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Teaching with Ignatius: Justice in Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract

The document *Justice in the World*, released in 1971 by the World Synod of Bishops, is an excellent basis for thinking about pedagogical practice in Ignatian higher education as a constellation of acts of justice. I describe here my personal experience (as an ambiguously Catholic faculty member) of teaching an upper division ethics course in the core curriculum and contextualize it in terms both of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* and the 1971 Synod document.

My title, "Teaching with Ignatius," probably leads you to expect that I will say something about how I use Ignatius in my teaching, with suggestions as to how you might use him in your teaching, as if Ignatius were a tool or instrument one could apply fruitfully to that difficult task of pedagogy we face. But I mean something rather different by that preposition, "with". To clarify just what I mean by it, I would ask you to consider the case of a man or woman who enters one of the religious orders founded or inspired by Ignatius. Such a person gains the habit of thinking of himself or herself as a companion of Jesus, as someone who cultivates a sense of the presence of Jesus in his or her life and, at the same time, a sense of his or her *presence to* Jesus, as a part of *his* life. And such a man or woman once immersed in Ignatian spirituality might very well look back at the time before this immersion and want to say that Jesus had accompanied him or her along the way many years before he or she became aware of this companionship or became willing to cultivate it. This person's way of being "*with* Jesus" is, I think, very much like my own experience of teaching *with* Ignatius: there was a specific moment, on joining the faculty of a University sponsored by three Ignatian-inspired orders, that I began to cultivate a companionship with Ignatius in anything like a deliberate way, but doing so, I quickly discovered that strong affinities existed between Ignatius' ways of teaching and of spiritual direction and my own long before I had any conception of who Ignatius might be or what he might stand for. So when I write about teaching

with Ignatius, I do not mean teaching *by means of* him, or using Ignatius in one's teaching; rather, I mean teaching *alongside* Ignatius, in a growing companionship. What it means to me to write about a companionship with Ignatius is that, even though my undergraduate and graduate training were not in the Ignatian tradition—far from it, really—I nevertheless discover again and again that there is a harmony between my fundamental convictions about teaching, as well as my methods, techniques, and habits of teaching, and Ignatius' general approach. In the eighteen years since coming to an Ignatian university, I have attended Western Conversations, joined the first cohort of the Ignatian Colleagues Program, made the Spiritual Exercises, and attended several years of conferences of the AJCU Arts and Sciences Deans. The companionship with Ignatius that I write about here has continued to unfold more and more through each of these interactions, and my initial pedagogical affinities with Ignatius have been reinforced and have extended into the ways I proceed in an academic leadership role.

In order to express as concretely as possible what I mean by these affinities, I will spend the greater part of my paper outlining the course I have the most experience teaching, and, not incidentally, the course I consider perhaps closest to the core of the mission of a Catholic university of any that I know. The course is simply called "Ethics" and represents a core requirement for upper-division undergraduates in all our colleges. Students have a choice—to my mind, only an *apparent* choice—

between Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems, two courses that differ perhaps in emphasis but seldom in their primary content and never, in my observation, in their primary intent. I teach my own sections of Ethics in such a way that contemporary moral problems are very present, at least weekly and sometimes daily, so that the choice between one course title and the other really does virtually constitute for me a distinction without a difference. So I will tell you a bit about my own ways of teaching this course and the motivations behind them. It will come out during this outlining that the question of *justice* arises at multiple points for me as I teach the course, which helps to relate the concerns of this paper explicitly to the commitment that Ignatian institutions of higher learning have to the promotion of justice as a central aspect of the service of faith.

I'll spend most of this paper writing directly about the Ethics course. If you know something about Ignatian spirituality, you will have no difficulty, I think, in identifying for yourself affinities between my approach as I describe it and Ignatius' views and practices. But I will reserve a few pages at the end of the paper to be more explicit about these affinities. Eighteen years ago, I would have included a caveat that I was a newcomer to the Ignatian tradition, and that others could speak more expertly about it. At this point in my career, however, I would not describe myself as a guest in the house of Ignatius so much as one of the hosts.

There are two facts of my religious background that undoubtedly color my approach to questions of pedagogy and spirituality. These two facts bring it about that I do not quite swim in the mainstream of Roman Catholic educators, although I do believe that they and I swim in tributaries of the same river. The first fact is that I am an Episcopalian, which makes me a member of what we fondly call "the worldwide Anglican communion." I suppose we call it this rather than "worldwide Anglican *Church*" because it is not so much a single organization with one hierarchical authority as it is a federation, one might say, of many different churches in increasingly profound disagreement with one another, for example over women in the priesthood and episcopacy, or same-sex marriage and the ordination of

