BEING RIGHT OR DOING RIGHT? EMPLOYING VIRTUE THEORY IN RESPONSE

TO RELIGIOUS STUDENT DISCOURSE IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

by

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I. Introduction

In a narrative symposium collective entitled "The Politics of the Personal: Storying Our Lives against the Grain," Anne Gere, a professor at Michigan State University who specializes in rhetoric and composition, described her experiences as a person of faith in academia: "the first time I mentioned that I shared my life with a Presbyterian minister, a colleague did a double take and quickly changed the subject" (46). This experience led Gere to be quieter about her husband's ministry in her work place as a practicing Christian at her university. When she helped her daughter with a piece on Native American spirituality that included her own narrative as a Christian, Gere explains that she had to hold back her identity from her colleagues for credibility.

Another rhetoric and composition scholar, Toby Coley, published a qualitative research paper about religious voices in academia entitled "Opening a Dialogue about Religious Restraint in Graduate Professionalization." His research is in specific reference to Christian graduate students, but I think his conclusions can be extended to any religious views manifested by scholars at any level, from first-year students to professors:

> As teachers of graduate students, professors help prepare future faculty through not only course content but also socialization practices, some of which include classroom atmosphere and extracurricular meetings. If graduates of faith encounter environments of hostility toward faith, their professionalization is tainted by restraint, a desire to hide this important aspect of their personalities. (Coley 400)

Coley argues that restraint is not only taught through subtly hostile cues, but is also reinforced later through restraint by the students themselves. This same phenomenon is mentioned in Gere's narrative as she states that she developed a habit of avoiding talking about being a Christian while trying to fit in her department as a new professor (46).

As a graduate student and first-year composition teacher, I feel unsettled by how I already urge and, in hindsight, have urged restraint in academic contexts. During my senior year earning my Bachelor's degree at Western Carolina University, I presented a paper entitled "The Sub-Creation of Man: Approaching Christian Morality within Literary Fiction" at the 2013 National Conference on Undergraduate Research in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Afterwards, two women approached me to praise me for my work. After talking together about Lewis and Tolkien's identities as both Christians and academics, they told me they found it encouraging to see someone engaging theology in an academic way on a panel about literature, in spite of what is often seen as a dichotomy between religion and academia. One of them stated she personally feels like Christianity is always dismissed as being unintellectual.

What I didn't express in this brief exchange was how scared I was to present that paper, and that I almost backed out of presenting it, even after arriving in Wisconsin. At times, I still feel uncomfortable having the paper on my CV because I worry it will not be seen as "academic enough" for the community I am trying to professionally join. There is a dissonance here for me as a scholar. I loved every minute of writing that paper, and I can read my own passion in it reading it years later with more knowledge about composition theory. However, when it came to presenting this paper in front of a group of academic peers, I felt awkward. Was this or was this not "real" scholarship?

As a first-year composition teacher, my students often have the same question about their own writing, asking if certain religious or moral discussions in their writing is "ok." They look to me for the answer, but it is something I am still not sure about. I want to say "yes," but I feel the weight of an academic *ethos* I am obligated to uphold as an instructor in a society that often reinforces that academia and religion are like oil and water. They seem to bring this nervousness into the classroom before they even produce their first piece of writing evidenced in their guarded silences during class discussion.

If, at a graduate and professional level, students and scholars alike express struggle with finding their own way as religious individuals in academia, how does this affect religious student writing when first-year students enter the college classroom? Can the subtle dichotomy be broken, and will doing so allow more room for both religious and nonreligious students to flourish in their writing when discussing issues regarding morality and virtue?

There has been significant scholarship surrounding religious students, mainly in reference to evangelical Christian student writers who are often perceived as aggressive, or the student Douglas Downs labels as the "True Believer" writer, as described in his article, "True Believers, Real Scholars, and Real True Believing Scholars: Discourses of Inquiry and Affirmation in the Composition Classroom" (39). However, what many of these pieces ignore is a more instructive angle of approaching these student writers, with an aim of what writing ought to do. Although, colloquially and amongst instructors, the attitudes of the evangelical "True Believer" writer are often seen as a problematic in student writing, perhaps their writing behavior can instead be explained by the weight of dichotomies reinforced by both our media culture and in the academy. I suspect there are

various types of common writing personalities possessed by students, and that the "True Believer" personality is only highlighted as problematic because of the perceived biases and misconceptions of the academy.

Additionally, I hypothesize that when what is considered "aggressive" evangelicalism appears in "True Believer" student writing, it is a symptom of the student writer feeling not only defensive of his or her ideas, but also defensive about part of his or her identity. It is likely, then, that the same kind of defensiveness is not limited solely to evangelical students, but can likewise be found in the text of students who hold unconventional cultural perspectives, controversial political opinions, or ideologies not seen as "credible" in the academy. The aggressive use of rhetoric to push an ideology in student writing is not as much a characteristic exclusively found in Christian student writing as much as it is the manifestation of typical defensiveness of an ideology, paired with the need for the student to prove their identity as valid while trying to still be "academic" in the contemporary sense. For some instructors, this attitude may manifest itself as student writing that is desperately trying to be right. The juxtaposition of the aggressive defensiveness of ideology while trying to remain "scholarly" creates an illusion of incompatibility between religion and academia, a conflict that I believe can be mediated by promoting peace-making discourse about virtue, morality, and compassion in the classroom setting and in writing instruction.

Prominent rhetoric and composition scholar Victor Villanueva mentioned in a 2015 article for the National Council for Teachers of English that religion in the classroom is something that needs to be addressed. Referring to proposals he has received as an editor for the *Studies in Writing and Rhetoric* Series, he mentions having received

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four proposals on the topic of faith and writing. Two of those proposals were relating to evangelicals and pedagogy. His response to these proposals was one of surprise, but Villanueva acknowledged the need to address research within this category: "I know those are our students and we are not well equipped to deal with them" (1). Compositionists need to do more than "deal with" students from a religious perspective in rhetoric and composition classrooms. We need to develop a pedagogy that addresses students's concerns about their identity and is also inclusive of other moral and ethical discourses from students who might not be working from a distinct religious perspective.

II. Research Questions and Goals

In this thesis, I will attempt to answer some of the following research questions: what perceptions about the incompatible dichotomy between religion and academia might first-year students automatically bring into the classroom? How might common teacher perceptions and common pedagogical practices in composition reinforce a classroom culture of silence when it comes to spiritual epistemology and alternate ways of "knowing"? What parallels might there be between theories in religious discourse and other marginalized discourses and writing practices? Finally, how can student aggression in rhetorical writing be resolved by virtue theory in composition and rhetoric that has often been used in western rhetorical traditions? I believe a common ground between perspectives can be found in virtue, so I will explore political virtue theory, as well as moral, intellectual, Christian theological virtue to see how they might overlap. I believe this will allow a sense of unity between *all* communities in the classroom, but will especially show a common ground that academics and students of faith can stand on together in their writing practices. Ultimately, I hope the answers to these questions may

better equip teachers of composition and promote student writing that is healthy, thriving, nuanced, and contributes to the evolving interests of academia and the field of rhetoric and composition.

Rhetoric and composition instructors should be aware of the added dynamic a religious perspective brings into the classroom and how the written expression of religious perspective in academic writing has changed with the latest generations of post-millennial students. Both Coley and Gere warn that dismissing religious discourse harms the intellectual growth of those who identify themselves as being religious. In the end, they both agree that higher education stunts intellectual maturation by restraining the expression of faith, and, as Gere states, universities have "failed to develop sophisticated and nuanced theoretical discourses to articulate spirituality" (46).

The goal of my research, then, is to reconsider the demographic of religious and spiritual student writers in first-year English in the new post-millennial student populations. I intend to examine the cultural biases these students are exposed to in public discourse that may reinforce an impression of a dichotomy and examine ways in which pedagogical practices might reinforce this dichotomy, stunting students' ability to productively engage in classroom.

III. Methodology

A majority of my research will be conducted by examining other theoretical perspectives on religious student writing, virtue and moral discourse in composition classrooms, and perspectives regarding compassion and peace-making discourses as a way of overcoming discursive divides relating to conflicting ideologies.

In Chapter II, "The Problem with Categorical Approaches to Belief and "True Believers," I will examine Downs's "True Believer" writer and the dichotomy between religion and academia as expressed in both scholarly and cultural rhetorics. Based on my examination of scholarship surrounding religion and academic writing, there is a blind spot regarding the origins of "True Believer" writing behavior. In this chapter, I will provide a review of how religious student writing has been covered in composition theory and will explain how these theories are problematic. By breaking down the religious/academic dichotomy and examining the traits of "True Believer" writing, and examining the sources of that kind of writing through a categorical approach toward student writing behaviors, I believe we can create a fairer environment for all students writing from ideological perspectives that they may feel are challenged by their understanding of "Academia." My intention for this chapter is to examine the traits of the dichotomy and the "True Believer" writers, to identify the problematic dynamic this creates in academic writing settings, and to propose a virtue theory of composition as a solution to problematic discourse.

In Chapter III, "Rediscovering Virtue across Theological and Rhetorical Traditions," I will provide a review of theological and theoretical views of virtue. I believe the friction between religion and academia identified by many scholars can be addressed with compassion towards student writers and those partaking in the controversial discourses. Because the "True Believer" writing pattern is caused by insecurity and defensiveness, encouraging a practice of compassion and encouraging virtue theory and peace-making writing in response opens up a new direction not only for the "True Believer" student writer, but for all student writers. Although subtle, virtue

already plays a large role in the classroom through norms and expectations designed to create a civil learning environment. I suspect that although the postmodern classroom may pose a challenge to "True Believer" students, when practices in the classroom are examined through virtue theory, the intellectual virtues that appear in composition and rhetoric classrooms in many ways overlap with the theological virtues a "True Believer" may bring into the classroom. By acknowledging this, promoting writing practices that focus on these overlapping ideas can create a space for "True Believer" students to create writing from their ideological perspective that is also defendable in an academic sphere. For this reason, I intend to examine several theological and theoretical approaches to virtue as a possible direction for "True Believers" with a specific emphasis on how virtue interacts with compassion.

In Chapter IV, "Pedagogical Applications: Student Perspectives and Pedagogical Options," I will examine the rhetoric of two public figures who have recently partaken in public discourse with the goal of unity: Bernie Sanders and Pope Francis. Both figures have recently partaken in well-received inter-ideological dialogues that are worth examining as examples of virtue applied to opening discourse. Bernie Sanders's speech at Liberty University on September 24th, 2015, is notable for his emphasis on the importance of those who hold different views being able to engage in a civil discourse regarding political policy and moral decision making. Pope Francis's speech in Ankara, Turkey, on November 27th, 2015, served as a similar call for unity between conflicting religious spheres. I believe these speeches provide profound examples of how ideology and moral perspective can be used in a beneficial way, and how perceptions of the incompatibility between discourses can be broken down with compassion.

Specifically, I also intend on discussing subtler issues of pedagogy, such as mindfulness and compassion in teaching practices in response to student writing, which is especially important given the current political climate in the United States and across the globe. Previous scholarship providing pedagogical suggestions to address religious writing not only inaccurately characterizes religious writers, but is also outdated because of the type of religious student writing that appears in contemporary first-year writing classrooms. Because of this, new methods of pedagogical response need to be considered, especially responses that move toward compassion and peace-making as a response not only to religious student writing that characterizes Douglas Downs's hypothetical "True Believer" writer, but all students who use rhetoric simply to *be right* in their writing instead of *doing right* with their writing.

