

COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Winter 2024

- 2 "A Meditation on Trees"
by Naomi Rinehold
- 5 Honoring Our Juniors at
the 2023 Junior Tea
- 6 Endeavor Summer Institute
& EDCON 2024: The
Independent Mind
- 7 Many Hands Help
Gutenberg "Work"



COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE

WINTER 2024 • VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

Editor Robby Julian

Colloquy team Eliot Grasso, Brian Julian, Chris Swanson, David Snider

Cover Art Tom Moyer

Other Photography Will Dowdy (Class of 2023), Erin Greco (Class of 2010), Donovan Snider (Class of 2023), Weston Snider (Class of 2026)

Layout Robby Julian

Proofreaders Bob Blanchard, Karen Peters (Class of 2012), Kay Smith

Colloquy [kol-uh-kwee] is published quarterly by Gutenberg College.



Gutenberg College offers an outstanding four-year liberal arts education in the Great Books tradition in an environment respectful of biblical Christianity.

President Chris Swanson, Ph.D.

Vice President Eliot Grasso, Ph.D.

Academic Dean Thomas (Charley) Dewberry, Ph.D.

Website gutenberg.edu

© 2024 Gutenberg College, Inc.

Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided the following credit line is used: Reprinted by permission from **Colloquy**, a publication of Gutenberg College, gutenberg.edu.

Subscription free upon request.

Visit gutenberg.edu/colloquy to subscribe.

Gutenberg is supported primarily through individual, tax-exempt contributions.



A Meditation on Trees

by Naomi Rinehold

I wonder about the trees.

Trees in Nebraska seem only to grow along rivers or around houses. The river trees are self-explanatory, but the house trees?

Look around you. The plains stretch to the horizon in all directions, featureless and implacable, the sky an infinite blue echo above. One small step of imagination, and an alien landscape confronts you, no more hospitable to human habitation than Mars. And then, out of the corner of your eye, you see a stand of trees. And you know: a house will nestle under them, a kitchen garden, some chickens, perhaps a tire swing.

Nineteenth-century settlers of the Great Plains sometimes suffered from Prairie Madness. Isolated as they were from each other and from anything else human, they became depressed, broke down mentally, and sometimes resorted to suicide. Prevalence of this condition receded with the proliferation of railroads and telegraph stations—and, coincidentally, with the maturation of the settlers' trees.

The trees around a house extend its boundaries so that a home can spill out from behind its walls and create a distinctly human space in the wider world. Conversely, settlers in the great northern forests built their houses in clearings, and the first ring of encircling trees served as both border and ambassador between the human dwellings and the inscrutable mass of leaves and branches beyond.

We take trees into our human world the way we take pets: seeing them in relation to ourselves and forgetting their intrinsic otherness. We get glimpses of this other perspective sometimes, as when a cat emerges from the shrubs, looking feral and predatory as a tiger, and we remember suddenly what it is. But are house cats or house trees really any more part of the human world than the empty plains or the crowding forest?

Nature is a stranger to us and foreign, and even the landscape can negate us. At least, this was the thinking of philosopher Albert Camus. He looked at the world and wrote, "At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise.... The world evades us because it becomes itself again."

Camus was an atheist and an existentialist. He thought that reality "just is"—that there is no meaning to be found in any of it. Any reasons for how things are and any meaning we might see in the world are merely human constructs. They have no independent existence; we just make them up. So it is *absurd* (his word) for us to find meaning or beauty in nature, absurd to find truth in ideas or goodness in people, absurd to wonder about the trees. The tragedy of humanity, he thought, is that we constantly yearn for meaning in a meaningless world. We project meaning, beauty, truth, and goodness upon a world entirely devoid of such things.

Trees, Camus would say, are alien to us. Despite inhabiting the same world and being made of the same stuff, they are inherently *other*.

Like Camus, I have had moments when my perspective shifts and the profound otherness of nature shakes my heart: a stand of redwoods, indifferent to my gaze; the endless, rhythmic crash of ocean waves against the rocks; the night sky. I breathe in, and they are beautiful and captivating; I breathe out, and they have become monstrous. My pulse quickens, and I feel something akin to terror. What can such things possibly have to do with me? How can I live in a world so profoundly indifferent to my existence?

Camus takes these flashes of alienation as epiphanies, as glimpses beyond a mirage of meaning cast over the world by the human psyche. He is not, I think, entirely wrong. We do mentally domesticate a fundamentally wild world. We do tend to see the world in relation to ourselves and *for* us. We forget that it has its own, independent existence. But Camus is not entirely right, either. His despair has colored his experience.