homosexual priests and bishops, who seldom agree on much of anything, but all of whom stand in a single tradition of liturgical practice and who are, most significantly, in *communion* with one another. Now, this fact complicates my approach to spirituality and pedagogy more than you might think. It is not simply a matter of belonging to a different religious tradition and nevertheless incorporating as much of the "Catholic" tradition as my faith and conscience will allow into my teaching. No, indeed, I am one of those Anglicans who are quite convinced that we are members of the Catholic Church, just not of its specifically Roman branch. And I do not mean (to be honest, I get tired of answering the question whether I do mean) "catholic" with a small "c", just referring to the universal Christian Church that would be thought of as including anyone who identifies himself or herself as a Christian. No, I mean Catholic with a big "C", bigger, I would say, than some Roman Catholics are accustomed to writing, the Catholic Church whose priests and bishops (many of whom now are women and homosexual) stand in an unbroken succession from Jesus through the Apostles. I mention this conviction of mine not (at least, not only) to be provocative, but to point out that it places me in an awkward position of speaking, by my own opinion, from *inside* the Catholic Church and tradition, at the same time that many (but by no means all) Roman Catholics would regard me as standing *outside* that Church and tradition. The awkwardness of this position sometimes leads to absurd predicaments that would be comical if they were not so discouraging, such as the conversation I had with a student who insisted that however much the Anglicans might believe in the resurrection of the body, "real Catholics" believe that only the soul survives death. What could I, an "unreal" Catholic, answer to such a claim?

The second fact of my religious life that colors my pedagogy is that I came to Catholicism rather late, at the end of college, having been raised as a fundamentalist Southern Baptist. I think I can best express my present relation to that tradition by telling a quick story. At one point many years ago, I was in Germany, where a trained ear can almost always detect what region someone comes from by the dialect of the German language that person uses. I make a little hobby of guessing

where people are from on this basis. But I was faced one day with someone who said he was “from Munich” but who didn’t have the unmistakable Bavarian color to his speech. After he assured me that he really was born in Munich, I said, “then you must have unlearned your language.” His answer was, “I didn’t *unlearn* it; I took it to a higher stage of development.”¹ The point of my telling the story is that I’d say the same thing about my evangelical Protestant upbringing: I haven’t unlearned it; I’ve taken it to a higher stage of development. By this I mean, for example, that I am still Protestant in the sense that I believe that some members of the Church hierarchy make claims for their authority over the faith and practice of other Christians that cannot be justified by Scripture, tradition, or reason. This does not make me a Protestant but a Protestant Catholic (a term that, incidentally, despite its sounding contradictory to modern ears, can be accurately applied to Martin Luther himself), a voice that is both a voice from within and a critical voice, critical most particularly of injustice within the Church itself.

One of the injustices of today’s Church is that her young people are woefully ill-informed about the Church. One act of justice that we as teachers can perform is simply to provide these students with accurate information when such subjects come up. I have already given the example of the Roman Catholic student who is certain that “his” Church does not believe in the resurrection of the body. That misunderstanding is dangerous enough in moral terms, since it would entail that, in order to be a Catholic Christian, one would have to hold a radical soul/body dualism that would, by implication, rule out the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ that is at the core of Christian teaching. That is a piece of misinformation that is dangerous in theory, but probably not that dangerous in practice, since few people bother to maintain intellectual consistency and even fewer take the trouble to act according to such a consistency.

There is, however, another misunderstanding that I frequently encounter among my Roman Catholic students that is dangerous and unjust *in practice*. This misunderstanding usually comes to light the first time a student uses the expression “the

Catholic position” in one of my classes. No matter what the context, I stop the discussion to question this expression. The student invariably means to refer to the official Vatican position, for example, the position on birth control. Taken by itself, it is a small matter of verbal imprecision. But when I question students further, a much more ominous misunderstanding begins to become apparent. Most of my students—and this opinion is most widespread among my Roman Catholic students—believe that there is only one “Catholic” position on moral questions such as this, and that a believer who dissents from that position automatically excommunicates himself or herself from the Church. These students are ignorant of the most fundamental facts of dissent in the Church and are shocked momentarily, but soon thereafter relieved, in most cases, to learn that there are any number of bishops, archbishops, and even entire national colleges of bishops who dissent from the Vatican position on birth control. Since many of these students do in fact dissent from the official position on any number of points of doctrine or practice, their ignorance of the fact that there can be dissent *within* the Church means that they feel themselves forced to leave the Church or at best to feel alienated within it by reason of their self-imposed silence. Pointing out the fact that there are persons in high positions of authority within the Church who dissent from the official Vatican view of this or that is an act of justice toward the students, since it allows them to retain those aspects they can accept of the moral foundation the Church provides even in the face of times of doubt or points of disagreement, and it is an act of justice toward the Church, since it helps the Church to retain the dissenting voices that serve as the engine of change that no human institution can survive without. What this form of justice has to do with Ignatius will gradually emerge as my paper develops.

Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been much discussion in the Church and among the Jesuits about the preferential option for the poor, and some have questioned whether the Church, and the Jesuits in particular, should play as large a role as they do in educating the wealthy. I do not mean to cheapen the idea of a preferential option for the poor but to deepen it when I say that I

have the experience, more often than it is comfortable to count, of trying to teach the intellectually poor, and it is often the children of the rich whom I find to be the poorest of the intellectually poor. It is not just that the students are ill-informed; much worse is their frequent lack of will to become informed, to read books, to read newspapers, to watch or listen to television and radio news and find out what is going on in the world around them. In my experience, the kid from Beverly Hills High is *less* likely to pick up a newspaper than the kid from South Central Los Angeles. They are also less likely to be registered to vote or to know how to vote when election day comes. This is not just an informational poverty but an impoverishment of will that I try to address in my Ethics course in its root causes.