II. THE PROBLEM WITH CATEGORICAL APPROACHES TO BELIEF AND "TRUE BELIEVERS"

The movie *God's Not Dead* was released in March 2014, and earned $9,244,641 domestically in its first weekend. The plot proceeds as such: a freshman is required to take a Liberal Arts course in philosophy as a requirement for his degree. On the first day of his philosophy class, the professor coerces the students to write "God is dead" on a piece of paper and sign it. Summarizing his predicament, Josh, a devout Christian, characterizes academia as incompatible with his beliefs: "I could drop the class, run away, pretend like it never happened, which is what my girlfriend wants. I could sign the paper saying something I don't believe. Or I commit academic suicide in front of a live audience by trying to prove that God exists." The perception Josh holds, which becomes his challenge to overcome throughout the film, is that his beliefs do not fit into academia. He must choose between his religious perspective and his academic career, and he does not see any other option in his dilemma. Josh refuses to concede and then proceeds to spend the semester researching the issue, and crafting the argument that God is not dead, which he eventually presents to the class through a PowerPoint. The student receives praise for taking a stand, and the professor dies in a car accident soon after realizing the student must be right about the existence of God.

The popularity of *God's Not Dead* reveals a perceived tension around religion and academia that is already being explored outside of academia in public discourses, including the entertainment industry. The film characterizes academia and academics as aggressive, arrogant, and determined to preach an absolute: that God is dead. In fact, an academic advisor in the movie goes as far as comparing the antagonistic philosophy

professor's classroom to the Roman Coliseum, full of "lions, people cheering for your death…" an allusion to Christian persecution in Rome under the rule of Nero. The movie is presumably designed for a specifically Christian audience with the message to young Christians that there is a war going on, and that war is with liberal academia. The sequel, *God's Not Dead 2*, is due to come out in April of 2016.

For those familiar with universities, especially Liberal Arts classrooms, it is not difficult to see the errors in the film's portrayal of a professor in a philosophy classroom. In fact, there are several pedagogical choices the professor makes that would be in violation of most universities' policies toward discrimination. The professor is portrayed as arrogant, deeply wounded, angry, and unhelpful toward his Christian student who is convinced is determined to embarrass him. In spite of the straw man portrayal of academia, the film made $9,244,641 in its opening week and grossed around $60 million overall (IMDB). Although the film has even been criticized by evangelicals[1], it is an example of work of Christian media that is desperate to address the fears many Christian students bring into the classroom. The film signifies a problematically high level of anxiety Christian students might feel coming into today's postmodern classroom.

Unfortunately, it can also be said that these fears are not always unfounded, in spite of the straw man examples in *God's Not Dead.* Stories about "religious discrimination" in the classroom frequently float around in popular media and public discourse. In an article from "Inside Higher Ed" entitled "No Christianity Please, We're

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[1] Michael Gerson, an Evangelical Christian and opinions writer for the *Washington Post*, wrote in his article, "'Noah,' 'God's Not Dead' are movies lacking grace" that "The main problem with *God's Not Dead* is not its cosmology or ethics but its anthropology. It assumes that human beings are made out of cardboard. Academics are arrogant and cruel. Liberal bloggers are preening and snarky. Unbelievers disbelieve because of personal demons. It is characterization by caricature."

Academics," Timothy Larsen, a professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College, relays a story a student told him about his experience as a Christian in a first-year writing course:

> John had been a straight-A student until he enrolled in English writing. The assignment was an "opinion" piece and the required theme was "traditional marriage." John is a Southern Baptist and he felt it was his duty to give his honest opinion and explain how it was grounded in his faith. The professor was annoyed that John claimed the support of the Bible for his views, scribbling in the margin, "Which Bible would that be?" On the very same page, John's phrase, "Christians who read the Bible," provoked the same retort, "Would that be the Aramaic Bible, the Greek Bible, or the Hebrew Bible?" (What could the point of this be? Did the professor want John to imagine that while the Greek text might support his view of traditional marriage, the Aramaic version did not?) The paper was rejected as a "sermon," and given an F, with the words, "I reject your dogmatism," written at the bottom by way of explanation.

Accounts like these may be difficult to swallow for composition and rhetoric instructors who strive to be mindful toward their students while also maintaining the goal of teaching effective scholarship. In his article, Larson considers possible retorts that could be brought up in favor of the writing instructor's responses, but he provides additional comments the instructor made on the student's paper that, he argues clearly, show discriminatory rhetoric.

To be fair to pedagogical theorists, especially in rhetoric and composition classrooms, there have been attempts within composition theory to address these perceived tensions and biases of the university. It seems that because of the way the postmodern classroom operates and because of the values that are held in the classroom (which will be more deeply discussed in the next chapter), Christian students who have been described by Downs as "True Believers" are bound to enter the classroom with a defensive mindset based on perceptions in the public sphere. Realistic or not, *God's Not Dead* and the discussions surrounding the issue of the religion in the classroom outside of academia signifies a need to rethink how we approach the causes of this tension that might occur within academia.

I think this can also be further explained by the nature of theory produced around Christian students in the classroom and the definition of "True Believer" that has appeared in conversations about this student demographic. Many theorists who have tried to tackle, describe, or fix these tensions have done so with goodwill by creating categorical approaches to "True Believer" writing. Additionally, some have created categories for pedagogical responses. But perhaps the categorization of these students and pedagogical responses for this specific population has reinforced the perception that it is a "problem." These categorical approaches to student writing and instructor responses inevitably alienate the student further and reinforce any possible personal biases against "True Believer" students that a professor may hold. I believe that what needs to be reshaped is how we approach how values are reflected in public writing, such as writing for decision making and obligation to serve a community in a way that is inclusive of multiple perspectives and encourages dialogues rooted in the perspectives of those who

ascribe to beliefs, as opposed to "diagnosing" a student's writing based on their ideology. By better understanding the approaches theorists have come up with and how they may have reinforced the problematic categorization of "True Believer" students, we can then theorize an approach that achieves what we often desire in the field of rhetoric and composition: flourishing discourse, epistemological curiosity, and change that matters.

To frame my argument, I will explore the following pieces: "True Believers, Real Scholars, and Real True Believing Scholars: Discourses of Inquiry and Affirmation in the Composition Classroom" by Douglas Downs, "Religious Faith, Learning, and Writing: Challenges in the Classroom" by Mark Montesano and Duane Roen, "Transformations: Locating Agency and Difference in Student Accounts of Religious Experience" by Mark Williams, and "Unpredictable Encounters: Religious Discourse, Sexuality, and the Free Exercise of Rhetoric" by TJ Geiger II. The first two are from *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*; the second two are from *College English*. All four articles/chapters are sympathetic toward finding a solution for what Williams describes as "friction" between what is traditionally considered "academic writing" and religious perspective. Each also identifies examples of typical "religious writers" and the demographic of the student writer they are trying to accommodate in their classrooms.

In "True Believers, Real Scholars, and Real True Believing Scholars: Discourses of Inquiry and Affirmation in the Composition Classroom," Downs offers a description of prescriptive pedagogical responses to student writers who try to bring religious values into their arguments. The term "True Believer" is used to label students, especially Christian students, who hold fast to their beliefs assertively throughout their writing. First, Downs identifies two different underlying qualities that he believes reinforce what

is often perceived as the incompatibility of academic and religious discourse. Downs believes because academic discourse is characterized by inquiry and religious discourse is often characterized by affirmation, it is the responsibility of the composition and rhetoric teacher to lead the student out of a discourse of affirmation and into inquiry with sympathetic pedagogical techniques, or to at least encourage the student to try to balance both. He identifies these techniques as serving as a "guide," "translator," "mentor," or "coach" (Downs 48) Although Downs theorizes out of good intention, and his use of the term "True Believer" is one that is valuable and frequently returned to in scholarship regarding the discussion of religious students in the classroom, his categorization of students and possible responses does not take into account other dynamics that could be at play in the classroom, such as his own biases against faith-based knowledge as an instructor in an academic culture with similar biases.

George Yancey, Sam Reimer, and Jake O'Connell published a mixed methods research paper entitled "How Academics View Conservative Protestants," that quantitatively measured academics' attitudes toward certain religious groups and then explained these ratings. Christian Evangelicals and Fundamentalists were rated the lowest in positive perception among academics; Muslims and Mormons were rated second lowest; and Atheists and Jews were rated the most warmly, proving clear patterns in academic biases toward religious groups (320). Overall, Christian groups scored lowest in positive perception and were often described as "hateful and ignorant." Additionally, Yancey, et al. found that most academics are unlikely to identify with a religious perspective or have friends who identify with a religious perspective (324). The researchers theorized that symbolic boundaries and lack of intergroup contact reinforce

academic identity, leading to divisive attitudes that link religious belief with intellect. This means that the issue is not a difference in intellect, academic participation, or any other factor relevant to academic pursuits, but a simple matter of personal biases that come with in-groups and out-groups.

Interestingly, Downs does note that his own biases led him to a certain emotional responses to "True Believer" students, but he does not inquire much further beyond giving it mention. To open up his conversation about how teachers handle the "True Believer" in the writing classroom in a problematic way, Downs illustrates his angry response toward a Latter-Day Saints student, Keith, who argued against families structured around homosexual marriages. This interaction reflects and confirms patterns other theorists have mentioned as Downs acknowledges that his emotional response to Keith limited Keith's ability to develop as a writer and hurt the student/teacher relationship, describing it as metaphorically giving Keith a "black eye" (52). However, I don't believe Downs effectively diagnoses how his own biases as a teacher affect his response—his prescribed pedagogical techniques seem like a Band-Aid on the problem— and I think his definition of a "True Believer" is limiting when we consider the wide array of religious perspectives the current generation of students might possess. Although I think that Downs' exploration of pedagogical methods to respond to students bringing religion into their writing is commendable and needed, I do not think narrowing the issue down to discourses of affirmation and inquiry completely diagnoses the root of the friction, which is evidently partially caused by biases in the academy.

The problems of categorical belief of "True Believer" has not gone unnoticed in theory surrounding the issue. For example, Williams does an effective job of addressing

these same issues in his piece in "Transformations: Locating Agency and Difference in Student Accounts of Religious Experience." According to Williams, defining the "True Believer" for Christian students actually reinforces the perceived dichotomy between academia and religious perspective. Williams argues that when presented with extreme examples of "True Believers" in the media, students shy away from religious identification and often do not view themselves in such an extreme way. This is due to the often extreme examples of "True Believers" who are portrayed in the media, such as in movies such as *God's Not Dead* and in news reports following religio-political groups such as The Tea Party Movement and Westboro Baptist Church. This reminds me of Susan Jarratt's discussion of the term "feminism" in her essay, "Beside Ourselves: Rhetoric and Representation in Postcolonial Feminist Writing" and the backlash against the term because of its negative associations (58). Creating extreme categorical identifications can often discourage unity between groups but instead draws a line between identities that creates an illusion of an inability to intersect. This seems to be a common pattern of human nature that is fought against in critical theoretical circles; when one does not fit the caricature of one's identification, one ceases to associate with that part of one's identity. The same principle applies with many ideologies. I believe the backlash against religious identification is especially reinforced in the college classroom, where both students and teachers bring in the burden of the cultural dichotomies between "faith v. knowledge" or "religious v. academic."