Camus was convinced that the world holds no meaning. So, when he perceived the otherness of nature, he experienced it as alienation. He felt the world withdrawing from him, leaving him untethered and without context. The ground fell out from under his feet so that he had nothing to stand on—no framework through which to relate himself to the world. The world became unintelligible to him, and then he became unintelligible to himself. He looked in the mirror and didn't know what he saw there. This should not surprise us. If we are just another part of the world, and the world is *other*, then we are *other* as well. We are like the night sky, the ocean, the trees—alien, terrible, and unknowable. Even to ourselves.

People respond to the otherness of the world in different ways. Some let it slide across the outer shell of their consciousness leaving no trace of its passage. They may never experience alienation from the world or wonder about the trees. Others get one good look and resolutely turn away. The cost of engaging is too high. And some people go on the offensive and fight to negate the otherness of the world.

A couple of years ago, during a discussion at Gutenberg's Summer Institute, a friend of mine shared a story of conversion. This conversion was a long process, idiosyncratic and unconventional and oh-so-typical of God. It started with dreams and ended (if such things ever really end) with waking up.

When my friend was a teen, she wondered about her dreams. She believed there was meaning to the world—her Christian parents and community gave her a firm basis for this—and she needed there to be meaning to the world, as we all do. And yet, that meaning eluded her. So she went looking for it in her dreams and, more prosaically, on the internet. There, she found answers in dream interpretation and started expanding her picture of reality.

When my friend was in college, she wondered about the stars. She learned that for most of history, astronomers were also astrologers who took it as given that heavenly bodies influenced earthly ones. The magi followed a star, after all. And when Newton proposed gravity—an invisible force working with great distances between the things it affected—it fell into that same, occult mold. If the moon can cause tides in the earth's oceans, why shouldn't the stars and planets cause tides in the lives of men? And if man can predict the ocean's tides based on the moon's cycles, why shouldn't she be able to interpret the tides of her own life based on the stars'? (That's why I can't seem to answer my emails! Mercury in retrograde is disrupting all meaningful communication!)

When my friend had started a family, she wondered about the world itself. She listened to podcasts and pored over Instagram feeds that gave her ways to see personal meaning in every event, every circumstance. The whole world, every tree and accident and human interaction, was both a message for her specifically and—at least potentially—a manifestation of her own will. So every single thing that happened to her needed to be interpreted; the whole world was a set of symbols for her to decode. And every thing that she wanted to happen could be *made* to happen by sheer dint of will if she could just tap into the great, nebulous energy that kept the world going. The combined effect of these ideas was to make the world seem meaningful only with respect to her and even to exist only in relation to her. So far from being alienated from a world that “evades us

(Continued on page 4)

The Sound of Trees by Robert Frost

I wonder about the trees.
Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place?
We suffer them by the day
Till we lose all measure of pace,
And fixity in our joys,
And acquire a listening air.
They are that that talks of going
But never gets away;
And that talks no less for knowing,
As it grows wiser and older,
That now it means to stay.
My feet tug at the floor
And my head sways to my shoulder
Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
From the window or the door.
I shall set forth for somewhere,
I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice
And tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on.
I shall have less to say,
But I shall be gone.

A Meditation on Trees, continued from page 3

because it becomes itself again,” she saw the world as part of herself, without any real independent existence.

I doubt this was clear to her at the time. She looks back on these *weirdy ideas* (her term) with a sort of chagrined bafflement. How could she have thought that the whole world existed only for her? How could anyone? There is, apparently, a whole cottage industry on the internet enticing people to believe precisely this. It’s appealing because it gives the illusion of control. Unhappy in a relationship? Just manifest a better one. Struggling with mood swings or depression? You can exert a sort of psychic gravity to control the tides of your inner life and make it better. Do you hurt? Your pain is a message, and if you can interpret it, you can also make it go away.

When my friend took a new job, she wondered about suffering. Gutenberg tutor Nancy Scott was giving Wednesday night classes on the book of Job. Sometimes, Nancy said, suffering can just happen. It doesn’t have to be a message. It doesn’t carry meaning in and of itself. Around the same time, my friend was reading Kierkegaard’s “Strengthening in the Inner Being,” and she saw two more things that challenged the picture of the world that she had been building. First, a person can despair, can be in anguish, even when thriving, even when wealthy and healthy and successful—just as a person can despair when poor and ill and failing. One’s circumstances do not determine one’s inner condition. Second, God is a person, a father who welcomes his children home, not a cosmic energy available for her use. These ideas were incompatible with the picture of the world she had built for herself, but she believed them anyway, and the conflict of beliefs fractured something in her.

If people were pure intellect and crises of the soul could be sorted out purely with logic, my friend’s story would be a lot simpler, a lot less messy. But we aren’t, and it isn’t.