What does cause this impoverishment of will? I got a lesson in this one day early in my teaching career when I mentioned the decades-long North Korean famine in class, noting that the country would be facing a generation of citizens who are irretrievably brain-damaged from prolonged malnutrition. I also pointed out what seemed to me the logical consequence: that a whole generation of teachers, scientists, business leaders, etc., would have to come from abroad while the government cared for these grown-up children of famine in institutions. My point was that the policies of North Korean leaders would result in a crippling of the country's economic structure, a prediction that has sadly, been fulfilled in great measure. But as I was drawing this consequence, a visibly angry student shouted at me from the second row of seats: "Why are you talking about this? I don't want to hear about it! It just makes me sad. It has nothing to do with me, and I can't do anything about it!" Of course, I was shocked, but I did what I could to explain patiently that an American foreign policy reaching back over decades had played a role in the famine, that foreign policy is made and executed primarily by our President, that citizens of legal majority have the privilege of voting for Presidents and congressional representatives, and that it is possible for a voter to get a pretty clear sense of a candidate's foreign policy objectives from media reports prior to the election. In other words, it *does* have something to do with you, and you *can* do something about it. If I am not mistaken, that

student began reading the newspaper, and she started asking questions in class about how her actions could affect the things she was reading about.

What was behind this student's new willingness to learn was also a change in her self-understanding. She was not previously accustomed to thinking of herself as a moral agent, as someone who can initiate actions that have potentially global consequences, and who can deliberate rationally both about the ends or moral principles of such actions and about the means used to reach those ends. This change in the students' self-understanding is my primary goal in the Ethics course. I view this goal as an act of justice towards the students, a preferential option for the intellectually poor, if you will. Our students live in a society that treats them (I should write: all of us) primarily as consumers of products and services. This treatment threatens to reduce the human person to someone who chooses among preselected options on the basis of liking one of the options more than the others. And trends of fashion take away most of even this radically impoverished latitude for choice; one is only allowed to like what one is told it is currently fashionable to like. Even the "nonconformist" has his or her accepted uniform.

I consider it one of the most urgent imperatives of justice in education for us not to treat our students as consumers. Of course, I require them to read Aristotle, Mill, and Kant, and some combination of Cicero and Kierkegaard and perhaps Foucault; and I ask them to know something about these authors' positions on moral questions. But these are tools toward a larger purpose: that of inviting and training students to think for themselves about moral questions, to form reasoned opinions about them and to find ways of putting them into practice. Too many of our students are quite willing to form opinions about moral issues but not *reasoned* opinions. This stems from their failure to think of themselves as *reasoners*. This failure does not begin with them; it is already present in the larger society that acts as if it needs them less as reasoners than as consumers, and it is perpetuated all too often in an educational sector that treats students as consumers of information rather than as agents of moral judgment. (If

professors are information-delivery devices, the day is not far off when we will find ourselves regulated by the intellectual-property equivalent of the FDA.)

The texts for the Ethics course are fairly standardized. It is customary in my department to use Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*, but there are variations. One colleague, for example, relies almost exclusively on Aristotle; another uses an ethics textbook that has selections from many authors. I do use the three customary texts, with any number of twists of my own. One is that I have the students read the texts in a reverse chronological order: reverse because Mill's utilitarianism is closer than Kant's formalism or Aristotelian virtues ethics to the ethical arguments the students are already familiar with from the media and the society around them. It simply makes for more effective teaching to lead the students from what is more familiar to them to what is less familiar.

One standard approach I am careful to avoid is that of presenting Aristotle, Kant, and Mill as if they were three possible options for moral evaluation that are mutually exclusive and which students must choose among. If it is a key element of justice toward our students to treat them as rationally deliberative moral agents, then it is also essential to avoid this trap. The alternative is to allow each of these authors to come alive and teach the students the power of his particular approach to moral reflection. I do not try to get a student to identify as Aristotelian, Kantian, or utilitarian; rather, I encourage each student to find elements of each thinker that he or she can use in moral deliberation. I will say more on this point when I come to the term paper assignment.

I also include Cicero's *De officiis* on my reading list (the Latin title means *On Duties*). I have any number of reasons for doing this. One is that, although my doctoral training and my research has been chiefly as a specialist on Kant, I think Kant is far too often cast as a proponent of a radical modernity that breaks clearly from the classical tradition of moral reflection. There is good evidence that Kant had Christian Garve's German

translation of *De officiis* before him while writing the *Groundwork*, and an attentive listener can hear many Ciceronian resonances in Kant's text. Having the students read Cicero gives them a chance to eavesdrop on a subtle dialogue between a modern thinker and an ancient one and to see that this language of "ancient" and "modern" conceals as much of continuity as it reveals of contrast.

It's true, also, that Mill responds to Kant, although not in the same way that Kant responds to Cicero. Kant is a subtle reader of Cicero and, while not naming him explicitly, responds on quite a deep level to his thought. Mill does name Kant explicitly, but Mill's "Kant" is a caricature that contains a long list of demonstrably mistaken interpretations of Kant's ethics. Mill thus provides a convenient example of how badly we often listen to one another in conversations about ethical principles. Having seen Mill practice this distorted representation of Kant's position trains students to police one another in their group discussions for just this kind of distortion of one another's positions. I will come back briefly to these group discussions after some additional remarks on the reading assignments and my general teaching strategy.