However, even though the perception and stereotypes of the "True Believer" are presumably inaccurate in that they begin with generalizations, teachers continue to stereotype the "fundamentalist Christian student" in discourses. Williams describes the

"radical" and "evangelical" Christian as a stock character that comes into play in the minds of both students and teachers when they are uncertain of their roles. Williams points toward Heather Thompson's assertion in her dissertation <u>When God's Word Isn't Good Enough: Exploring Christian Discourses in the College Composition Classroom</u> that teachers continue to stereotype the Christian student and present them as problematic. This argument is illustrated in Downs's definition of the "True Believer" and in other pieces of literature as well.[2] I am certain that the biases of teachers, combined with the anxieties of students who value their spiritual/religious perspective, an anxiety possibly rooted in cultural perception of the academia/religion dichotomy, could be the true source of friction between the two, more so than fundamentally conflicting modes of discourse.

However, even when these biases are acknowledged on behalf of the instructor, it may not fully relieve the tension. In "Religious Faith, Learning, and Writing: Challenges in the Classroom," Duane Roen further explores Mark Montesano's experiences with religious student writing, noting how even when an instructor pays attention to his/her responses to religious student writing, the student's own anxieties coming into the classroom can pose a challenge. Montesano describes his own sympathy toward religion in writing and pedagogical responses to students in a composition class he taught in the religion department at Arizona State University. He describes two students in particular who "expressed a concern that their college course would be designed to challenge, diminish, and… modify their beliefs" (86). After Montesano brought in and explored

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[2] "Testing the Limits of Tolerance in the Democratic Classroom" by John Clifford is a profound narrative account illustrating a professor urging restraint on a Christian student and the dismissal of her perspective as being considered unfitting for an academic setting.

several religious and philosophical texts in the class, he describes the students as feeling "encouraged and somewhat exhilarated by the intersections of the religious and the rhetorical" (86). By welcoming discourse around religion in an academic setting, Montesano attempted to ease their anxieties as students of faith. However, even with this effort, the perceived dichotomy between academia and religious perspective still posed a challenge for Montesano in his interactions with and a student named Brett. The dichotomy still poses a problem.

Montesano seems earnest in his endeavor to create a religion-safe writing environment. In spite of this, though, one of Montesano's students, whom Downs might have described as a "True Believer," ended up writing what Montesano describes as a "half-hearted" attempt at a paper and a rambling profession of faith. This is reflective of a defensive response a Christian student may use in anticipation of a hostile environment. Upon conferencing, Montesano reports the student blamed his lack of success on academia's hostility toward his views as a Christian. Although Montesano explained he was supportive of Brett's writing and views, Montesano believes that Brett still played into this dichotomy by blaming his frustrations on it. Brett eventually dropped out of college altogether. This could be a case of a student playing into the "stock character" both Williams and Thompson describe. In both Montesano's and Downs's accounts of pedagogical responses to the "True Believer" student, we see both teacher and student playing into the perceived dichotomy that seems to be more culturally constructed than rooted in rationality.[3]

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[3] Toby Coley's Article, "Opening a Dialogue about Religious Restraint in Graduate Professionalization" illustrates this.

Looking at the examples described in many of these pieces of student writing and teacher responses, and in the solutions that have been hypothesized in order to ease the tensions that occur, it is clear that the problem of tension in the classroom is not easy to address. Categorization of students based on religious belief also seems to make the problem more difficult because it does not allow the flexibility that effective teaching and pedagogy requires. Real life interactions in the classroom shape themselves organically, are difficult to predict, and in contrast, categorical approaches limit flexibility by limiting what a student can be and by denying the ability for a teacher to respond in ways that encourage intersection. The primary shift that needs to occur in these approaches is the attitude that a student's religious perspective does not hinder his or her ability to learn and should not be seen as a "problem." In addition to that, the aim of academia, laden with good intentions and an honest pursuit of knowledge, should not be demonized into a "problem" either.

What seems to be the problem, then, is the illusion of a lack of intersection between perceived dichotomous spaces that has been imposed on both religious students and university classrooms. This illusion is based on group biases, fears, and stereotypes that are openly reinforced in public discourses. In order to break the dichotomy and begin coming up with effective pedagogical responses to the tension, we should look at what religious discourses can contribute in the classroom based on the intellectual goals of the academy, while also considering the new demographic of millennial and post-millennial students, spiritual discourses, or more discourses based in ethical appeal, as a spectrum. Removing the labels and categories of religious students while applying a pedagogical approach that can also be extended to accommodate other ideological perspectives may

find difficulty in the postmodern classroom, allowing more room for intersectionality in class discussions.

In "Unpredictable Encounters: Religious Discourse, Sexuality, and the Free Exercise of Rhetoric," TJ Geiger II argues for a pedagogy that presents intersections between identities, such as religion, sexuality, and ethnicity. Geiger compares his model of the free exercise of religious rhetoric to the free exercise of rhetoric surrounding sexuality. In the same way some theorists see sexuality as a spectrum and an important aspect of student identity to be explored, Geiger sees religious perspective as a diverse spectrum of identities that ought to be acknowledged, breaking away from the idea of the "True Believer." In his classes, Geiger breaks down common assumptions about the mutual exclusivity of religious and LGBTQ communities by deliberately introducing readings that show a variety of perspectives and possible intersections between the two communities.

Considering the demographic of millennial and post-millennial students, Geiger's intersection-based pedagogy is extremely relevant. According to the PEW Research Center, the Millennial generation is the least religious generation in the United States in the last century (83). There has also been rapid growth in American adults identifying as religiously unaffiliated, from 36% in 2007, to 55.8% in 2014 (83). However, this does not mean that religious perspective, the ethos of religion, and spiritual knowing are no longer relevant. In fact, these statistics expand the spectrum of belief. Although the Millennial generation identifies itself as less religious, Millennials report praying as much as previous generations. Spiritual knowing, which can be defined as faith, is still a relevant area of knowing or seeking knowledge, even to those who consider themselves non-

religious. Spiritual epistemology is still one that needs to be reconciled in the classroom instead of quieted. In addition to this, the PEW Research Center reports that in 2014, there is increased racial and ethnic diversity within Christianity. In 2014, racial and ethnic minorities made up 41% of Catholics (up from 35% in 2007) and 24% of evangelical Protestants. Many churches are also expanding doctrine to include traditionally controversial beliefs in the church, such as gay marriage. With the increase in classroom and church pew diversity, racially and ideologically, the importance of the inclusion of religious perspective in intersectional theory also increases.

Additionally, the identity of what is considered "academic" is quickly changing and needs to be better understood as well. Traditionally, spiritual epistemology has been seen as "unacademic" because of its fluidity. However, with the emergences of feminist theory, intersectional theory, and the increase of the use of narrative in composition circles, what is or is not "academic" has blurred. In his work, "Ethical Dispositions: A Discourse for Rhetoric and Composition," Duffy describes the characteristics of the postmodern composition classroom. Duffy believes it is essential for composition classrooms to encourage the discussion of ethics and moral decision making as a mode of overcoming ideological divides and encouraging ethics-oriented writing in rhetoric and composition classrooms. Although this idea will be discussed more in reference to the function of virtue theory in overcoming divides in the next chapter, the fluidity of identity that he describes in regard to the postmodern composition classroom is something that should be explored in tandem with the fluidity of belief in the student population.

On the one hand, Duffy acknowledges what other theorists have said before him such as David. W. Smit and his work *The End of Composition Studies* to explain that the

field of rhetoric and composition has become something difficult to define because there is so much variety classroom to classroom, it cannot be fully articulated. Smit states in his work that those participating in the field of rhetoric and composition "have no common theoretical basis, no shared assumptions about the nature and value of writing, and no communal sense of what kinds of writing should be taught and learned" (223). In many ways, this has created a problematic perception of first-year writing courses from the outside looking in, which may cause anxiety for religious students entering the academy because of the nature of belief. However, Duffy argues that this has created some room for composition and rhetoric to thrive as a field. As a result of its diversity and fluidity as a field, major theorists in the field have demonstrated how first-year writing courses have become places where not only serious scholarly work occurs, but also "a site for pedagogical innovations that link the teaching of writing to political activism (Kahn and Lee), digital rhetorical (Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe), community engagement (Mathieu) and much more" (Duffy 211).

Duffy proposes the diversity of composition and rhetoric classrooms allows room for ethical discussions in the composition classroom. In a similar vein, I believe this fluid identity of composition classrooms, along with the expanded understanding of religious student populations coming into college, together allow room to find commonality. As Duffy highlights, composition classrooms have become places of social change aimed toward good. Excluding the external perceptions of what the composition classroom is supposed to be, transformation is occurring in composition classrooms through teaching writing that engages communities outside of the classroom and by opening up modes of discourse to enact change.

If composition instructors understand that what goes on in the classroom is more than it appears to be, I think it can be argued that we should view religious student populations as having more going on in their intellectual processes than what appears. The perspectives of students and instructors seem to be on different planes in discourses inside and outside the academy, but in reality I think there is commonality to be found in the goals of both instructors and "True Believer" students. It is unlikely that either religious communities or academic communities are truly determined to halt the flow of knowledge and encourage failure. It is also unlikely that either side desires the tension that occurs.

Awareness of personal biases against religious groups, attitudes that could be prevalent in academia according to George Yancey, Sam Reimer, Jake O'Connell's study, is a practice in critical awareness that is necessary for creating change and enacting an effective pedagogical response. When we consider the groups rated in Yancey, Reimer, and O'Connell's study, any student from those groups could be considered a "True Believer" in their own faith. If a "True Believer" is someone who holds to a belief whole-heartedly, then anyone who is Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Mormon, Muslim, Jewish, or Atheist, could be considered a "True Believer" to some extent in their own ideological identities. These labels also do not even begin to cover the various religious ethnic groups that could occur within those labels and face a serious troubling erasure due to biases against the umbrella labels they fall under. However, in scholarship, these groups are seen as posing a problem to the postmodern classroom. The biases against the "True Believing" Christian student in academia are unfair, even in its labeling, and as a result, composition and rhetoric instructors should focus on what each student's writing

does as opposed to their own disagreement with the ideology of the student who writes it. Methods for this will be highlighted in the later chapters

With the contemporary context of what millennial belief can look like and what composition classrooms can look like, it is clear that categorical approaches are inadequate in assessing the tension between religion and academia. I believe the postmodern composition and rhetoric classroom should actually serve as a contributor to unity among different ideological perspectives and should encourage diversity in discursive practices in academia. The question then becomes: how do we bridge the biased divides? I propose composition teachers take a new look at virtue theory as a means of resolving these tensions and finding common ground regarding what "good" discourses can do in spite of (or in solidarity with) potential ideological divides.

