

Past published essays on Tabula Rasa:

From April 2022 Edition:

William, 8th grade

#### Privacy: Parents vs. Teens

There are always two sides to the problem of how much parents should monitor their kids' online and social lives. High school kids are especially at an age when they want to have privacy. They don't want their parents telling them what to do or what not to do, and they don't want to have to explain every little thing to their parents. This is also because they are becoming young adults, and that means they need to make some of their own decisions. The other side of the question is that parents always feel they know what is best for their children. They think that they can see the bigger issue or the bigger problem and they want to make sure their child makes the right choices. Also, it is true that there is a lot of danger in the world, and a child might not be aware of some of the traps they can fall into. Naturally, the parents want to protect their child from this danger. It's important for every family to individually come to an agreement regarding this debate. This way the parents have to allow their kids some freedom and some privacy as they are learning to become adults, but not excessive amounts that would harm them. Teenagers left alone to do whatever they would like without anybody to guide them and steer them in the right direction in life will not be very successful. However, they have to be able to make some of their own decisions, even if those decisions aren't necessarily the best one. This allows them to learn and make better decisions in the future. On the other hand, the kids having some restrictions placed on their privacy is equally as important because being completely free would not end up well for them. Parents are much more experienced in life in general and usually know what's important to censor their children from. It's a good idea to discuss any specific situation that comes up so that both the parents and the children know what they can and can't do. In life, you can't always have everything exactly as you want it, and the sooner children learn that, the better prepared they will be to enter the adult world.

Liam, 10th grade

#### To What End?

In our lives, it's good practice to set goals in our lives. May they be milestones that we want to accomplish or just little everyday things, we set goals to give ourselves benchmarks and ideas towards what we ultimately want. To what end, however, do these goals lead to? Where do the actions that we take in our lives lead us to? I find it rather important to have larger end goals that almost act similar to plot points in a book or play. They act as major goals, a culmination of all of our efforts towards what we want to be. Without goals, especially goals like this, we lose our path in life and (more often than not) can be harmed by our lack of direction.

Say that your dream in life is to become a famous chef. This dream is to act as the driving force behind what you do. Since it is your end goal, your life (and the direction you take in it) can and

should be towards this final goal. I'm not saying here that everything you do at every moment should directly help you become a chef, that's generally not how life works. Going to hang out with your friends, reading books that aren't about cooking, watching tv shows, or whatever else you may do in your life that isn't completely centered around cooking and becoming a chef is perfectly ok. The point, however, is that a good portion of our actions should be in pursuit of our goal. If I wanted to be a chef, I would practice cooking, learn about techniques and different flavor-matching ideas. I wouldn't spend all of my time on cooking, but I would spend a good portion of it working towards my goal.

Goals and dreams, however, will and should change. We are always in a constant state of growth, looking for what we truly want to do. Perhaps, you realize, as time goes on you no longer want to be a chef, but maybe a restaurant owner or a food critic. By taking the time in your life to reassess what you want and what you value, you enable yourself to move forwards towards what you truly want to do. When we start to undergo this process of change, it often doesn't feel good because we don't think that we are changing for the better, because we are too constricted in our beliefs about what is and isn't right. A (fairly obvious) part of growing is keeping an open mind towards the possibilities of what you could do, and making sure to take the time to understand what you want and if you really want it.

To what end is it that we find our life? Beholding our dreams is important, specifically so that we can mold and shape them into what we desire. Understanding the change from one moment in our lives to the next is important for growth for the same reason that understanding history is important for shaping the future political world. Without understanding where we came from, we will be doomed to make the same mistakes as before.

It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows. - Epictetus

I love this quote because it reminds us that we need to keep an open mind. When we are talking about our end goals in life, Epictetus would agree that it's very important to keep an open mind when thinking about it. Growth can only take place with it, after all.

Maxime, 12th grade

A Universal Language

In a world as connected as ours, where information goes around the world in a matter of seconds, we ask ourselves how to improve communication between people. Out of all the possible solutions, let us think about the question of a common language and ask ourselves if it would be better if humanity only spoke a single language. We must first define the concept of a language. A language is a tool of communication, that uses words with meanings and a predefined structure, to express thoughts. Therefore, a single language is the use of the same words and meanings, with the goal of being understood by others that speak and understand that same language. The obvious answer, from the point of view of the Doxa, seems to say that a common language would greatly facilitate communication of people around the world. Indeed, according to the myth of the Tower of Babel, if we have multiple different languages, it's because God has punished humanity. Therefore, it seems evident that re-establishing a common language for men

would be a way to go around the divine punishment. Nevertheless, a common language would lose the individuality and a part of the culture of peoples on earth, because each language has a certain richness.