My most fundamental reason for choosing to read Cicero with the Ethics students is his central moral category of *decorum*, sometimes translated as "propriety". Other possible English equivalents might be tact or consistency; the characteristically German virtue of *Konsequenz* is almost certainly derived from Cicero's *decorum*. I try to get Cicero's ideas across through the sense of *fit*: *decorum* has to do with what fits (or what is appropriate to) a human being as such, as well as what fits in a particular person's life story as a whole and what fits with his or her present stage of life, position, resources, etc. I appreciate Cicero's sensitivity to the most minute particularities and contingencies of a person's life—and, indeed, Cicero is one of few moral philosophers who can articulate how something as apparently trivial as the clothes one wears could be seen as a moral issue—but I have a deeper reason for bringing him into the moral conversation. *Decorum* cannot be judged by reason and can therefore not be argued about. It relies on a sensibility that bridges the moral to the

aesthetic and helps to make the case for the importance of imagination in moral life. Cicero teaches students to respect their most deeply-felt intuitions about moral appropriateness, even when those intuitions are not verbally articulated or, in some cases, articulable. Cicero also helps in this way to avoid the pitfall of believing that since reason can clarify *some elements* (viz., the *rational elements*) of moral decision-making, it can actually *make* moral decisions. I emphasize to students from Day One of the course that there is no moral decision that we can make on the basis of reason alone, without the help of imagination, judgment, and ultimately of faith. What moral philosophy can do is to help avoid certain mistakes in our moral *reasoning*; it cannot replace the nonrational parts of the ethical decision. At the same time, the greater danger here is not that the students will become ethical *rationalists* but that they will revert to an ethical *irrationalism*. This happens when ethics teachers make exaggerated claims for the power of reason to solve moral problems, and then students become disillusioned with reason itself when these claims prove to be empty. Curbing students' expectations of moral philosophy is thus an essential element of justice toward them, since it helps them to preserve and value their rational capacities while not giving them exclusive pride of place in the human person.

I'll make just two more comments about reading assignments. I admitted already that I am a Kant specialist by training, and, as you might expect, I do spend an unusually large chunk of time on Kant in my Ethics course. This is not, however, because I think Kant represents the pinnacle of moral philosophy. I would much sooner say that Aristotle represents such a pinnacle, so that my reverse chronological order allows me to end the course with the richest and most nuanced moral treatise I know: the *Nicomachean Ethics*. No, the comprehensiveness of my use of Kant in this course (indeed, he sneaks somehow into every course I teach) stems from my desire to offer the students the best that *I* have, the best example that *I* can give of a careful, well-informed reading of a philosopher, without the claim that it is the best there is. In fact, my knowledge of Kant and my sympathy with Aristotle make me probably most well-disposed toward thinkers like Maréchal and

Lonergan who, as I understand it, attempt to converse with Kant from their base in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. The very existence of Maréchal and Lonergan as authors within the Catholic intellectual tradition falsifies the unjust claim that one must choose between Catholic moral thought and the "modernity" represented by Kant, with no possibility of thoughtful mediation.

Recognizing such false dichotomies is naturally a part of any Ethics course. As I've said already, I make it a goal to incorporate contemporary moral problems at every turn. One that always comes up (because I cannot remain silent about it) is the death penalty. When I poll students, the overwhelming majority of them believe the press hype that tells them that the majority of Americans favor the death penalty. (I read the same hype in German papers, and when I do, the author and editor get a sharply-worded letter from me. One of those letters even elicited a response.) When the issue comes up, we take a close look at the wording of the pollsters' questions. One such poll question (typical, so far as I know) runs something like this: Do you think a serial killer and rapist should (a) be executed, or (b) go free? It is no surprise that most Americans (more than 70%, as I remember) choose execution when offered this false dichotomy. At least one alternative polling agency found that all it took for the pro-death penalty responses to drop well below fifty percent was to offer pollsters the third alternative of life imprisonment. Laws are made as a result of which lives—sometimes innocent lives—are lost on the basis of a misplaced respect for statistics, when a careful scrutiny of the way poll questions are posed could lead to a more just result. The injustice in this case is multiple. Of course, the greatest injustice is that innocent lives are lost. But there is the additional injustice of pollsters and the media not just reporting public opinion but distorting and manipulating it. And the very claim that the majority of American citizens favor the death penalty is unjust to that very majority who record such an opinion only when offered a false dichotomy. I try with examples like this to encourage students to grasp that if they want to play some role in enacting justice in the world, they don't just need the "right" moral theory (or, God forbid, the

arrogance that comes with that expression, “the moral high ground”). They need to read the newspapers and to do so critically, which probably means knowing something not just about journalism but about history and inferential statistics as well.