III. REDISCOVERING VIRTUE ACROSS THEOLOGICAL AND

RHETORICAL TRADITIONS

This chapter is intended to cover some of the ways in which virtue theory occurs in multiple spaces in the field of rhetoric and composition, how virtue theory can be used to ease the tensions of "True Believer" writers in the classroom, and how virtue theory can open up conversations that can lead to prosocial writing, or writing that is geared toward altruistic or service-oriented motives in contrast to writing that is geared solely toward argumentation or debate. In this chapter, I describe the origins of the recent conversations around virtue theory, I illustrate how it has connected to contemporary conversations in composition, I connect it to the origins of rhetorical theory, and show the intersections of religious belief and critical theory.

Currently, there are interesting conversations going on both inside and outside the classroom surrounding virtue and what kind of constructs can be changed in order to promote goodness and justice in a community. Additionally, there have been conversations around virtue and rhetoric early in the history of the field of rhetoric that give insight into how virtue has been a topic in our field since its recorded origins. This all connects to "True Believer" writing in that because of the nature of belief, especially religious belief, the religious perspective of "True Believer" students should not only be welcomed into the composition classroom as an aspect of identity that impacts writing, but because of the nature of virtue in the field of writing and rhetoric, discussions surrounding how belief affects moral perspective and decision making are essential if we are to accurately encourage contemporary intellectual virtues and prosocial writing.

A deconstruction of the idea of the "True Believer" student shows that there are larger issues at play beyond the perceived academic/religious dichotomy. Most students, religious or nonreligious, are "True Believers" in their own way to a certain extent. Every student holds some level of belief or value that he or she brings into the classroom. However, because of the values of the postmodern classroom, the "True Believer" student in reference to conservative evangelical Christians has begun to stand out, arguably not because of the nature of belief, but the nature of value. I believe the tensions found when a "True Believer" enters the postmodern classroom can be detected by defensiveness in "True Believer" student writing. However, that is not where the tension begins. The source of the tension can be found in misconceptions based in discussions that happen outside the classroom, which feed any fears and biases held by academics and "True Believing" evangelical Christians. Christian and academic communities hold beliefs about one another that are solidified with approaches that reinforce their own worldviews, as opposed to reaching out to one another.

Just in the examples discussed in the previous chapter, many of the tensions and instances of dispute arose out of discussions surrounding arguing a point. In two of the examples, these arguments involved argumentation around marriage. It seems then, that often the instances of writing and discussion that illicit tension are based around topics that occur in the popular discourse. These kinds of conversations come down to conflicts of perceptions or values and play into other discursive dichotomies in the United States such as the dichotomy between conservative and liberal political values, dichotomies at play within conservative Christian communities such as believers and nonbelievers in relation to belief in God, and dichotomies that are at play within the academy such as

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scholarly and non-scholarly sources of knowledge. Simply by laying out these perceived dichotomies, there are clear problems with playing into these categories, and tying them to religious belief makes it even more problematic. Although there are several ways to trouble dichotomies, one theory that I think could be especially applicable in regard to addressing "True Believer" students, as well as students from other ideological perspectives that include some degree of "True Belief," is by rethinking the classroom with virtue theory in mind.

Ultimately, from personal experience as a student and teacher, and based on my own students' reports in their self-reflections in my classes, the lessons in writing that stay with students the most are ones where they can clearly see the fruit of what they have produced. Most students would likely remember years after it has been turned in and graded what a paper was about, and even more what it did in a space in the case of presentations or awards, more than what punctuation, usage, or grammar lesson they learned in its writing process. It is not to say these aspects of teaching writing are not valuable but that instructors should pay attention to how their assignments for students encourage them to contribute to decisions in a public space, because that is likely what their students are paying attention to the most. I propose that this emphasis on producing writing that serves a community, with an eye toward virtue theory, can also help to encourage commonality between groups that seem to have differing values.

When students are shown the profound effect that writing can have, even if it is simply engaging an issue that relates to the humanness of another within the classroom, it also helps to create a heightened rhetorical awareness. Also, with the increases in the use of internet technology and the literatures that occur across it, younger students are being

exposed to more and more perspectives and are seeing the profound effect words can have in a public discourse. Religious or not, many students are eager to use their new understandings of rhetoric to participate in these spaces.

Showing students the power of language should encourage Composition and Rhetoric instructors to engage controversial issues in the classroom. The value of identity in the postmodern classroom should also be kept in mind in the endeavor. Regarding students who are religious, our students who are nervous about belief in the postmodern classroom should not be quieted because of their perspectives, but should be shown the external effect writing can have through virtue writing practices. This can be done through renewed attention to virtue theory in writing because an emphasis on what virtue looks like, or if it embodies virtues such as justice, compassion, honesty, and wisdom, serves as a common ground between religious and academic communities and their goals. Instead of reprimanding the use of belief in writing, the goal is to encourage the virtues that come from belief as a motivator for rhetorically effective writing geared toward community service and involvement, and prosocial writing. Moving toward virtue theory as a mediator for multiple ideologies serves as an intermediary composition and rhetoric pedagogy, which can already be found in many of the common values in many Composition and Rhetoric classes and many religious perspectives that orient individuals toward changing a broken society for the better.

I. Virtue Theory in Public and Academic Spheres

Virtue theory is not new to discussions around public discourse or academic discourse; however, it has not been applied as a means of overcoming divides between academic and religious communities. My belief that virtue theory can act as a mediator

between academic and religious communities is heavily rooted in the use of virtue theory in political decision making in the public sphere, as proposed by Harvard political theorist, Michael Sandel in his book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Although Sandel's work is geared toward political decision making, I believe his observations on looking at public discourse as a matter of moral decision making, and how virtue theory can help bridge divides, can help instructors understand where tension occurs in the written and verbal discourses of religious students in the classroom.

Sandel argues that our political public discourses in the United States have reached an impasse due to a difference of value. He divides the two methods of public discourse into two categories: 1) welfare theory of justice, and 2) freedom theory of justice. Welfare theory of justice is often associated with the political left. Sandel describes it as a theory based on "the greatest happiness for the greatest number of citizens" (260). However, Sandel argues that often this turns into a flawed version of utilitarianism that limits the human experience of happiness to a number and inevitably marginalizes some part of the population. On the other hand, Sandel believes the freedom theory of justice, which is often associated with the conservative right and the egalitarian left, is based on respecting the freedom of choice. The problem with this, as Sandel argues, is that although people in the United States are becoming increasingly interested in freedom through rights, there is disagreement on what that means from a moral standpoint. In the pursuit of moral ends, citizens reach irreconcilable differences in their moral perspective (260). Because of the intrinsic differences in value between the welfare theory of justice and the freedom theory of justice, we have become stuck in our public discourses as they come to be shaped by either of these sides.

Sandel's proposed guiding theory for public discourse in civic decision-making is a virtue theory of justice. Sandel argues that by coming together and defining what consists of what he calls "the good life," citizens in a society will find more commonality about what is needed for individuals to flourish (261). Sandel believes that most people will agree that certain virtues are good, such as the cardinal virtues, and that by focusing on how those virtues manifest, decisions can be made more effectively in order to encourage a just society.

I think the key to his argument, though, and what is also key to how we conduct talk about virtue in the composition classroom, is that addressing religious perspective in discourse is unavoidable. Sandel argues that a religious perspective contributes a great deal to an individual's conception of "the good life" and removing that altogether from public discourse is not advantageous to civic decision making. He argues as such: "The attempt to detach arguments about justice and rights from arguments about the good life is mistaken for two reasons: First, it is not always possible to decide questions of justice and rights without resolving substantive moral questions; and second, even where it's possible, it may not be desirable" (251). According to Sandel, religious perspective must be taken into account in public discourses and decision making. What this means for the rhetoric and composition classroom, which is based in methods of discourse and is increasingly engaged in civic rhetoric and interaction, is that religious perspective must be addressed and accounted for in the class as well. Although this may be intimidating because of the academic attitudes toward religious perspective previously discussed, I believe it also opens up new ways of addressing "True Believer" students' ideals and values in a rhetorical space that encourages students to create action based on those

values. Virtue theory in composition creates a space where students can find what they have in common among each other regarding what is valuable for a community. The inclusion of virtue theory also creates a deeper sense of purpose behind writing as it is used to collaborate and contribute to discourse around what constitutes a flourishing society.

In the field of composition, scholars have recognized the same discursive shift and impasse in the United States that Sandel describes, and it has come to be directly reflected in discourses that occur in the classroom. The tension between "True Believer" students and academia can be symptomatic of these larger conversations regarding what is occurring in our society on a national scale. Paul Lynch, a composition scholar, acknowledges this shift in his essay "Composition's New Thing: Bruno Latour and The Apocalyptic Turn." Describing the current events that are regularly occurring and being brought into discussion in composition classrooms, Lynch recognizes that there is a responsibility on behalf of composition classrooms to address global and national crises through writing. Quoting Michael Blitz and Mark Hurlbert in their book, *Letters for the Living,* "if educators everywhere are teaching and conducting research toward the understanding and remaking of culture and society, why are our culture and society so chronically unhealthy?" (3). This is a crucial question for compositionists, and all educators, that should be taken seriously. In spite of identifying this as a real problem, Lynch ultimately ends his piece by saying that perhaps it is time for composition to return to composition without the lofty goals we bring into the classroom.

Echoing the sentiment that we live in a chronically unhealthy society, Duffy also connects unhealthy public discourse to the importance of discourse conduct in the

classroom and exposes a need for compositionists to bring new value to their field in a culture that struggles to promote healthy discursive practices. Describing the troubled public discourses, Duffy paints the picture of a culture where respectful openness in discourse is limited, and the exploration of gray areas in civic arguments "results in arguments reduced to assertions and counter-assertions, claims and counter-claims, with many expressed in language that is irrational, venomous, and increasingly violent" (211). Because of the negativity found in public discourse, many have turned to the idea of virtue theory as a means of not only teaching critical writing for public discourse but also bringing more purpose and intention to rhetorical conduct.

Composition instructors already set norms for classroom conduct in discussions and in the classroom setting. There is almost always an expectation for students to embody certain values when they walk into a classroom, such as respect toward other individuals, tactful participation, preparedness, and active engagement. In writing, students are expected to invest in their writing, provide work that exemplifies honesty and integrity in how it was produced, and respect and intellectual honesty toward ideas and arguments. Although they are not often referred to as being "virtues," these expectations in the classroom provide a common ground of value that already occurs in many composition and rhetoric classrooms. In addition to these, some classes have an added emphasis on service in the community, rhetorical participation in public conversations, and discussion of issues regarding social justice, which may be seen in many ways as answers to the question Sandel poses of "what is the right thing to do?" These shifts in the composition and rhetoric classrooms toward justice and service would benefit from a reevaluation of the role of virtue in writing, and the benefit of producing

writing that is not simply "right" through effective argumentation, but "does right" in a rhetorical space. Virtue theory simply takes the tools that are already being used to set norms in a community, such as in a classroom, and then encourages individuals in that community to contribute something positive with them. Perhaps, in light of tensions between religious perspective and academic perspective as they are felt in the classroom and are portrayed in the public, it is time to reevaluate values.

A reasonable question that should be asked in regard to the endeavor of engaging virtue theory in the classroom is: what right do composition teachers have to discuss and encourage virtue in the classroom? Considering the nature of classrooms today and the current demographic of students, this is a valid question. The academy is as pluralist as it has ever been in part due to internet technology; that is, multicultural perspectives and intercultural interactions are easy to find through microblogs and other social media platforms. The effort to break down dichotomies and challenge hegemonic attitudes also helps to create a new open space for new ideas and perspectives. However, ideological diversity does not mean there is not room for discussion about virtues and ethics, especially in the classroom setting.