Charlie, 10th grade

Was it my Own Work?

Whenever I accomplish something, I wonder how much of that accomplishment can be purely attributed to me, and how much of it has to do with luck or my situation and genes. Of course, I can at least know that I did the work, spent the time... For intellectual work, the quality is the most important part, and it seems to me that I can just naturally think the way I think, and therefore it has nothing to do with me. Even with physical work, where most of it comes down to practice and effort, there is still the thought that I am more physically capable than others just because I was born that way. All of this ties back to the idea of determinism, that everything is predetermined. More specifically, this is physical determinism, the idea that everything physical is predetermined and that everything psychological is purely a reaction to the physical. If the future is determined, then how much of what I do is really me? I may feel like I have the choice to do whatever it is I am doing, and yet what if I were to be put in the same exact position over and over again. Would I still always make the same decision? It seems to me that of course I would, because I would follow the same thought process and arrive at the same conclusion, but that would mean that you could figure out what I was going to do before I did it and so my life would be predetermined. I don't think that there is a real answer to this question because of how hypothetical it is, because no matter what the answer is, I still feel like it was my choice and it is my work.

Luke, 8th grade

When Should You Break a Trust?

In middle school, having friends is very important, and one of the most important qualities in a good friendship is trust. You know you can share personal things with your friend and that they will respect your privacy. Sometimes they may want some advice from someone who knows them really well, or sometimes they may just want to get something out of their system with a person they know won't spread around what they have shared.

But what should you do if your friend tells you something that is dangerous or self-destructive and asks you not to tell anyone, especially not their parents? That's a very tough decision. You really like your friend and want them to know that they can trust you. But on the other hand, you don't want to see them get hurt in any way. It's a dilemma, and it seems like whichever choice you make will have its downsides.

So, if your friend has started doing drugs, or is in danger from another person, like an adult, you need to figure out what's most important – losing a friend because you broke their trust, or saving the friend from something that could really hurt them physically or emotionally, or both. It's a difficult choice, but if you really do care about the friend, you will be doing them a favor

by getting them help for their serious problem. You may lose the friendship, but you will know you did something very kind that saved the friend from danger, and that is something to be proud of.

From September 2022 Edition:

Kingston, 10th grade  
Completion VS Achievement

Completion is not an achievement. As a child, my life was all adventures and achievements. Auroras in Iceland painting the sky with green and pink, waving and dancing like flamenco. A baby puffin chasing me around, its body spinning and jumping. Magnificent glaciers that shamed the Grand Canyon. These made me special. These made me proud. These were achievements.

Yet happy times flew. As I grew up, homework flooded my life to the point my mom believed that my bag was stuffed with a whale. Moreover, there were chores – dishes, laundry, etc... These were boring. Not useless necessarily, but something that needed patience. Sometimes I just gave up.

Well, one still needs to find new achievements. Other than reading, I also gamed, which really caused me a lot of problems. Yet, what could I do? The books and the video games were the only places where excitement resided. Point is, completion is not an achievement. Achievement leads to motivation, and completion leads to problems.

However, I was not a philosopher at that time. I came to the conclusion above when I tried to figure out my problem when my parents scolded me for not enjoying a vacation. It was Taitung. Before, the first thing that occurred to my mind when I thought of this place was sugar apple-flavored popsicles. However, that was not my first thought this time. Instead, it was the newly released game. In fact, I did not want to visit the shops or historic sites that had so interested me before. My parents also noticed my disinterest. At the hotel, my mom sternly asked me, “Do you really want to be here?” I absentmindedly replied yes, and escaped shame by sleeping. But I could not sleep. My feelings were indescribable, swirls of confusion that were corrupted with a guilty insight, fear and defiance shattering underneath, and I knew that I should be excited about the whole trip, but something in my mind did not experience that excitement – the tug of war between the baseless honor and the blind horror, I realized I was changing and becoming someone I didn’t like.

I still wanted to visit those places, because I did not want to feel any guilt or loss of not going there. Yet as I ticked the place off my list, excitement slowly faded away. Staying there became a completion task. Problem found, all I needed to do now was to solve it.