I use the early sessions of the Ethics course to lay out a set of concrete examples, both to get students to see the need for moral philosophy and to get them to explore initially their own sense of what is morally right and wrong. I choose examples that are close to the students’ everyday lives but which, at the same time, demonstrate something of the complexity of moral deliberation. One example I frequently use is the decision whether to give money to a street beggar. Of course, the students give a variety of responses. Then I ask them to identify factors that might affect their decision: What if the person appears drunk, has a small child, or appears too well-off to be begging? Then I ask what *principle* the students have used to make their decision. Most are not aware of having used a principle at all; they felt their way through the problem holistically. In itself, this does not appear problematic, especially if the response was charitable or compassionate. But it is, in fact, tragic if the holistic, emotive approach to the problem makes it impossible to articulate any principles at all—tragic, because if we cannot speak about moral problems, we cannot learn from one another’s experiences, insights, and deliberations. This is the state of splendid and depressing moral isolation that most of our students find themselves in upon entering an Ethics course. And this isolation becomes untenable precisely at the point where the student discovers a moral problem he or she does not have the resources to settle alone and does not have the language to carry on a moral discourse with others about in which their perspectives could be added to his or her own, or, in the extreme case, to interact with the student’s own views in such a way as to alter them. Helping students to articulate moral principles, however clumsily at first, is a matter of justice, since it is only in this way that the human moral conversation becomes open to them, and it is only in this way that their voices become available to the larger human moral conversation.

After we stumble over the problem of moral principles, I take the students through an exercise that helps them begin to articulate principles. I ask them to imagine all of the possible different responses to the beggar’s request. They had at first thought only in terms of the false dichotomy, to give or not to give cash. On my prodding, students begin to propose other possibilities: to give food, to engage in a friendly conversation, etc. But I am usually the one who has to come up with the more outlandish options: shouting obscenities at the beggar or even engaging in physical violence. Students want to insist at first that these are impossible, I suppose partly on the basis of the expression heard all too frequently, “That’s not an option.” Never mind the fact that what most often follows this expression is a “because,” which tells us why this particular option has already been ruled out. My point is that it is often these perfectly outrageous alternatives for action that turn out to be the most helpful in articulating our moral principles. If we can say why it is that we are so certain that inflicting blows on a person who asks us for help is wrong, we may then have found the very principle we need to decide among the not-so-outrageous alternatives. For example, if we say that it is a matter of human dignity, that it is, after all, an interaction between one human being and another, then this may help us see that, for example, throwing some coins on the ground for the beggar is less consistent with human dignity than saying “Good morning” but giving nothing. I do not mean this as a solution of the problem, only as an example of how we discover and articulate principles. The purpose is to induce a process of moral reflection, not to determine the outcome of the process. Apart from this basic purpose, the exercise also cultivates the students’ imagination for alternatives, in keeping with my conviction that it is a serious moral problem not to be able to imagine that there even could be a response different from the one I and those around me typically give. I try to impress upon students that there is a moral advantage to learning a foreign language or experiencing a foreign culture on its own turf: these actions help us to imagine that it is possible to live otherwise. And I, at least, find concrete examples of this among my own students: bilingual and bicultural

students display, in my observation, a higher degree of moral imagination precisely because they think and live in two cultures at once. It is probably as difficult for these students to imagine that there are those who think there's only one way of saying or doing something as it is for our monolingual, monocultural students to imagine alternate ways of living and speaking.

My favorite story of such a lack of imagination comes from the first few years of my teaching while still a graduate student at Emory University in Atlanta. One of my sharpest students engaged me in conversation one day to ask me about my personal goals. He was puzzled, because he thought that I was of at least above-average intelligence, and he couldn't understand why I would go into a career with as little financial promise as university teaching. "Dr. Wilson," he asked, "don't you have any goals?" When I answered, "Sure, I have goals, just not financial ones," he countered, "I'm not aware that there *are* any *non*-financial goals." Of course, the truth was that he was not aware—I wish I could write "not yet aware", but I do not know this—of the non-financial goals he carries in his own heart.

Leading students toward insight into their own most heartfelt goals is much more of an art than a science, and I am convinced that it has a great deal in common with spiritual direction as manifest in the *Spiritual Exercises*. I will devote the final pages of my paper to a brief exploration of these affinities (I am sure you have guessed some of them already), but before I do so, I want to remark briefly on the three main tools I use in the course in the attempt to produce these insights.

First, there is the daily format of the class on Mondays and Wednesdays. I do not formally lecture in this course except when reviewing for an exam. One reason for this is simply that I was not taught by lecture but by discussion from freshman year forward. (I did my undergraduate work at St. John's, Annapolis, the so-called Great Books school.) I had never even observed the lecture format until graduate school, when I was teaching assistant for several professors who taught in this way. What I saw then was very instructive—and discouraging. It was typical for the professor to come in and summarize the

simplest parts of the text that anyone who had actually read it would already have understood, to remain silent about the difficult passages, and to discourage questions in order to "get on with the material". This had two disastrous effects: it actually discouraged students from reading, and when the time came for a planned discussion day, the students had so clearly heard the message that their voices were unwelcome that they remained silent, and the professor was left frustrated and angry, not understanding that the students were simply doing what he or she had trained them to do. Lecturing is often touted as an efficient means of communicating information, but in the cases I saw, at least, it was the least efficient means of learning, especially in philosophy, where we are not primarily in the business of communicating information but of teaching skills (for lack of a better term) of thought and insight.