I think in order to understand how virtue theory might play out in the classroom, it is crucial to examine how virtues might overlap in different ideologies that have come to influence Western education and thought. Although I am covering virtue theory in Western education and thought, it is not the limit of where virtue theory can occur. First, I think it helps to outline and explore virtues and their origins to show that philosophical, theological, and intellectual virtues are not completely exclusive from one another. There is a great deal of value in looking at how virtue theory can be examined in all rhetorical

traditions. I choose Western tradition here because of its enduring influence on education in The United States, as well as its traditional interaction with Christian traditions. By identifying where there is overlap in values and virtues in rhetorical traditions that often appear in courses and communities in the United States, instructors can find ways to tactfully orchestrate in-class discourses based on these virtues as themes that encourage prosocial writing and unity between students of different ideological perspectives.

II. Historical Western Virtue Theory

In Western rhetorical traditions, rhetoric and classical Greek and Roman philosophy overlap a great deal. Although the relevance of certain figures in rhetorical tradition are debated, and there has been a history of the erasure of certain voices across history, many of the discussions surrounding rhetoric and virtue in classical philosophy, such as the discussions between the Sophist and Athenian rhetoricians, still occur today. Many of the values of these rhetorical traditions have been adopted into other aspects of our contemporary culture. As a result, considering the virtues in early rhetorical and philosophical traditions is essential to understanding how they might influence rhetorical spheres today.

In Plato's account of Socrates's discourse in the *Gorgias,* rhetoric and virtue first appear as inseparable. In his dialogues with Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, Socrates argues about the nature of rhetoric and whether what is just or unjust is a factor in teaching oration. Although Socrates does not believe rhetoric on its own is moral (he argues it is an art), he does effectively agree that a rhetorician needs some level of knowledge about what is just or unjust. Socrates's discourse with the Sophist, Gorgias, reveals a question

about teaching rhetoric that is still very alive today: what is the function of virtue in rhetoric?

In the dialogue, Socrates asks Gorgias what his responsibility is to his students of rhetoric regarding morality: is it necessary for someone learning rhetoric to have some idea of what is just or unjust? Or is it just enough to appear just? He asks Gorgias, "For Heaven's sake… draw aside the veil and tell us what really is the function of rhetoric." Gorgias replies: "Why, I suppose, Socrates, if he happens not to know these things he will learn them too from me." A statement which Socrates reiterates: "Stop there: I am glad of that statement. If you make a man a rhetorician, he must needs know what is just and unjust either previously or by learning afterwards from you" (Socrates 95). In many ways, Socrates and Gorgias's dialogue still influences how we conceive of teaching composition today. Even then, it was known that teaching rhetoric teaches value. Extending rhetoric to composition instruction in the contemporary classroom, this principle still applies. Duffy states this as well in his piece, saying "to teach writing is by definition to teach ethics" (213). Although the classroom is becoming more pluralist, the nature of rhetoric itself does not escape this old discussion, nor should it.

Is it the responsibility of composition teachers to teach justice, or any other virtue in the classroom? I argue that whether or not it is intended, the intellectual virtues that occur in the postmodern classroom do teach some level of virtue. If the Sophists and the Athenian philosophers agreed on little else about the nature of rhetoric, they did seem to agree on a need of moral awareness in order to navigate the various discursive spheres they were teaching their students to speak into. Whether it is obvious or not, by allowing or disallowing certain discussions in the rhetoric and composition classroom, rhetoric and

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composition teachers are teaching some level of value or devalue for certain types of

discourses. Teaching rhetoric is teaching virtue, which means it is so much more

important for instructors to pay attention to how they address the writing of "True

Believer" students. In their case in particular, these are students who are coming into the

classroom with some level of awareness regarding virtues. Although the origins of these

virtues may be different than those that occur in the classroom, they are not without

overlap.

To understand further what we mean by virtue, especially in relation to rhetoric, it

helps to start at the beginning with the Athenian philosophers and how they conceptualize

virtue. Although the theory behind virtues between the ancient philosophers vary, many

possess a model based on Plato's original Cardinal Virtues, whether it is an extension pf

or a tweaking of the ideology behind them. In *The Republic*, Plato identifies the main

Cardinal Virtues crucial for his political theory as wisdom, justice, temperance, and

courage (78). Plato argues that these four virtues are essential to a healthy, thriving

society.

This understanding of virtue is helpful for looking at public virtues on a larger

scale, but Aristotle's theory of virtue provides a bit more of a nuanced treatment of virtue

for the specific goals of academia and epistemology. Unsurprisingly, Aristotle's virtues

serve as an extension of Plato's virtues, except in *Nicomachean Ethics* he divided virtues

into the categories of moral and intellectual virtues. In his piece, he divides the virtues as

such: intellectual virtues, which are virtues by which individuals arrive at truth, such as

philosophy, appreciation, and prudence; and moral virtues, which are exemplified in

virtues such as liberality and temperance (34). Distinguishing the two categories,

Aristotle states that "the intellectual owes, for the most part, its birth and growth to a course of inference" and that moral virtues are "acquired by habit" (35). This gives us further insight into the nature of virtues as it has been traditionally conceived. Not only is the distinction between the intellectual and the moral important, but their origins are as well. When considering how virtue should be explored within the classroom, the idea of intellectual virtues is key. For Aristotle, intellectual virtues are acquired by growth and inference, and the endeavor to teach virtue in an intellectual capacity itself is not something that can be done but can be acquired through practices that allow growth. In the contemporary classroom, this can be done through writing practices that engage scaffolding and backward planning in teaching practices. Aristotle argued that there was a separation in how these virtues are learned, but I believe the postmodern classroom and the opportunities prosocial writing offers for students now allows room for engaging intellectual *and* moral virtues, as defined by Aristotle as well as defined by contemporary classroom practices.

In many ways, by trying to frame the goals of these theories as intellectual virtues rather than moral virtues, they fall short in serving their purpose. Lynch raises an important question about the value of critique and critical theory: "This is the question of the apocalyptic turn. Do we really need close and careful readings to convince ourselves that we live in hard times? What can critique do for us now?" (Lynch 463). Looking toward Bruno Latour's theories, Lynch proposes that perhaps part of the problem is that composition classrooms, with their emphasis on critical theory, can, at times, create more questions than answers. Other scholars have also noted a drift away from compassion in

these fields when brought into research. Barry Kanpol and Fred Yeo argue in the series

forward to the book *The Academy and the Possibility of Belief* that:

> The Critical endeavor has become an end in itself, and in our sentiment,
>
> lacks the moral and ethical certitude of commitment to a humane and
>
> democratic vision of social justice based on a notion of human
>
> compassion, hope, and even spirituality – all of which form the foundation
>
> of human imagining that life can be better, fairer, more just. (xi)

Critical theory becoming an end in itself points back to Lynch's concern for addressing

the human condition in the classroom. Without deeper motivation, research surrounding

these theories, which attempt to address the human condition, runs the risk of becoming

hollow scholarship that lacks the ability to inspire true, active, prosocial change.

Intellectual virtues as Aristotle classified still occur in theories such as critical

theory. In many ways, critical awareness has become the new intellectual theory.

However, perhaps it is time to take away the divide between moral and intellectual

virtues, or pursue them together, and find out what should be done about the knowledge

acquired throughout intellectual virtue practices.

III. Theological Perspectives on Virtue and Compassion

The distinction between intellectual and moral virtues is helpful for understanding

the role of virtue and morality in rhetoric because of the close ties between the early

origins of virtue theory and rhetorical theory. The exploration of how these theories

interact is something that is also considered in Christian theological discussions

surrounding virtue and rhetoric. When looking at the history of rhetorical theory, the role

of Christianity in the formation of this theoretical tradition cannot be ignored. In early

Greek rhetorical traditions, there was discussion about how the role of virtue and morality and rhetoric were based in the belief of the existence of absolute truth. This discussion still exists in contemporary classrooms. However, the contemporary classroom does not say that there is no absolute truth. Instead it says that there are multiple truths based in multiple perspectives that exist in one place. Christian rhetorical traditions function on the idea that there is an absolute truth that exists.

The contemporary classroom leans toward blurring lines between virtue and rhetoric already, as previously argued, which also is reflected in Christian rhetorical spheres. Although the nature of truth is different, the idea of a good function of rhetoric and the overlapping of moral and intellectual virtues exists. Understanding this, and understanding how virtue can be brought into composition and rhetoric classrooms, gives instructors new ways to lead their students to understand the function of rhetoric in a virtuous capacity in a public and academic space.

As previously discussed, in many ways, virtue theory not only serves as a source for theories such as feminism and critical theory, with justice being an Aristotelian virtue, but it is also concerned with conduct in rhetorical practices, with temperance, prudence, and courage being applicable virtues for rhetorical conduct. However, as is consistent with virtue philosophy, virtue theory in pedagogy cannot stand without being backed by the idea of intrinsic good, an essential quality of Aristotelian virtue. This requires a community agreement on what is good for the human condition, which requires compassionate motivations and open discourse. What I believe can be added to virtue theory to make it truly effective as a pedagogical theory for composition is the

involvement of compassion and the use of compassionate writing practices in the classroom.

Ultimately, using compassion-related activities with a virtue theory lens would bring students to a deeper understanding of the human condition and human suffering, which would hopefully lead to more effective prosocial writing practices in the composition classroom. Once again, this idea is based in many of the values and practices already encouraged in both academic and religious communities, whether or not they are explicitly acknowledged as being such.

Many theological virtues overlap with the virtues found in classical philosophy, and there is discussion surrounding the relationship between intellectual and moral virtues as well. Roman Catholic theologian and moral philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, helped to identify the quintessential Christian virtues by adding to Plato's cardinal virtues in his collective work *Summa Theologica*. In *Summa Theologica, Volume 3 (Part II, Second Section),* Aquinas defines virtues in two categories: cardinal and theological virtues; cardinal virtues include prudence, justice, temperance, and courage (1708). Whereas theological virtues, virtues concerned with the spirit include faith, hope, and charity (1239-1240). In conversation with the difference between moral and intellectual virtues, Aquinas removes the separation between the two and treats them as the same. In *Summa Theologica, Volume 2 (Part II, First Section),* Aquinas argues that although there are some distinctions between moral and intellectual virtues, there is a great deal of overlap, especially in the virtue of prudence (836). This is interesting because prudence can also be interpreted as a virtue of wisdom, discernment, and tact, which are all

essential in rhetorical practice and often engaged in rhetorical choices in writing instruction.

Another link Aquinas makes between the intellectual, moral, and theological virtues is that they all fall under the blanket of charity, or love. In *Summa Theologica Volume 2 (Part II, First Section),* Aquinas argues that charity is the aim and the motivator of good action, and that it the essence of friendship and an end in itself (1266). I think this is an important idea to understand in reference to virtue theory in the classroom and in response to conflicting ideologies as they occur in classroom peace-making discourses. Although love, charity, and compassion are sometimes used in similar contexts, I think it is important to highlight the nuances. Aquinas uses the term "Charity" in the traditional Christian sense, which comes from the Latin *Caritas,* and meaning God's love of humanity, humanity's love of God, or humanity's love toward each other (OED Online). Because of the contemporary confusion between the term "Charity" and its contemporary usage as a physical act, I prefer the term "Compassion," defined as "The feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it; pity that inclines one to spare or to succour" (OED Online). It is arguable that Christian Charity as it is directed toward humanity is spurred by a sense of compassion toward humanity.

