehemence with which he put forth his views – the silly, the profound, the trivial, and the deep. This was a man alive with resentments, vindictive anger, and persecution mania; at the same time, he had a kind of large-spiritedness, not remote from simple naïveté that led him to open his door to a kid from Canada and fill him up with all his dogmas and doubts as though he were an old colleague.¹¹

Popper's well-documented antipathy to criticism of his work could be ignored as an idiosyncratic curiosity in the history of ideas if we also had not observed such an inability in our own colleagues and, if we are to be honest, in ourselves. For his part, Gopnik generalizes this realization to cover virtually all intellectual activity:

But what really underlay the contradiction between what [Popper] thought and what he was, I now think, after a quarter-century's reflection, is a perversity of human nature so deep that it is almost a law – the Law of the Mental Mirror Image. We write what we are not. It is not merely that we fail to live up to our best ideas but that our best ideas, and the tone that goes with them, tend to be the opposite of our natural temperament. Rousseau wrote of the feelings of the heart and the beauties of nature while stewing and seething in a little room. Dr. Johnson pleaded for Christian stoicism in desperate fear of damnation. The

¹⁰See David Edmonds and John Eidinow, *Wittgenstein's Poker* (New York: Ecco, 2001).

¹¹Adam Gopnik, “The Porcupine: A Pilgrimage to Popper,” *The New Yorker*, V. 78, No. 7 (April 1, 2002), pp. 88-93, p. 91.

masters of the wry middle style, Lionel Trilling and Randall Jarrell, were mired in sadness and confusion. The angry and competitive man (James Thurber) writes tender and rueful humor because his own condition is what he seeks to escape. The apostles of calm reason are hypersensitive and neurotic; William James arrived at a pose of genial universal cheerfulness in the face of constant panic. Art critics are often visually insensitive – look at their living rooms! – and literary critics are often slow and puzzled readers, searching for the meaning, and cooks are seldom trenchermen, being more fascinated by recipes than greedy for food.

It is not so much that we are drawn to things that frighten us as that we are drawn to things that we can think of as things – as subjects that exist *outside* [emphasis mine] the boundaries of all that is just the way we are. It is not merely that we do not live up to our ideals but that we *cannot* [emphasis mine], since our ideals are exactly the part of us that we do not instantly identify as just part of life. An original thought is like a death mask of a man, with the solids made hollow and the nose a cavity, a portrait pulled inside out. We are our ideas (Popper, with his long, slightly overformal sentences, lucid but unornamented by wit, sounded like no one else), for they include everything we are – but turned right around to face us, and looking back at us in surprise.¹²

In sum, Gopnik questions not just of how deep our cherished ideals of liberal learning and the primacy of truth-seeking in academia actually *do* penetrate but rather how deep they *can ever* penetrate.

To the extent that it may be true, this psychological conjecture helps to explain what otherwise might appear to be a puzzling anomaly: how a community of scholars devoted to the highest ideals of inquiry should *ever* give rise to divisive – and not infrequently *ad hominem* – disputes that are nasty, brutish, and seldom short. It is all well and good to tout the unencumbered search for knowledge, but we fallible and self-interested human beings do sometimes fail to live up to our most fervidly professed ideals. And even if it is not true across the board, Gopnik's conjecture serves to remind us that it is more difficult to live up to the ideal of truth-seeking than we usually want to admit.

Friendship within the academy

As usual, the reality of how we actually behave lies somewhere in between the extremes of our best ideals and our worst fears. So while acknowledging the difficulty of living up to the Aristotelian norm, we should take a more optimistic stance for one primary reason: All of us certainly have seen people accept criticism and change their minds – both on the larger academic playing field and at individual schools where we have lived and worked. There are academics who behave far better than Popper and entire academic communities that function as one thinks they should. But even the latter are fragile and subject to various kinds of breakdowns if not attended to carefully, which brings us back to the topic of leadership and the problem of fostering communities that do somehow combine truth and friendship.

So let us return to the Aristotelian paradox: How can we, as academics, rationally prefer truth to friendship if friendship (or something like it) is essential to support the inquiry that leads to truth? The answer lies in a more sophisticated understanding of friendship that can be constructed in Aristotle's own terms. In one of his most lasting contributions to ethics, Aristotle argued that we should regard human

¹²Gopnik, p. 92.

actions and social relationships in terms of a continuum, with vices on each extreme and virtue existing in the middle – not as a metaphorical arithmetic mean but as a moving, *context-sensitive* point somewhere in between the extremes.¹³ Thus if we place misanthropic enmity at one end and self-effacing solidarity or absolute discipleship at the other extreme, then the varieties of friendship fall somewhere in between.