I have never found the perfect remedy for this problem. The one thing I do consistently, day after day, is to find out from the students how much they have been able to understand of the text already and where they've encountered difficulties, so that I can concentrate my work on those aspects of the text they have not been able to grasp on their own. My mechanism for doing this is to assign a student or a small group of students to come prepared to present, in five to ten minutes, the text for the day, and this presentation begins our discussion. This makes our work much more efficient, since even if the presenter has badly misunderstood the text, this shows me that someone in his or her position can misunderstand the text in just this way, and I can direct my interventions toward just this misunderstanding. I do not worry a great deal about "covering" material; I would point out, with an experienced translator's sensitivity to language, that it is not our job to cover material but to *uncover* it for the students or, better, to teach them to uncover it for themselves. These metaphors do mean something, whether we use them deliberately or not. Even the more standard signification of "covering" in this context—that of covering ground or territory—is disastrous, since it implies putting land or road or what have you *behind* us, and what we want in the classroom is to make certain questions and possible answers

present before our students and to keep them present.

And I have a deeper agenda behind assigning these presentations which, incidentally, I use with both my freshmen and upper-division majors.. They force the students, at least a few times during the semester, to encounter the difficult primary texts we read *on their own*. This is a traumatic experience for many of them, since they are convinced that they cannot make any sense out of Aristotle or Kant without help. One of my central goals is to show them, first, that they do have some resources of their own for reading and understanding such texts, then, to use the class discussions to refine the tools they already possess. If this is the goal, it is crucial for me not to summarize the texts for them, since this perpetuates the idea that I am the producer of knowledge and they are the consumers, which would leave them in precisely the state of dependence I want to lead them out of in order to read and think for themselves. This agenda means that I do not have to exercise much discipline to keep up the pace of the discussion and keep us moving from one point to another so that we are sure to “finish”. Instead, my discipline consists of making certain that our discussions are always substantial and relevant, but once that condition is met, I can let them be as fragmentary or slow as they need to be. However, the next class period, we always move on to the next reading assignment. I might allow myself five minutes of remarks as transition. We are always on schedule. The main reason I insist on this is that the students’ participation is crucial to the course. In order to participate, they must be prepared, and in order to prepare, they must know exactly what to expect on a particular day, preferably well in advance. These Monday and Wednesday classes prepare students for an essay midterm and final, when I ask them to discuss the texts in a substantial and relevant way, but without any demand for completeness. The one proviso is that they must be able to write about each of the texts in a way that indicates they’ve not derived their understanding of it solely from our discussions, which means they actually have to do the readings.

Fridays I reserve for small group discussions. The overall purpose is to prepare students to write their final papers applying ethical theories to the solution of a concrete moral decision of their choice. Early in the semester, I assign a decision for groups to consider; later, individual students introduce their chosen paper topics for discussion by the group. The main benefit of the small group discussions is that the students learn to carry on a rational debate with persons whose moral positions differ from their own. Any claim is allowed, even if it is offensive to someone else in the group; I allow no one to be silenced. The provision I make is that anyone who makes a moral claim must be willing to defend it with reasons and willing to consider, on the basis of reasons offered by others, altering his or her view. Many students believe they cannot converse with persons whose views they consider offensive; some believe that this is not possible at all—like the black students who begged me at the beginning of one Ethics section *please* to avoid discussions of racism, because they thought no good could possibly come of such conversations. But by the midpoint of every term, the small groups are managing to have the very discussions they initially thought were too dangerous or even impossible.

There is a question of justice here as well. The male student, for example, who began his group participation by articulating views about women that were offensive to almost everyone present had not thought through these views for himself. He had heard them from someone in his family or social group. His only opportunity to revise his views, which he slowly began to do, was to be made a part of a discussion in which he was allowed to begin by voicing these offensive views. It was an act of justice toward him not to deprive him of this opportunity. The other members of the group (the overwhelming majority, in fact) who were offended by his initial remarks were not, I would argue, injured by them. Instead, they learned that silencing the offending party is not as powerful as calling him or her to account for the views with reasons everyone can understand. The “political correctness” that responds to offensive speech by excluding the offenders from the moral conversation only makes the views more extreme. It is the equivalent of locking up those who

commit petty crimes and offering no opportunities for education or reform: we should not be surprised when the result is a hardened criminal or a confirmed bigot, misogynist, etc., who is then invulnerable to better influences. From the other side, the gay or lesbian student, for example, who has seen the possibility of influencing a homophobic classmate toward a different view through open and rational discussion leaves the course with a new reserve of hope, whatever the initial sting of having to hear the offensive remarks. I would argue that it is unjust to deprive him or her of this hope through an exaggerated protective solicitude.

I have students write two preliminary drafts of their final papers. I review and comment on one of the drafts; another is critiqued by a fellow student. The process of critique and revision offers multiple opportunities for insight. For example, when critiquing a classmate's paper, a student often realizes for the first time why professors write the comments they do on his or her own papers, and students often find themselves following the advice they themselves have given in their critique as a way of improving their own work. But the insights are not always just academic. One student chose as her moral decision what career she should pursue. Her parents wanted her to be a physician; her talents were artistic, but she thought that pursuing these talents would be selfish. I wrote very brief comments on her draft, pointing out that while doctors certainly save lives, it is rash to assume that artists do not. That led to a conversation where I shared our University Physician's insight with her that many people die not of physical causes but of spiritual ones, such as the person with AIDS who skips his medications because he's depressed. One way of describing artists, I think, is as doctors who deal in the spiritual causes of disease, those causes that tap into soul and imagination and those sources of life that will always remain mysterious to medical science. Well, the student dropped out of pre-med studies to major in art, and one short comment on one paper draft was instrumental to her decision. It is a matter of justice to lead our students to the insight that their own gifts have an intrinsic worth that does not depend on any comparative

evaluation with careers and talents that someone regards as objectively more valuable.