Thomas Aquinas argues that love, which he refers to as charity in the traditional sense of selfless love, is the backing of all virtues: "If, however, it be understood of the love of charity, it does not mean that every other virtue is charity essentially, but that all other virtues depend on charity in some way…" (1272). Although individuals in a community may disagree on what defines virtue, I think the role of the need of

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compassion in discursive practices is something that can be agreed upon as universally

needed – from ancient discussions around the nature of rhetoric and what it should do, to

contemporary discussions around effective Critical Theory. Consequently, this is the

exact factor of the presence of compassion that seems to be missing in the discursive

practices highlighted by Sandel in *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Kanpol and

Yeo in *The Academy and the Possibility of Belief,* Blitz and Hurlbert in their book,

Letters for the Living, and Duffy in his article "Ethical Dispositions: A Discourse for

Rhetoric and Composition." Academic, public, political, and private discourses not only

need the desire for individuals to do right in a community and serve one another, which I

think virtue theory encourages, but also require that this happens with loving and

compassionate intentions. Compassion should be a high order concern for composition

teachers interested not only in critical theory and virtue theory but all pedagogical

theories.

Paulo Freire's use of Critical Theory, compassion, and his own faith as a Roman

Catholic exemplifies how all of these ideas intersect and overlap to create a

pedagogically effective classroom environment. Freire's foundational work for bringing

critical theory into the classroom, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* was written out of Freire's

belief in the importance of love and compassion in pedagogical practices. He places high

importance on love in the purpose of his work, love being both the mean and the end to a

better society. Regarding prosocial action and social justice, Freire argues, "true

solidarity is found only in the plentitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its

praxis" (50). He also makes his purpose for his writing clear in his preface: "From these

pages I hope at least the following will endure: my trust in the people, and my faith in men and women, and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love" (40).

The entire root of Freire's argument, an argument that has become central to critical pedagogy, is love. Freire's treatment of love as a means and an end in social justice is especially interesting when Freire's own Roman Catholicism is considered. This feature in Freire's work should open up the conversation about the importance of virtue in the legacy of critical theory, and also engage the discussion of the importance of love, compassion, or charity as being a crucial for these theories to be effective in their prosocial motivations.

Virtue theory, therefore, brings another angle to prosocial theories in that it depends on higher goods, love and good for the sake of good, as motivation to create more effective writing that addresses problems with the human condition. Compassion as a virtue, an action, is crucial in backing the other virtues. Aristotle writes in his work, *Nicomachean Ethics* that the highest goods are intrinsic goods, goods for the sake of good (9). However, in action, this is not something that can be done by choice: "For even if there is some single good predicated in common of all intrinsic goods, a separable one that is itself an intrinsic good, it is clear that it would not be doable in action of acquirable by a human being. But that is the sort that is being looked for" (8). As a result, I think the intrinsic good necessary for the most effective prosocial writing is something deeper than virtue, which is cultivating genuine compassion.

Aquinas and Freire's understandings of virtue not only contribute a better understanding of how virtue theory with compassion can enhance prosocial writing, but their pieces also serve as examples of prosocial writing based in their own senses of

belief. Freire in particular used his religious perspective to contribute theory and scholarship based in his beliefs on intrinsic goods, something I think all writers, "True Believers" or not, should be encouraged to do.

Many of the examples of problematic "True Believer" student writing given in the scholarship named in the previous chapter involve arguments on issues that play into dichotomous discussions. In examples of the character Josh's dilemma in *God's Not Dead,* the goal of his argument is to prove a professor wrong. I think this attitude toward using rhetoric to "be right" is what leads to the problematic discourses mentioned earlier. I also believe that trying to encourage prosocial writing while ignoring the profound effect belief can have on values is a contradictory endeavor. What becomes my proposed solution to tensions between religious and academic communities in the context of the increasingly relativist classroom, then, is an engagement of virtue, its origins, and its need for compassion as a lens through which writers can engage their own beliefs and contribute their ideas in a community. What I think virtue theory provides, especially a virtue theory guided by the idea that compassion and love as the source of virtue, is a new path of discursive practice for "True Believing" students as well as all students in the composition classroom.

IV. PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES AND PEDAGOGICAL OPTIONS

So, what kind of pedagogical practices can we encourage in the composition classroom, especially in first-year writing, that aim toward approaching writing with virtue theory as a means of overcoming discursive divides, such as those that arise out of discussion surrounding religious perspective? I think by looking at pedagogical approaches in terms of layers, we can create a classroom community that not only is open to discussions about morality and how it is reflected in rhetoric and public discursive practices, but a classroom community that also actively works together to contribute positivity into a community.

My desire is for students and instructors to develop courses that encourage students to understand and internalize the importance of writing through the theme of examining how virtue comes through in writing and how what the individual values is reflected in rhetoric. This would open up room for "True Believer" students to understand how their perspective moves them to prosocial action instead of being fixated on proving they are correct or justified in their religious perspective in a space that is perceived as being hostile toward religion in public and popular discourses. By encouraging a pedagogy through the lens of virtue, students explore their own values and how they apply to their personal, civic, academic, and professional spheres in what is often seen as a transient class, and to introduce them to academic writing as a means through which they can benefit others through the virtues and values that come from and interact with belief.

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Most students learn about the standards for academic writing they carry through the rest of their college career and beyond in first-year writing. As a result, I think it is crucial for instructors to create a space for refreshed dialogues surrounding virtue and morality in discursive practices that not only show that the writing classroom is a place where *all* voices can be heard, but to also teach healthy habits in discursive practices that will hopefully eventually be carried into the public discourses. For my own first-year writing courses, I hope to develop a space that allows my students to see how their own identities, values, and thoughts -- religious or nonreligious -- are linked in their writing in a way that can serve them beyond their academic goals.

The following sections are summaries of five different pedagogical practices that I believe can help foster a classroom environment that overcomes division and opens up discourse for morality, virtue, religious perspective, and academic writing. The first section begins with discussion around the practice of instructor mindfulness toward their own biases, expands outward to pedagogical practices encouraging students' learning to understand and articulate their own beliefs and how they are motivated by them in their discourse, and then expands outward toward leading students to produce writing that contributes positively to a community. To anchor my ideas to composition and rhetoric, I provide an emphasis on personal and public writing practices, and also rhetorical awareness of the persuasive moves that are used in the public to navigate difficult discursive scenarios. This is all scaffolded to then lead students to develop into writers who are aware of their own rhetorical choices and how they contribute in a community of diverse ideas. I see this process as a way to build students up to become writers who

create meaningful writing that has the potential to make a difference with their beliefs and identities.

I. Instructor Mindfulness

Although it is easy to talk about what we desire in our students' practices, I think it is absolutely necessary for instructors first to foster a high level of mindfulness about their own perspectives as individuals if they are going to take on the endeavor of creating a classroom environment that reaches across discourses that are often seen as conflicting. In the Introduction section of this piece, I gave a brief overview of how silencing occurs for "True Believer" students in the classroom. Toby Coley noted in "Opening a Dialogue about Religious Restraint in Graduate Professionalization" that religious restraint in academia occurs in verbal and nonverbal cues from peers and instructors, and eventually turns into self-restraint (400). Because of this, I believe if we are to attempt a pedagogy that opens up discourses and gives religious students, and all students, new ways to navigate difficult discourses regarding morality, virtue, and belief, instructors must practice active mindfulness in their day-to-day pedagogical practices.

In 1977, Glenn Matott won The Braddock Award for his piece "In Search of a Philosophical Context for Teaching Composition" in which he applied the pedagogical theory of existential Hasidic philosopher, Martin Buber, to composition pedagogy. Buber wrote his foundational work, *I and Thou*, in 1923. In it, he argued that individuals should develop meaningful relationships toward each other by cultivating meaningful interactions and valuing one another in more dimensions than means to an end (60). This is not a new idea to philosophy, but Buber's work is especially valuable in how he rhetorically frames this idea; we must shift from "I-it" relationships, "it" being phrased to

represent separation and the utilitarian treatment of an individual, to an "I-thou" relationship, "thou" being used to represent real, authentic, human connection (54).

Matott frames this in reference to composition by urging instructors to examine how instructors might address student creativity in writing. Buber's philosophy is able to be extended toward not merely treating writing as a product, but a product connected to a creator, the student. Matott summarizes what kind of role attention and viewing writing as an extension of the creator, the student, with Buber's existentialism might look like:

> For composition teachers, Buber's concepts mean, I think, that the teacher's expertise not in relation to the *person* as creator, not yet with the *process* of creation; rather, they point the way back to the traditional concern with the created *product* - but with difference. When in freedom, the student's creative instinct, operating through highly personal and inscrutable processes, has produced a created product, then the teacher *responds* to the product and thus to the creator. This response must be genuine. It need not – nor will it characteristically – reflect "unconditional positive regard," for the whole aim of the response is to assist the creator in achieving ever greater command over the medium through which the "instinct of origination" *and* "the instinct of communion" are expressed. (66)

I agree with Matott in that I believe Buber's existential approach to teaching and relation in the classroom setting is important for leading the creator, the student, to create meaningful writing. This is something that is done with compassion and viewing writing

as more than writing similar to how Buber argues that we should view a person as more than their person.

For instructors in composition, this means being mindful of one's own responses to ideas and tensions that they may be personally invested in. Both Gere and Coley highlight the risk of limiting intellectual growth that comes with silencing religious perspective in a classroom. For Coley and Gere, their treatment of intellectual growth is similar to Matott's treatment of creation and creativity in that they believe intellectual growth is extended out of an individual's perspective. In categorical approaches to religious student writing provided in the research in the second chapter, the approaches address writing as products, as opposed to created products that are linked to their creators. Often, as Matott highlights, writing is seen by the writer as an extension of the self. This does not mean responding to student writing with unconditional positivity, but it does mean approaching each piece individually with attention and compassion. This inevitably requires instructor mindfulness and a constant return to the question of compassion and fairness in pedagogical practices.

It is difficult to say that mindfulness will prevent all instances of tension, but I think it can help if part of the problem surrounding religious discourse in the classroom is an intangible sense of tension. Downs's story about responding to a "True Believer" student that led him to metaphorically give his student a "black eye" is a great example of an instance where some practice in mindfulness during and after the situation could have improved it a great deal. Downs tried to remedy what had happened by writing about categorical approaches, but perhaps what instructors need in such instances is self-

reflection on their own practices, and an assessment of their own active compassion toward their students in both classroom discussion and writing feedback.

Self-reflection and mindfulness toward one's own attitudes and biases against different religious and political perspectives is crucial for fostering an open classroom environment. I would not go as far as to say instructors should openly express their biases toward students in the class, but I say that instructors should practice actively acknowledging how they may come off with verbal and nonverbal cues toward opinions they may not agree with.