Lawrence Thomas has argued that “companion friendship” is marked by three salient features: (1) “Companion friendships are a manifestation of a choice on the part of the parties involved.” (2) “Neither party to the relationship is under the authority of the other.” (3) “There is an enormous bond of mutual trust between such friends.”¹⁴ His point is that even though friendships are based on personal attraction that may “befall” us (sometimes to the point of being surprised that we have become friendly with someone who initially may have put us off), we ultimately have a choice about whether to advance the relationship (or even to continue it), as opposed to, e.g., the relationship between child and parent.

Entering into such a friendly relationship does require us to open ourselves to one another and build bonds of trust, and such trust and openness are at variance with relationships of authority. No matter how one may feel personally, the relationship of superior to subordinate (if taken seriously) imposes bounds that impede the development of true friendship. Moreover, the closest forms of friendship (e.g., that between two lovers) lead to commitments that might appropriately entail a choice of friendship over truth. So the quick resolution of the Aristotelian paradox is the realization that the friendship that should stand at the heart of an academic community needs to be of a managed sort, one that does not go to the full extreme of solidarity that characterizes the very deepest friendships. This is true, in part, because in an academic community each of us is in a real and an important sense under the authority of the other members.

This authority is manifested in the periodic reviews that depend upon honest (truthful) peer commentary. But in a deeper sense, to accept membership in an academic community is to place oneself under the continuing authority of one’s peers for the evaluation of the products of one’s intellectual or creative labor: A community of inquiry just is a context in which one’s ideas or art works are subject to evaluation on an ongoing basis. Moreover, this evaluation does not depend on hierarchy or seniority. Every president knows the pleasure of being challenged in public by the newest junior faculty member or youngest student. And even the work of the most senior faculty colleague is subject to similar scrutiny.¹⁵ To recognize such authority is to place limits on friendship.

Two failures of academic community and their remedies

This realization helps us understand two very different ways in which academic community can break down – ways aligned with the ends of the Aristotelian spectrum of attitudes that include friendship. First

¹³To cite a classic case, if cowardice occupies one end of a spectrum with foolhardiness the other, then courage falls somewhere in between. But similar actions may represent courage in battle but foolhardiness on a city street.

¹⁴Lawrence Thomas, “Friendship,” *Synthese* 72 (1987), pp. 217-36.

¹⁵More than thirty years ago, as a young and very green instructor still working on my doctoral dissertation, I authored a critical review of Popper’s (co-authored) book, *The Self and Its Brain*. That paper, along with others, was presented at a symposium attended by Sir Karl himself, at which he took exception to criticism in ways quite consistent with the picture presented above. Regardless of the merits (or lack thereof) of my contribution, the inclusion of such a junior colleague in this gathering was certainly not anomalous in itself.

and most obviously, it can collapse under the weight of enmity and distrust. When academic debates become marked by personal rancor and *ad hominem* attack, we lose faith that rigorous critique is offered in the service of truth and not in service of some baser motive (self-aggrandizement, revenge). The colleague who has fallen so far into cynicism – a generalized and destructive mistrust of the other members of the community and its activities – that he or she can no longer participate precludes the possibility of discourse altogether. The most extreme manifestation of such malaise is a refusal even to be present at departmental or faculty meetings, thus precluding the possibility of persuading or being persuaded by colleagues.

But academic community is equally threatened by behavior at the other end of the continuum: by excessive political solidarity (sometimes verging on discipleship) among a group of colleagues who make themselves impervious to argument or critique from those outside their group and so have come to prefer friendship to truth in a deep and destructive sense. A less virulent form of the preference of friendship to truth is more commonly found among students than faculty, in the confusion of the democratic principle that (a) everyone has a right to his or her beliefs with the notion that (b) anyone's belief is therefore as good as anyone else's. Such a position represents an extreme form of tolerance – actually, a type of intellectual euthanasia – that facilitates living together at the cost of undermining critical discourse. Most insidiously, excessive solidarity (under the guise of collegiality) threatens academic integrity when colleagues fail to do the hard work of rigorous and principled peer evaluation at times of reviews for reappointment, tenure, or promotion.