As a final remark before turning to the Ignatian resonances, I want to comment on the very idea of Ethics as an upper-division core requirement. One of my first interactions with the students in these classes occurs when I ask them whether it irritates them to have their specialized work in their major *interrupted* by such a requirement. Many are willing to say that it does, especially if I allow them to think for a moment that I might sympathize with their irritation. Then I explain to them *why* we interrupt them in this way: after they have already begun to actualize themselves as potential bankers, doctors, lawyers, business leaders, artists, engineers, filmmakers, we call them back and address them again as *human persons*, to remind them that they are not their work, that it is only out of the core of themselves as whole persons that they can accomplish worthwhile work. In a society where it seems that what you "do for a living"—and therefore what quality and quantity of commercial goods and services you are able to consume—defines who you are, it is a crucial act of justice to treat our students with an eye to their intrinsic worth as persons and to teach them to be attentive to this non-commercial worth in themselves and others and in the world around them.

In *The First Jesuits*, John O'Malley quotes Ignatius' secretary, Juan Alfonso de Polanco, as saying that the director of the *Spiritual Exercises* should not be too directive, because "individuals will more deeply relish what they discover for themselves."² As you have surely already grasped, this is a principle I use in the Ethics course as well; the main point is to induce and empower the students to discover in classic texts as well as in themselves principles of moral deliberation. O'Malley also notes that Jesuit education has sought from the beginning "to move the student beyond pious practices to an inner appropriation of ethical and religious values."³ I do my best to construct the course in such a way as to foster this inner appropriation as my primary goal.

David Lonsdale notes that Ignatius' autobiography makes clear that "experience was the main catalyst of change in his life"⁴ and that spiritual

discernment was always based for him on reflection on his own experience. This reflection would always contain for him consolations and desolations, attractions and revulsions. A good Ethics instructor, like a good spiritual director, first lets the students know that these inner movements are a normal, expected, and salutary part of the process of reflection, and then monitors the students' states of mind as they progress. One of the reasons I have hesitated to become involved in online teaching is that I feel a need to be physically in the same room with my students, see how they sit, how they make or avoid eye contact, how they interact with others, etc., in order to be attentive to the moments when my intervention becomes imperative. Usually it is a matter of waiting for a student who has become troubled by the process of reflection to come to me, but by the time this happens, I am seldom surprised by the fact that the student is troubled or even by the nature of the disturbance, since I am a careful reader of the non-verbal language my students speak. I imagine that I would encounter similar difficulties in giving an Ethics course over the Internet as an Ignatian priest or religious would encounter when giving the *Spiritual Exercises* in this way. Even if there is a live video link, is the color transmission sensitive enough to show me how a student's face pales in a discussion when a classmate asks an uncomfortable question? These questions do not speak against teaching or offering spiritual direction online; they merely represent special challenges to be overcome. Technology such as social media may offer important advantages over traditional forms of communication in the ways that they incorporate visual media more intensively, make possible immediate responses to immediate problems, and automatically keep a visible record of changes over time.

Ignatius' concern to adapt the *Spiritual Exercises* "to the temperament and talent of his listeners"⁵ presupposes that he must have been attentive to the differences in talent and temperament among his listeners. My approach of basing any lecturing I do on questions and confusions in student presentations reflects this same attentiveness. This, too, is a question of justice, since giving equal access to education does not simply mean allowing students of all backgrounds to be

physically present in our classrooms. It must also mean becoming aware of who our students are and matching examples, metaphors, study questions, and all sorts of teaching techniques to the students we have rather than to some ideal student we (probably misguidedly) wish that we had.

This attentiveness to who our students actually are is a first step toward drawing them into the life of a community. The fact that Ignatius and the *Spiritual Exercises* have given rise to the fraternal community of the Society of Jesus as well as, less directly, to several women's orders⁶ points to a connection between spiritual direction and community. The relevant community in the case of the Ethics course is the community of moral discourse, where each of us is not left solely to his or her own meager resources of experience and reflection to make moral decisions. Instead, conversation about moral issues makes it possible to leave this isolation, to borrow experiences and tools of reflection from others, and yet to preserve the identity of one's inwardness.⁷

The emphasis Ignatius places on imagination in the *Exercises* generates another suggestion: that the arts, as cultivators of imagination, have a leading role to play in moral development. I am always pleased to have fine arts or film or theater or music majors in the Ethics class. They are at times less apt (or less patient, anyway) with the theoretical aspects of the course, but they are trained in an attentiveness to the contingencies of life, contingencies that make for a subtle differentiation in the way moral principles are applied from one nearly identical case to the next. Anyone who has tuned a guitar or spoken a line of Shakespeare or edited three minutes of video is immediately more open to recognizing the significance of small differences.

