

## Editors' Preface

JOHN A. DOODY, KIM PAFFENROTH, AND PETER BUSCH

It is an exciting time of growth for *Expositions*. Last year we launched the journal in order to publish peer-reviewed articles for a wide audience—not only for specialists in a scholar's own field but for curious readers in other humanities disciplines and the wondering public at large. As we begin our second volume, we are now (as Nietzsche would say) “becoming what we are”: growing into ourselves, discovering new ways of inviting authors into a conversation that is worth reading.

### Socratic Questions

One of these discoveries is actually a rediscovery. This spring our issue investigates Socrates as a model for interdisciplinary studies. Although his research and teaching methods were less than popular in his own day—the Athenian democracy saw fit to execute him for impiety and corrupting the young—Socrates is now applauded by academics across the political spectrum. Allan Bloom, for example, declares Socratic inquiry to be nothing less than “the soul of the university” (1987, 268). For Martha Nussbaum, meanwhile, Socratic questioning is central to the life of the mind and to life itself: “Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being. In other words, this life of questioning is not just somewhat useful: it is an indispensable part of a worthwhile life for any person and any citizen” (1998, 21). Finally, Cornel West holds up “Socratic questioning” as “the enactment of *parrhesia*—frank and fearless speech—that is the lifeblood of any democracy” (2004, 209).

What then is the significance of Socrates today for all students of the humanities? Should we think of the humanities as a grand Socratic dialogue, as the aforementioned scholars would seem to recommend? Or would a Socratic approach only take us so far in understanding some topics, authors, or texts? To take a few not-so-random examples, what if we happened to be studying a novelist and teacher in Victo-

rian England, a black social reformer in post-Civil-War America, or a Christian theologian and bishop in late antique North Africa? How do these wildly disparate writers answer the questions posed by Socrates? Do they even ask the same questions that he does? And what do they think of his questioning activity itself, his whole "examined life"?

Three articles in this issue help us begin such a reconsideration of Socratic inquiry. Thomas Hibbs opens with a study of W.E.B. DuBois, whose *Souls of Black Folk* invokes Socrates (alongside St. Francis and the "sorrow songs" of former slaves) as an alternative to Booker T. Washington's practical education for economic advancement. According to Hibbs, Socrates' example is no less important for understanding *Souls of Black Folk* as a whole, because the work should be understood as DuBois' own *apologia* or Socratic defense. Our second article, by Todd Breyfogle, introduces readers to Saint Augustine's *Confessions* by helping them appreciate its qualified continuity with the Socratic tradition. On the one hand, Breyfogle advises that we read *Confessions* as if it were a Platonic dialogue and so to engage Augustine's text in active conversation rather than accept it as an authority; on the other hand, he emphasizes that the book moves beyond dialogue in using poetry to stir the reader's imagination. Finally, we are pleased to include a hitherto unpublished manuscript by Walter Pater, edited and introduced by Gerald Monsman. As Monsman shows, Pater's "Gaudioso, the Second" was intended as a response to his wayward student, Oscar Wilde. Against Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* and what Pater saw as its detachment of beauty from morality, Pater reaffirms a Platonic view of beauty as exemplified in a very different portrait, one that our readers will literally see for themselves in the pages of the article.

## New Features

At *Expositions* we have an unofficial motto: "Scholarship that scholars actually *like* to read!" One way we live up to this boast is by including essays that explore intriguing questions without following the usual formula for scholarly articles. Whether by holding a three-way interdisciplinary roundtable on Harold Bloom's *Jesus and Yahweh* (as we did in issue 1.1) or by reviewing a "neglected classic" that has as much to say about life in Victorian England as it does about physics in four

dimensions (as in 1.2), we have already found new occasions for inviting otherwise bashful disciplines into conversation with each other. This spring we continue this work with two features that we expect to offer as regular sections in upcoming issues.

The first we call “Overheard in the Academy.” Unlike our usual academic roundtables, which review recently published books, “Overheard” is an exchange about a matter of present concern which all sorts of people in the humanities are talking about. Ripped from the headlines, bullied from the blogs, cajoled from the cocktail parties, these are the issues that get us wondering or arguing with each other. In this issue we have invited four scholars to weigh in on a typically provocative proposition from Stanley Fish: that the question, “How are the humanities useful?” has only one honest answer, namely, that they aren’t.

Our second new feature is a section called “Notes, Insights, and Flashes.” Perhaps hard to classify within conventional categories, these short pieces will reflect upon or challenge existing scholarship, provide intriguing new paths of interpretation and close analysis of a text, or take a position that is still too experimental or risky to be developed in an ordinary article. We expect some of our most exciting scholarship to appear in this section. In this issue we begin with a note on Susan Neiman’s reading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. What did Hannah Arendt mean when she spoke of “the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*”? For Neiman, Arendt meant that evil has shallow roots and can therefore be uprooted by human hands. According to Bernard G. Prusak, however, Arendt actually meant that evil has no roots at all, no ultimate cause that we can discern.

We are now accepting submissions of “notes, insights and flashes” for upcoming issues of *Expositions*. Please see our website for details ([www.equinoxpub.com/expo](http://www.equinoxpub.com/expo)).

## **The Evolution Continues**

Our last article this spring reviews recent books on Charles Darwin. As Andrea D. Wolfe notes, Darwin’s account of our biological origins continues to meet popular resistance despite what researchers see as ever more robust empirical support for evolutionary theory. Why do

we find this gulf between ordinary and scientific opinions? How have recent defenders of evolutionary theory sought to bridge it?

Wolfe's essay is a fitting conclusion to an issue with so many new features on display. No doubt *Expositions* will continue to evolve as we adapt and survive in the competitive, dangerous world of academic publishing. As the editors, however, we also hope that the journal shows some evidence of intelligent design.

## References

Bloom, Allan

1987 *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Nussbaum, Martha

1998 *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*.  
Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

West, Cornel

2004 *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*. New York:  
Penguin Books.