When something fractured in my friend, she wondered whether anything was real. The whole world seemed underwater and displaced. “I was losing

my mind,” she told our discussion group. One night she awoke to a terrifying premonition—something bad was coming. Something horrific. She woke her husband. “We have to go!” They got the children out of bed and went to her parents’ house. She was full of fear and adrenaline, desperately trying to think of a place they could all go to be safe. So it came as a shock of betrayal when her husband said, “We came here so your parents could watch the kids while we talk about what’s going on with you.” They talked, but she was still underwater.

When they took my friend to the emergency room a day later, the fracture had widened. She told the nurse, cogently and persuasively, that she was demon-possessed. Eyes big, he answered, “We can’t help with that here. Maybe you need to see a pastor or a priest.” She told her husband, “I must be a witch,” because that would make her experience fit with the picture of reality she had constructed. She sat with him in an exam room for a long time, frantically proposing and discarding possibilities that might explain what was wrong, interrogating and throwing away parts of her picture. At some point, her husband recognized the pattern, the loops she was riding. He told her, “Maybe you’re heroically trying to reconstruct reality in your mind.”

When my friend walked out of the hospital, raw in her spirit but so thankful to be going home, she saw the trees. If you’ve ever been to the RiverBend emergency room, you’ll know the trees I’m talking about. Massive redwoods, just outside the door, before you even get to the parking lot. She stopped and wondered at the trees. Then she said to herself, “Trees are trees. And God made them.” She saw that the trees were real, that they existed outside of her. She saw that she could trust the earth she was standing on, trust it to be itself and not depend on her. She saw that the world was full of concrete and specific things, distinct from her own concrete and specific being, but still related to her. She saw what related her to the rest of the world: she was a creation, one of many, before a Creator who was also a real person. And she started reconstructing her picture of reality.

I still wonder about the trees. So alien, and yet mysteriously ours. Camus looked at the world and could not see any genuine relation between it and himself. For him, therefore, the human self is an untethered thing, rootless and adrift. Kierkegaard thought that to be a *self* is to be in relation to one’s Creator, that we don’t have the context to be what we are without that relation. But God is more *other* than the trees or the ocean or the night sky. If those things are alien to us, how much more so the ineffable Creator? And yet, He is also mysteriously ours—not only because we are His by virtue of being His creatures, but because He is a person and He has chosen to be our father. It is through our relation to God, by being His children, that we are also connected to everything which is His. We are in relation to the world because it is another of His creations, and we are in relation to each other because we are His children. And, if Kierkegaard is right, we can also only be in relation to our own selves by being in relation to Him.

Every tree is an invitation to wonder. Not a message from God, per se, but something—a nudge, a hint, a tantalizing suggestion—if we have the eyes to see it. 

Naomi Rinehold is a tutor and the student services director at Gutenberg College. After earning her first B.A. (in History) at Campbellsville University in Kentucky in 2000, she spent eight years teaching in Argentina—first ESL students at a rural school and then teenagers at Buenos Aires International Christian Academy. After returning stateside, she earned a B.A. in philosophy at the University of Oregon while living at Gutenberg, and she then moved to Knoxville where she earned an M.A. and, in 2019, a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Tennessee.

Calling all Alums: Gutenberg is turning 30!

Gutenberg College admitted its first class of four students in September 1994. We want to celebrate our first 30 years with an Alumni Reunion July 12-13, 2024.

Mark your calendars!



Thank You!

From Gutenberg President
Chris Swanson

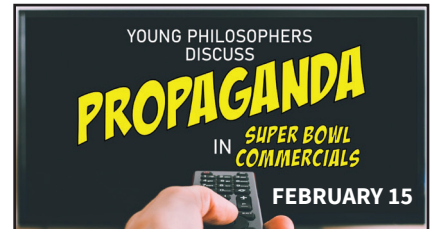
We surpassed our Year-End Fundraising Goal! We are grateful to the friends and community of Gutenberg College for supporting us again this year. We received \$140,608—112% of our goal! Thank you. The gifts go towards financial aid for needy students and support our efforts to reach out to a wider community.

These donations have a lasting impact on many lives. They give students an opportunity to become independent truth seekers and to grapple with important ideas at a critical juncture in their lives. Thank you for your many prayers that God might show His lovingkindness to the students and wider community of Gutenberg College.

Honoring Our Juniors at the 2023 Junior Tea

Each fall, the Junior Tea (hosted by the seniors) celebrates the students who successfully complete all their two-year exams at the end of their sophomore year. Each junior receives a Greek New Testament to acknowledge having passed the two-year Greek exam.