Ignatius writes in his *Reminiscences* that he made the decision to go to Barcelona for the purpose of "studying for a time in order to be able to help souls."⁸ I have puzzled for about a year now over the question, What does it mean to study in order to be helpful to souls? I've also put the question to several Jesuits; neither they nor I have an answer that satisfies me. Of course, the theme of service to others that plays a role in every Jesuit

university's mission statement is relevant here. But what *sort* of intellectual training promotes our ability to be of service to others? The only reply I have at my ready disposal today is that a good Ethics course raises this question, even for the business majors, who may think that their only goals are financial ones, then find themselves puzzled when their management professors, for example, talk to them about cultivating relationships and about the need for every community (including a company) to foster the wholeness of the persons who make it up.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* themselves, I find one resonance in the Second Annotation to my way of teaching, which demands that the students struggle on their own with difficult material, even when I could make it much easier, so that they will have the experience and satisfaction of discovering their ability to read difficult books and think difficult thoughts. The Second Annotation enjoins the director to be "brief and summary" and to leave as much as possible to self-discovery and divine grace. The reason: "For it is not so much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but rather the intimate feeling and relishing of things."⁹ A simple method of lecturing threatens to deprive students unjustly of their "intimate feeling and relishing" of their own capacity for learning and moral reflection.

In the "Presupposition" to the First Week, Ignatius has one of the clearest articulations I've found of the principle of charitable interpretation: "...any good Christian has to be more ready to justify than to condemn a neighbor's statement. If no justification can be found, one should ask the neighbor in what sense it should be taken, and if that sense is wrong he or she should be corrected lovingly."¹⁰ The relevant "neighbors" for the Ethics course are the authors of the assigned readings as well as one's fellow students. A charitable reading in the former case is necessary in order for the students to get as much worth out of these authors as possible for their own moral reflection. In the latter case, it is necessary because of the truth that we teachers seldom admit willingly: the students learn more from one another than they do from us. Reserving Fridays for small group discussions is one way I acknowledge this truth; I do this in order to try, as

far as possible, to place this mutual learning at the center of the students' institutionalized education. There is also a question of justice at play here, combined with a type of humility that does not come easily to any teacher. The ability to learn from one another in moral conversation is a skill that can tremendously enrich our students' later lives. The skill of attentive listening and note-taking to lectures on ethics is one that is not likely to be called for again once they graduate.

In closing, and with apologies for my somewhat fragmentary treatment of Ignatian spirituality, I want to sound just a few notes from *Justice in the World*, the document of the 1971 Synod of Bishops that has proven so influential in articulating the Church's renewed commitment to justice. The bishops declare that "education demands a renewal of heart.... It will likewise awaken a critical sense."¹¹ I suppose the renewal of heart I try to produce in students has to do with rekindling in them a childlike faith in their own core intuitions and talents, like the young woman who learned to trust her call to become an artist. On the side of awakening a critical sense, the bishops also remark that "contemporary consciousness demands truth in the communications systems, including the right to the image offered by the media and the opportunity to correct its manipulation."¹² I make something of a campaign out of reminding students what it means to live in a society with free access to information, in contrast to any number of dictatorships where, for example, publishing an underground newspaper will end you up in prison, where, if you are unlucky enough to arrive healthy, you may have vital organs removed and sold on the black market. At the same time, you will remember that in the case of the death penalty opinion polls, I teach students to approach the media with a critical eye and to question the question. Thus, the bishops note that a just education "will help them to be no longer the object of manipulation by communications media or political forces."¹³

Forty years later, *Justice in the World* resonates in concrete forms, such as the Africa Faith & Justice Network, which was formed in 1983 in direct response to the bishops' document. Their executive director, Fr. Rocco Puopolo, notes that

the document “brought the Church’s social ministry from the ‘fringe’ ... to the very center of what it means to be Christian as part of the renewal of Vatican II.” I would add to this thought the idea that Catholic higher education, especially in its Ignatian expression, has become—and should continue to become—understood in terms of the social ministry of the Church as itself a constellation of acts of justice.

I will take just one final quotation from *Justice in the World*: “The Church recognizes everyone’s right to suitable freedom of expression and thought. This includes the right of everyone to be heard in a spirit of dialogue which preserves a legitimate diversity within the Church.”¹⁴ I sincerely hope in my teaching, in my academic leadership work, and in this essay to be contributing something to this same spirit of dialogue. HJF

Notes

¹ *Ich habe meine Sprache nicht verlernt, sondern weiterentwickelt.*

² John W. O’Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 131.

³ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴ David Lonsdale, S.J., *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 28.

⁵ Philip Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola: A Biography of the Founder of the Jesuits* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 63.

⁶ I have in mind here the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange and the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary.

⁷ This community of moral discourse does not depend upon shared values beyond the willingness and the growing ability to communicate one’s reasoned opinions and to reason together about them.

⁸ Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, trans. and ed. Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹¹ World Synod of Bishops 1971, *Justice in the World*, §51, accessed March 25, 2013, www.osjspm.org/document.doc?id=69.

¹² *Ibid.*, §26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, §52.

¹⁴ Rocco Puopulo, “Justice in the World 40 Years Later,” accessed March 25, 2013, <http://www.afjn.org/focus-campaigns/justice-in-the-world.html>; World Synod 1971, *Justice*, §44.

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