In the postmodern classroom, true objectivity is not realistic, and students must learn to consider their audience in their writing practices, which is primarily made up of their instructor and fellow students in the class. What we can do as instructors, though, is identify moments of our own discomfort and assess them with mindfulness. We can look at these moments and ask ourselves questions similar to the following: is this discomfort rooted in what they are saying, or how I feel about what they are saying? How can I respond to this compassionately and fairly? Am I considering this work of writing as just a piece of writing, or a piece of writing connected to a creator? Am I valuing the creator, my student, as a complex and valuable person in my responses? And in those moments after which we fail in our compassion, there is always room to ask ourselves: how can I do better next time?

If instructors are to encourage students to find commonality in their written discourses through virtue, aided with compassion, then they must mindfully practice it themselves in their pedagogy. Without this effort, we cannot expect our students, "True Believer" or not, to do the same with their writing and participation in public discourses.

If we are to encourage our students to write with compassion, we must first teach with compassion, *especially* in our approaches toward perspectives that may come up in the day-to-day that we do not agree with.

II. Students Writing Belief

To open up compassionate virtue-based discourses that are inclusive toward religious perspectives in writing assignments, I think the idea of a "This I Believe" essay early in the course can allow students room to become comfortable with manifesting their beliefs into writing in a way that is rhetorical and considers an audience. Because I believe that exploring the theme of virtue and belief is a strong lens through which students can learn rhetorical analysis and a mode through which they can produce writing that they find interesting and meaningful, "This I Believe" essays can provide them with an opportunity to be comfortable with exploring their identities in an academic context.

The "This I Believe" essay format is based on the public radio program, *This I Believe,* which originally aired in the 1950's, and was then resurrected on National Public Radio with new essays in 2005. All of the essays that are broadcast are accessible through www.thisibelieve.org. According to the site, in its revival as a radio show, producer Dan Gediman's goals for the program were "Not to persuade Americans to agree on the same beliefs" and to instead "begin the much more difficult task of developing respect for beliefs different from their own." I think the rationale behind the essays featured in the show make the "This I Believe" essay model ideal for opening up discourse in the classroom about belief and how belief can be written about in a way that is intended to foster unity and understanding between different ideologies. The free access to essays is

also a good resource for instructors to find essays based on any discursive themes they would like to cover within the course.

My idea of using "This I Believe" essay specifically in first-year writing comes from Howard Tinburg's chapter, "Working Through Theory in a Community College Composition Classroom" in the collection *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*, in which he describes using "An Essay of Belief" assignment early in his composition course to get to know his students, their beliefs and values, and their writing styles. He also uses it as a way for his students to learn how to form knowledge from their own experience (242). He cites this essay as the assignment his students enjoy the most, and it is also one he believes "produces comfort and fluency" in his students' writing (242).

I think this activity would be best served as being done early in the semester as a low-risk writing assignment, such as an early paper that replaces what is often a literacy narrative. One benefit of this is that it allows the instructor of the course to learn more about their student and their values. It provides space for the student to engage in writing that borders on self-expressive, which would likely contribute to the comfort in writing Tinburg mentions. If an instructor is interested in exploring narrative rhetorically, then this is an assignment that could be revised with research, or provide an idea for future research and prosocial writing assignments. The "This I Believe" essay is valuable because it brings the student into the classroom on a personal level, and allows them to participate in first-year writing in a way they may not expect if they are new to college-level writing. This is an especially valuable outlet for "True Believer" students who may be nervous entering into academic writing with their beliefs; the "This I Believe" essay

shows that belief is good, and students participating in this activity as a group brings awareness to the diverse perspectives that will inevitably occur in the college classroom.

One example of a "This I Believe" essay that I think serves the idea of using virtue theory in the classroom, and to introduce an openness toward discussing religious perspective, is Mohandas K. Gandhi's speech, "The Elixir of Growth," which was originally broadcast as part of the "This I Believe" series in 1954. Such essays could be presented as exemplar essays on articulating belief and reaching across divides instead of reinforcing them.

This speech is ideal as an example for this activity, with the goal of making peace between ideological divides for several reasons. First, Gandhi crosses barriers in religious perspective for himself in his essay: "I consider myself a Hindu, Christian, Moslem, Jew, Parsi, Buddhist, and Confucian." With the goal of reaching over discursive divides with "True Believers" in mind, essays such as this one, where Gandhi's where he shows his complexity in religious belief and how it impacts his actions and perspectives, is valuable. Gandhi's statement identifying a diverse identity in religious perspective crosses over religious divides, and because it occurs early in his essay, it is likely to be jarring as well. However, I think how he rhetorically explains how his beliefs manifest into his actions is even more important. He states that he believes that "rivalry among creeds degrades them" and continues to explain what he believes are the unifying and necessary factors for peace among all people.

Gandhi's argument also corresponds with the importance of love I discussed in my second chapter. Gandhi argues in his essay that the most important value between individuals is love: "Love between individuals is the elixir of growth" and, stating "My

love of my fellow men does not depend on their agreeing with me or following me. I smile on the dissenter. Disloyalty to my ideas is a gulf easily bridged by friendship and affection." Gandhi's speech thus exemplifies how love can be used to overcome ideological divides with rhetorical finesse. He also covers topics such as materialism, wealth, and oppression throughout his speech. However, beyond presenting several interesting topical issues, I think what this essay does best is provide an example of how belief can be expressed rhetorically to overcome divides instead of creating them. Because of this, it would be a great piece to not only bring into a composition classroom as an example of a "This I Believe" Essay, but would also be a great piece for students to write about or analyze rhetorically.

Using the model of a "This I Believe" essay for writing instruction is not new; the website for the radio program provides an entire section for educators and pedagogical applications, including guidelines, and a model for speaking comfortably and tactfully on belief in a way that encourages authenticity and considers an active audience. Although it is not a new or novel idea for writing classrooms, I believe it fits in well with goals for cultivating a classroom that engages values and open and respectful dialogue surrounding belief that will hopefully lead to positive community contribution.

III. Compassionate Writing Practices

Because of the necessity of compassion in opening discourse and engaging virtue theory-based writing practices, creating a scaffolding of compassion-based writing activities is important. Compassion-based writing activities are a great transition between belief and action because it takes personal belief and situates it in how we interact with others. Previously, I discussed how although critical theory is well-intentioned, what is

needed behind critical theory and is the root of virtue and contributive action in the community is compassion, or love.

The following activities allow students to engage pathos-driven material to appeal to students' compassion, and to connect it to local social problems. Students have an easier time participating in telescopic compassion (compassion that is aimed toward issues far away rather than employing compassion in the communities they inhabit daily) because of the media they are regularly exposed to. Current events that involve emotionally charged issues are frequently shared through microblogging, and the growth of websites such as Youtube.com, upworthy.com, and Vice.com have served as platforms to bring isolated or under examined social issues to light through videos. However, although shared media have made issues that may not seem close to home more accessible, it has also become a platform that encourages inflammatory discourses because of the factor of anonymity. Part of remedying these discourses involves connecting issues to the local and bringing an awareness of the humanity of people involved. Showing a video about an issue and then connecting it locally allows students to feel more connected by these issues, and connected to the humanity of those involved, but it also brings them to a new place of understanding and involvement to where they feel they can use their voice to create change.

One activity I propose is an activity that uses layers of impact, moving inward, to highlight social issues, and then having students reflecting through writing on different layers of their own relation to an issue. My "layers" writing activity involves thinking about distance in relation to social issues. The assignment begins with readings from narrative perspectives of those facing injustice. After the readings, I assign students to

write three paragraphs relating to the texts: I ask them to write down a story they heard about something similar happening to someone, a story about something related happening to someone they knew, and a story about something that related to them. The purpose of this activity is to play on self-oriented compassion to look at how an issue that may seem bigger than them or distant from their experience can still affect them.

The part that really inspires compassion in this activity, though, is the discussion afterward where students share their responses. In a diverse classroom, there will be diverse experiences. The discussion aspect of this writing activity is crucial because it brings to light the differences in experience everyone has and the varying levels of injustice individuals experience regularly. In a healthy and positive classroom community, sharing experiences through this writing activity creates more room for students to empathize with perspectives and experiences they do not share. Ideally, a composition classroom would have a strong community. The students often have a lot in common; first-year students are typically often trying to situate themselves in academia. A close-knit writing community in the composition classroom is ideal, and so although there may be diverse experiences, students hearing personal stories from one another would hopefully inspire a level of awareness about social issues that would ideally turn into effective prosocial writing.

Another activity I propose as one that could engage compassion that inspires social change is a writing regarding the power of pathos where I ask students to write and reflect about a time when their personal values were challenged by an emotional response toward someone else, and to consider what that meant about what they valued in that moment. The purpose of this is for students to reflect on compassion, and how their

morality or sense of virtuousness is either at conflict with or aligned with their empathetic responses. I believe this is valuable activity, especially in a virtue theory pedagogy classroom, because I believe the patterns of compassion in students, although they come with biases and variations in capacity, are likely similar. This writing activity, paired with an open discussion sharing of their writing, would encourage open discourse about virtuous actions and doing the right thing, which could be taken a step further with writing and discussing how awareness might lead to action. These low-risk writing assignments could also turn into narrative pieces that could be used as inspiration.

IV. Rhetorical Analysis of Public Discourses

  In the vein of compassionate writing, it is also helpful to introduce Jim Corder's piece "Argument as Emergence Rhetoric as Love" to more actively engage theory about writing that is loving and compassionate, and engages virtue in public discourses. I recommend using Corder's theory regarding love and rhetoric, and use it in a rhetorical analysis of a piece that has the intention of finding unity within difference and making peace between belief-based divides. Corder argues that we constantly situate ourselves in our narratives and that they are unavoidable in our rhetoric (17). Corder also argues that tensions arise when conflicting narratives occur. For many "True Believer" Students, this is likely one of the sources of discomfort in discursive practices in the classroom. Religious identity is like any other identity in that it guides an individual's choices and perspective. If we desire to give fair space to our "True Believer" students, we should utilize texts in the class for analysis that navigate difficult discursive spheres that are complicated by belief.

Two pieces that model such moves toward agreement and compassionate action across differences in belief are Bernie Sanders's speech at Liberty University and Pope Francis's Speech in Ankara Turkey. Analyzing speeches such as these is important for students so that they might consider how to navigate their own perspectives in a space that may not be in agreement with their personal beliefs. Each speech shows a careful rhetorical navigation that moves toward unity amongst differences in religious perspective through establishing a call to pursue common goals.

Bringing everything back to the original goal of addressing religious perspective, these two pieces in particular show how peaceful discourse can occur using the common ground of love and virtue. On September 14, 2015, Sanders made a speech at Liberty University, a conservative Christian university, urging evangelical Christians to find middle ground between Republican and Democrat parties to make decisions toward love and justice. In many of his points, Sanders defined what he believes to be just and unjust, and he refers to Bible verses regarding how to treat one another. Generally well received in his message, Sanders's speech provides an authentic attempt to reach across discursive divides that are often seen as opposing to find common ground, and urges students to make decisions based on common ground.