Academic leaders need to remain vigilant in the face of both these alternatives, challenging either when it rears its head. More positively, leaders need to work constantly and consciously to create the underlying conditions of trust within our communities that make genuine critical discourse possible. Our first responsibility is to model a spirit of openness and responsiveness to the ideas of others in our own behavior. It is important to avoid seeming defensive in the face of criticism. However, the most powerful sign of openness is a willingness to admit that one was wrong or to indicate publicly that one actually has changed one's mind on some important issue as a result of engaging in the shared conversation. We also need to model a readiness to take risks in the service of truth. In a lecture to the AAC&U a few years ago, the historian Patricia Limerick talked about being willing to “step on landmines” in the course of a difficult conversation – to be candid and name a problem that was present but unacknowledged.¹⁶

Second, leaders need to be carefully attuned to messages implicit in the common discourse that can be variously interpreted by persons at different stages in their engagement with the community. For example, imagine that a college is dealing with a difficult and controversial question, one that finds the administration on one side and a sizeable number of faculty members on the other. In the context of a heated discussion, a faculty member proposes that the meeting go into “executive session,” excluding all non-voting members – i.e., all administrators – so that the faculty can “speak freely and develop its own position,” absent external influences. Senior members of the body will interpret this request (including its *conversational implicatures*) against the background of their long experience with the institution and their particular knowledge of the person making the motion. Perhaps she speaks from the best of intentions, or perhaps he is known to be someone who lets no occasion pass to cast aspersions at the administration.

Perhaps the institution has suffered at the hands of an autocratic president who really has stifled open discourse by inflicting harm on those who have disagreed with her; or perhaps the opposite is true and the president has struggled mightily to work collaboratively with the faculty. Either way, those who have been members of the community will understand the background.

But consider how a relatively junior colleague, one new to the institution and still trying to figure out its particular history and political dynamics, might read this moment. Absent comments to the contrary by other senior colleagues, that person would be justified in parsing the request as a reasonable attempt to advance the discussion by removing a potential obstacle. The new person would also be justified in wondering whether her administrators are truly unworthy of her trust, whether she might indeed place herself at risk by speaking freely in their presence. Even if such inferences are not warranted in this particular case, they will stand unless others – and most effectively, senior faculty leaders – challenge them at that moment. The more general lesson is that we need to be intentional in attending to the tenor of our shared discourse and understand that many members of the community will (with some legitimacy) interpret silence in the face of some particular claim as assent to it. Leaders often have the opportunity to set the agenda and can make the discourse itself a topic of conversation when necessary. Moving to this meta-level of inquiry can be one powerful way of getting a discussion back on track.

The deepest obstacle to preferring truth may well be the intrinsic difficulty of expressing disagreement. That is, despite the stereotype of irascibility that sometimes is used by others (or by us!) to portray the academic world as if it were indeed populated by so many Poppers, a more accurate view would acknowledge the force of our own basic human desire to like and to be liked by our colleagues. That is to say, we are more likely to subvert academic community through excessive solidarity than through cynicism. If this observation is accurate, then as academic leaders we need to acknowledge that our most essential virtue may well be the *courage* needed to place friendship at risk in the service of truth. Before the final day of the battle of Gettysburg, General Robert E. Lee had a conversation with his second in command, General James Longstreet. As portrayed Michael Shirra's novel, *The Killer Angels*, Lee tells Longstreet that the most difficult choice of a general is to risk the very thing he loves the most, his army, by committing it to battle without reservation. And yet without a willingness to risk that most beloved thing, the general forfeits the possibility of victory.¹⁷ As guardians of academic community, we must be equally willing to risk that most precious friendship that we feel for our colleagues and possibly strain the bonds of community by remaining committed, without reservation, to the service of truth. In doing so, we must trust in the better angels of our compatriots – that they too are committed to this common purpose.

As a scholar, Sir Karl Popper ultimately will be judged by the value of his ideas, not by his personality or his actions. Academic leaders, by contrast, must be judged by their actions – ultimately by their success in nurturing the central values of those academic communities of which they are members. Each of us certainly would like to embrace the “large-spiritedness” Gopnik discovered in his (fallen) idol and encourage the kind of collegiality and camaraderie represented in the story of Linda Olsen while preserving, at the same time, the capacity for genuine critical discourse. Even so, when faced with the

¹⁶It is possible to become more adept at performing this difficult function through attention and practice. Those wishing to work on this skill might consult a book by Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time* (New York: Viking, 2002).

¹⁷Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), pp. 202-3.

choice, we need to affirm critical discourse as the ascendant value. Since action follows thought, I hope that these remarks provide some measure of assistance in thinking and acting creatively in regards to this most intriguing relationship between friendship and truth.