This year's honorees are Gracie Greco, Samuel Tardibono, Kate Couch, and Bethany Dewberry. They are pictured below at the tea, accompanied by Greek tutor Naomi Rinehold.



gutenberg.edu/yp



THE GUTENBERG PODCAST

gutenberg.edu/podcast

The Gutenberg Podcast brings the world of ideas to a broader audience. Host Gil Greco and a guest tutor explore the Great Books from a Christian perspective, recognizing their complexity in the light of competing views.





Endeavor Summer Institute July 16-19, 2024

This summer, Gutenberg is pleased to introduce **Endeavor**, an academically-oriented summer program for high school students. The core question of this year's Endeavor will be "What does it look like to do science?" We'll read and discuss the formative

ideas of Copernicus and Galileo and the twentieth-century perspectives of Aldo Leopold and Michael Polanyi. Students will spend a day in the internationally renowned H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest with Gutenberg tutor Charley Dewberry, one of the Pacific Northwest's leading

restoration ecologists. There, we will endeavor to understand the streams in their landscapes (which includes snorkel diving). Find more information at gutenberg.edu/endeavor.



THE INDEPENDENT MIND
EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2024

GUTENBERG COLLEGE
30 YEARS · SINCE 1994

AUGUST 9-10
EUGENE, OREGON

gutenberg.edu/edcon

Young children are sponges. They absorb everything: language, ideas, and customs. As they mature, they continue to absorb, but they also gain the capacity to judge new information. They are becoming independent. Maturity and independence do not come easily or quickly, however; they are the products of a lifelong search for truth in humility before God. Nor is independence optional. We have a moral responsibility to hold fast to God's truth and not succumb to the pressures and assumptions of the world. At this year's Education Conference, Gutenberg College invites you to explore with us the challenge of teaching and finding independence of mind.



Guest Speakers



Amanda Butler
Classical Conversations



Andrea Lipinski
CiRCE Institute



Davies Owens
BaseCamp Live


Many Hands Help Gutenberg “Work”

One of the distinctive parts of community life at Gutenberg College is how students, staff, residents, and community members help maintain and care for our building and grounds. Each school year, for example, three Saturdays are designated for House Workday, and a wide range of maintenance tasks and improvements are tackled by teamwork.

For some larger projects, we have often been blessed to have members in the community volunteer much more of their time and effort than could be expected of a single Workday. This last summer, some willing, hardworking souls went shoulder-to-shoulder to take on the large project of refurbishing the hardwood floor and repainting the walls in the Loft—a large area on the third floor of the Gutenberg building.

We especially want to recognize and thank board member and alum (now lawyer) John Hemmerich for his remarkable labor of love. He used his skill in hardwood refinishing and contributed a *huge* number of volunteer hours to refinishing the Loft floor and staircase.

Board chairman Paul Pindell also contributed a weekend helping sand and prepare the floors with John, and house manager and alum Erin Greco facilitated the clearing, cleaning, and painting of the loft in preparation for the work on the floor. Residents and staff members helped with these tasks. The result is a beautifully warm and welcoming space for classes, study, and the deep conversations that are hallmarks of Gutenberg’s model of education.

Thanks to all those who steward the college with their time and care! If you would like to join us at a future Workday, or if you are curious to learn more about our bigger upcoming projects, please opt in to our email list at office@gutenberg.edu. 



Erin Greco’s painting “helper” in the Loft



Board members John Hemmerich and Paul Pindell



Board member John Hemmerich



The Loft “After”

COLLOQUY WINTER 2024



1883 University Street
Eugene, OR 97403
541.683.5141 | office@gutenberg.edu
gutenberg.edu

Return Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
EUGENE, OREGON
PERMIT NO. 594



Join the Conversation! Apply for Fall 2024.
Regular decision deadline is March 1.
gutenberg.edu/admissions



Great Book Symposium

Plato's Meno & The Art of Discussion Leading
February 6

The Great Books can be profoundly beneficial if one knows how to mine their riches. In this session of Great Books Symposium, Gutenberg tutor Dr. Eliot Grasso will offer a seminar on how to lead a discussion on Plato's Meno. The seminar will discuss the content of Plato's dialogue while developing discussion-leading tools to help students get the most out of this timeless work.

Tuesday, February 6, 8:00-9:30 PM
Cost: Donation • Via Zoom

The Great Books Symposium is designed to engage mature learners in deep dialogue about the influential works of Western civilization.



Preview Days
April 19-20

Gutenberg College is a place for students who want to think deeply, learn in community, and grow in faith and character. At Preview Days, Gutenberg opens its doors to high school students and transfer students who are considering Gutenberg's bachelor's degree program in liberal arts.

At Preview Days, you will meet tutors who have devoted their lives to learning and helping others learn, discuss works by great thinkers, fellowship with a community of caring people who work together in pursuit of goodness, and learn how you can become a Gutenberg student.

Join us at Preview Days to discover if Gutenberg is the college for you!