One of the points of common value or virtue Sanders uses to connect with his audience is the idea of justice and love. Throughout his speech, he outlines what justice looks like to him, and how he interprets that as public service and developing political policy that serves the population. He also established common ground between religious perspectives by noting that he is guided by a vision of compassion that is expressed by The Golden Rule:

I am far, far from being a perfect human being, but I am motivated by a

vision, which exists in all of the great religions, in Christianity, in

Judaism, in Islam and Buddhism, and other religions. And that vision is so

beautifully and clearly stated in Matthew 7:12, and it states, 'So in

everything, do to others what you would have them to do to you, for this

sums up the law and the prophets.' (Sanders)

These moves are a great example of the kind of discourse I think can occur in classrooms,

that relieves the tensions that occur with religious perspective in an academic setting, as

well as other tensions that may occur because of differences in political perspectives or

other types of belief. Sanders's speech at Liberty University navigates the rhetorical

territory well, and I think is a rich example of a piece that uses love and virtue to reach

across discursive divides relating to religious perspective. The speech serves as a prime

example of compassion, virtue-based discourse being used to motivate citizens to serve

the public sphere instead of using rhetoric and persuasion to be correct or bend the will of

an audience. As a result, this would be a great piece for students to analyze rhetorically

and reflect on for their own rhetorical practices.

One way I think this can be done is through Aristotle's Model of Communication.

This could be in the form of a paper prompt, or it could be in the form of short-answer

questions based in Aristotle's model, such as the following:

Speaker: How does Sanders situate his own beliefs in relation to his

audience at Liberty University?

Message: How does he use compassion in his message? What virtue does he use in his speech as a point of commonality between himself and his audience?

Audience: What points of commonality does he acknowledge between himself and his audience? How does he express kindness and goodwill toward his audience?

Effect: What does he urge his audience to do? What is his call to action? Do you believe his rhetoric is effective?

A level of rhetorical analysis of Sanders's speech that looks at it through a lens of unity, compassion, and virtue, gives students the experience of looking at political and religious discourse in a new way. This new way is one that finds common cause amongst differences, respectful and engaging in belief, political without being inflammatory, and in service of humanity.

This kind of analysis can similarly be done with Francis's address to the President of Religious Affairs in Ankara, Turkey. In his speech, Francis denounces religious violence, calls for active responses of relief toward those who are refugees from war, and calls attention to the damage war inflicts on the natural environment. Similar to Sanders, Francis calls for everyone's attention, political and religious leaders and citizens alike, to respond out of a love for humanity toward the needs of victims of conflict: "This requires the cooperation of all: governments, political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society, and all men and women of goodwill." Much like Sanders, Francis acknowledges his own perspective. As a pope and a Catholic, which is unable to be ignored, Francis uses rhetorical moves to call his entire diverse audience to serve a

common cause similar to Bernie Sanders's speech at Liberty University. An analysis of Francis's speech could provide a deeper rhetorical understanding of how belief can turn into loving rhetoric that moves an audience to action.

For Francis, questions that break down the speech according to Aristotle's communication line could be as follows:

> **Speaker:** How does Pope Francis situate himself in relation to his audience in his speech?
>
> **Message:** What are the two main ideas he argues in his speech?
>
> **Audience:** How does Francis establish commonality with a diverse audience?
>
> **Effect:** What does he urge his audience to do? What is his call to action? Do you believe his rhetoric is effective?

This assignment would be especially effective done in tandem with Bernie Sanders's speech because it provides an example of how a person of faith communicates to a secular audience. This is in contrast to Bernie Sanders, as a secular Jew, communicating to an audience of faith. Addressing how both Francis and Sanders navigate their rhetorical situations in similar ways could provide an especially impactful lesson for students about how faith, virtue, compassion, and focusing on commonality might be navigated rhetorically.

Both of these examples of texts embody a practical solution to addressing the tension of religious perspective in student writing. In the case of Sanders, as a secular Jew, he still finds a way to reach out and communicate a unifying idea based on virtuous action to an auditorium of students at a conservative evangelical university. In the case of

Francis, he navigates overcoming divides politically and religiously to actively make changes to address a problem that is common to everyone, which is taking care of the environment. Much like Gandhi's "This I Believe" speech, these two pieces provide interesting rhetorical examples of how someone might navigate faith to overcome discursive divides, and could prove to be interesting pieces for students to look at from a rhetorical perspective for teachers interested in engaging virtue theory.

V. Writing to Serve the Community

One last pedagogical factor I believe is crucial for instructors interested in engaging virtue theory with compassion, especially in regard to addressing "True Believer" interests in the classroom, is community involvement and service through writing. Writing that engages community issues and service allows students to explore topics they value, such as researching and working with organizations that reflect their personal beliefs, and then to write about them in an academic way.

Because composition is a required course for most students entering the university, it is difficult to teach units that engage the fields of all of the students that could be in a class. My intention, then, with this practice done through a lens of virtue, is for students to research and engage civic writing about organizations and services that reflect, or don't reflect their personal beliefs and values. The previous practices I have proposed involve an awareness that spirals outward, from instructor mindfulness, to students establishing their belief in writing, engaging compassion in their writing, and then analyzing how belief can be navigated rhetorically in a way that encourages unity. Naturally, the next step should be students engaging and researching how belief, values, and virtues can be acted on to serve a community.

This kind of assignment and feature could be anything from participating in community service and then reflecting on it through writing, to researching a specific service-based organization and writing about how its mission and the beliefs of its participants directly reflects the type of service they provide. This is where "doing right" with writing is emphasized, and every opportunity to write about a local, service-based topic allows students to acknowledge issues they value in communities that are important to them on a real level.

While reading Villanueva's course rationale "For the Love of Language: A Curriculum," I was deeply influenced by the description he included in the syllabus for his first-year writing course. In the description, he says to his students that the goal of the course is to "enhance your critical reading and writing abilities so that you will be prepared to participate in the ongoing discourse of the communities that matter to you, especially the academic community" (267). I believe if we are to encourage students to engage writing as a practice beyond the classroom, it is important to encourage writing in the communities that matter to them. For many students who come from a religious perspective, this includes their religious communities.

This is also inspired by Ellen Cushman's article "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change." Cushman, a bold advocate of community engagement, states in her essay that "activism begins with a commitment to breaking down the sociological barriers between universities and communities" (376). I agree that the composition classroom is a great focus for teaching students to be versatile, make strong rhetorical choices, and to write about things they value for others.

This theme of virtue and action should serve as a foundation for rhetorical exploration and means through which students can create writing that not only matters to them, but also urges them to think critically in this transient period in their education. The desire of this course is to extend these ideals into the multitude of spheres they inhabit as writers, beyond the university. I hope that the assignments and projects will cultivate a rhetorical awareness that will lead to appropriate writing choices in a variety of contexts both inside and outside of the academy.

All of the pedagogical practices I have presented in this section create a scaffolding to not only produce great writers in our composition and rhetoric classrooms, but also great citizens who write with the goal of contributing something positive and beneficial to public discourse about difficult issues. I think these assignments also sets up our students to respond to one another compassionately and with a desire to create unity instead of merely using rhetoric to be right.

When it comes down to "True Believer" student writing as being seen as problematic, I do not believe is it the nature of their beliefs that are problematic. In many ways, the tensions that arise are out of a perceived difference in value between academic and religious perspective. Because of the fluidity and the diversity of these two perspectives on a larger scale, the idea that they must be kept completely separate is unrealistic. Instead of trying to change the nature of beliefs by labeling belief as unacademic, I think it would benefit "True Believer" students, and all students, to foster a classroom environment that says it is alright to have morals, but that it is most important for us to find common ground with one another and navigate how we can express them rhetorically.

I argue that this can be done through practices such as expressing one's own belief toward an active audience, actively engaging compassion in low-risk writing practices, rhetorically analyzing examples that navigate these spheres successfully, and then physically exploring how beliefs can lead to action and service. Although the examples I have listed in this section are not the limit of how virtue, compassion, and belief can be explored in the writing classroom, I think they are notable and help soften the tensions that students of belief may feel entering the classroom. They provide rich ground for students to engage their perspectives in their writing practices fully and authentically.

V. CONCLUSION

At the end of my first semester of teaching first-year English at Texas State University, a student came to visit me in my office to discuss her final paper. Her paper, which was a research paper on Sor Juana as a Christian and feminist, was full of heart. Throughout the semester, this student in particular had engaged either Christianity or feminism in each of her papers for my class, even going as far as writing a research paper about how online dating practices on the social media dating app Tinder contrasted with common mainstream Christian dating practices. Needless to say, the creativity, humor, and intelligence with which she approached each writing assignment was a pleasure for me to read.

On this particular day at the end of the semester, our conversation turned to who she planned on taking for her second first-year writing course. To my surprise, she told me that she was seriously considering transferring. When I inquired further, she told me that she did not feel like she fit in at Texas State University and was looking at Christian schools in Texas. She was a bright, innovative, and creative "Straight A" student with a huge heart, and I was more than sad to hear about how she felt like an outsider in her first semester of college because of her faith.

As much as we try to work to create a classroom that is open to multiple identities and engages the idea of postmodernity to its best extent, we may still fail on some level. The accounts passed around regarding instructor responses to faith in the classroom are disheartening. Larson's story about the student whose paper was written off as being "a sermon" by his composition instructor shows the clear silencing that can occur in academia toward the expression of belief. On the instructor's side of the problem,

Downs's story about how he handled his "True Believer" student and his regret in his own response shows that the problematic responses to these tensions are not without regret on the side of the academy, but Yancey, Reimer, and O'Connell's paper, "How Academics View Conservative Protestants," demonstrates that there is a need for mindfulness in how we as instructors address these issues in our pedagogy. As Villanueva stated, we are not equipped to deal with students of faith. There is no villain in these conflicts, rather, a lack of a sense of readiness and sensitive and compassionate response to a type of discourse that has been far from mastered in our public conversations, which is discourse surrounding faith.

The stakes are high for students in their first year of college. As is the case of the student I mentioned who considered transferring, the academy is at risk of losing such perspectives. With the increase in minority ethnic populations in the United States, those are valuable voices we are at risk of losing as well. Closing off dialogues surrounding faith cheats students from understanding the full perspectives of their fellow students. Many students chose state institutions in particular because of the low price of colleges and do not have the privilege of attending a private religious institution instead; if we are to encourage true ideological diversity and if we are to encourage our students to embrace their identities in their writing, we must rethink how we engage the expression of faith.

I propose, then, that in order to create a space fairly for students of faith, and of all students who hold some sense of truth belief, religious or not, we should take another look at how we approach these students, the role of virtue, morality, and belief plays in the history of our field, and develop pedagogical practices that are geared toward opening up discourse with an aim toward compassionate and virtuous discursive practices. The

battle is not between religious perspective and academic perspective. Instead the focus should be peaceful and unifying discourse, developed with goodness and compassion in mind, battling inflammatory rhetoric that invokes fear.

I think the best place to start in this battle is by opening up our classroom discourses and to be unafraid to confront difficult issues as long as we are striving to find out what is the right thing to do. I think this also means opening up discussions about how religious perspective and belief affects our values and actions. And finally, I think this means teaching our students to learn to *do right* in a community through their writing, with confidence and security in who they are and the values and virtues they hold, instead of using rhetoric to *be right* as a defensive tactic. Because in the end, what should unify all discursive communities, religious, political, and academic, is the goal to produce something that contributes something *good.*

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