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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE

Bracing Civilization

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We don't have a special section in this issue, but we do offer a couple of very special features in time for the beginning of the new academic year, which have the added benefit of illuminating and affirming the foundations of our culture and tradition. To begin, we go on the road with itinerant literature, philosophy, and creative writing professor John M. Gist, "Tracking Tenure by U-Haul," as he recounts his frequent moves from college to college and, ironically, must explain, even to himself, his flight *from* the security and finality of tenure. This is the first time *Academic Questions* has published a lengthy career retrospective, and we think readers will find it absorbing, entertaining, and resonant of many aspects of their own experience, as Gist puzzles out his commitment to his profession, to teaching, to the university, and to the dark looming presence of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Also something quite different for *AQ* is "Acknowledging Things of Darkness: Postcolonial Criticism of *The Tempest*," in which author Duke Pesta handily takes apart the anti-Western postmodernist analyses of *The Tempest* that designate Caliban as some kind of indigenous victim of Prospero's European expansionism and exploitation. By the by, Pesta deftly manages to reconstruct the meaning of the play through old-fashioned fidelity to the text and its background. This essay is our tribute to the four

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hundredth-fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the Bard, and to accompany it, we feature an excerpt from *The Tempest* as our poetry selection for the issue.

Continuing to illuminate our cultural foundations, Toby Huff, in "The 'Eastern' Origins of Western Civilization?" substantiates even further his Fall 2009 *AQ* essay on the uniqueness of the West ("What the West Doesn't Owe Islam"). Huff shows how its distinctive achievements, derived from revolutionary developments in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, not only did *not* derive from the East, as is sometimes promulgated today, but *could not have*—given the focus, makeup, and constitution of Eastern cultures.

Crossing the Atlantic to the New World, past contributor Elizabeth Corey has some thoughts on teaching the Constitution in a required class at Baylor University, in which she strives to avoid both ahistoricist idolatry of the text as sacred and the ever-elastic malleability of the so-called "Living Constitution."

Another special feature of this issue is our short pro and con, or, more correctly, con and pro, "Massive Possibilities? A Forum on MOOCs." Do Massive Open Online Courses indeed carry the enormous potential to transform higher education, as some reformers believe? One shudders to hear of forty thousand students enrolled in a single course, but then again one might warm to the idea of many students having access to the expertise of the major professors in their respective fields. We have two entries against the proposition—Mohamed Gad-el-Hak's "Monologues of Learning," and NAS research associate Rachelle DeJong Peterson's "MOOC Fizzles"—and two supporting it: Herbert I. London's "MOOCs on the March," and Thomas K. Lindsay's "A Middle Path," the latter of which suggests that something substantial but less than massive may be the future of online learning.

Our reviewers in this issue mostly regard the books under their purview with a skeptical eye. Bruce S. Thornton questions Oxford scholar Mary Beard's approach in *Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures, and Innovations*, and as he does so reaffirms the importance of understanding and appreciating the classics for their beauty and insight into human nature, as well as "their foundational contributions to our civilization."

Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist, by radical environmentalist Bill McKibben, is reviewed by National Association of Scholars public affairs director Glenn M. Ricketts, who judges the book to be not so much an argument as an affirmation of faith in the coming of climate change catastrophe.

Allen Mendenhall finds much to enjoy in James M. Lang's *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*, but no clear pathway to prevent student cheating.

And in her second appearance in this issue, Rachelle DeJong Peterson reviews *Higher Education in the Digital Age*, noting author William G. Bowen's inconsistency and self-congratulatory complacency.

Peter Wood usefully assesses a number of new books on higher education in our Books, Articles, and Items of Academic Interest feature for this issue. And so we are launched into another academic year.