Funny enough, a game revealed the solution. There, players needed to do daily completion tasks to earn game currency. Contrasting to the dull view I had for completions, I was excited each time I completed a task in that game. Yet this clashed with my previous idea of achievement! There had to be a catch. Then the Eureka moment arrived. I could not experience excitement because I viewed all I did as a “completion!” Because of this, I slowly lost the

excitement of doing activities. However, since I still treated games as achievements, I did not feel bored despite repeating daily completions. Thinking back, I also did homework and chores when I was young, but I was motivated. There is no difference between achievement and completion if I view them as the same concept! Why, if I had that mindset, then I would be as motivated to do my homework as the time when I visited Iceland! Completion IS an achievement. Treat the two as interchangeable, and allow motivation to bring the best joy.

Urmi, 7th grade

Social media has quickly gained speed within communities of teenagers and youth. It has become a versatile platform with all sorts of content fitted to one's liking. Often, many individuals follow celebrities' on social media who regularly post content depicting their glamorous lives. Particularly some are fascinated by stars who promote pictures or videos of their perfect bodies, face, or even both. However, the truth most do not see is that much of the content on social media could be fabricated or fake. Celebrities sometimes undergo surgical operations, and teens consume their content, thinking they can become naturally like them by restricting certain foods and dieting. Unfortunately, this results in kids becoming impacted on their mental health. One may develop worsened eating habits to achieve body types like their idolized celebrity. This mental health issue has a standard reference to an eating disorder (ED).

EDs are life-threatening illnesses where one feels the excessive need to starve themselves and act irrationally to obtain their desired body image. ED can disrupt relationships, the food cycle, physical health, and mental health. EDs are health-hazardous because they leave long-term impacts, aside from the obvious discomfort of indulging in food. One may withdraw from social events and activities, become overly conscious of themselves, self-isolate, and experience suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety, and stress. Approximately 24 million people in the U.S. suffer from the two leading types of ED: 1) Anorexia (i.e., when one tries to maintain a below-normal weight by compulsively exercising and refusing food). 2) Bulimia (i.e., when one binge-eats food and then self-inducingly vomits it out). Roughly 10,200 people die from it every year<sup>1</sup>. Despite EDs being deadly, they have been on the rise. For instance, research shows that eating disorders rose from 3.5% from 2000-to 2006 to 7.8% in 2013-to 2018<sup>2</sup>. The illness is more prevalent in females than males, and the numbers continue to rise among the female population

It is vital that we take care of our bodies and put them first. What can someone do to stop it? It may sound simple, but the first step is to realize that one's health is declining. It would be best to start distancing from social media, how hard it may be. Then, depending on how deeply one has been affected by the ED, it is recommended to reach out to a trusted guardian or consult an emergency eating disorder hotline, providing further assistance. Finally, schools and guidance counselors could provide media literacy to help teens evaluate digital content more critically.

<sup>1</sup> <https://nutrition.org/eating-disorders-are-on-the-rise/>

<sup>2</sup> Marie Galmiche, Pierre Déchelotte, Grégory Lambert, Marie Pierre Tavolacci, Prevalence of eating disorders over the 2000–2018 period: a systematic literature review, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Volume 109,

Elizabeth, 10th grade  
Over Application for Colleges

The first big milestone of anyone's life is, in most cases, college. When the time comes to apply, choosing which ones to submit an application to is very important. However, a recent issue is over application. Since many colleges share the same format, a single application can easily be used to apply for multiple colleges at the same time which has been made easier by the numerous websites designed for that purpose. It's easy to go down the rabbit hole of applying for too much, leading to over application, which is bad for both colleges and students. For the admission officers, this means many more applications to read and can lead to a decrease in the quality of the process since less time will be spent on each one. For aspiring students, the acceptance rate will have to be lowered since they will have to accept less people if many more apply. Even if you get accepted, you are only allowed to attend one college. This means not all who are accepted will end up attending. This problem is exemplified with how much easier it is to apply for multiple colleges at once, making it harder for admissions officers in deciding how many to accept, as it's hard to estimate how many will actually attend. They may have to accept more than the limit with the expectation some will reject the offer. Meanwhile, students who fully intend to go to the school may not make it in due to the increased competition from others who applied without the intent to attend even if accepted. There are no penalties to this either, with no limit to how many applications can be submitted. However, even though it is allowed, that does not mean it is ethical. By applying to a school 'just because', it takes a spot away from a student who wants it while also putting a burden on admission officers. A limit could be placed on how many colleges a student is allowed to apply for, or encouraging them to do their research on which they truly want to attend. In an increasingly competitive generation for students, if everyone puts in the effort not to over apply, it gives more opportunities to others and relieves the pressure on both admissions officers and students.

From December 2022 Edition:

Chloe, 11th grade  
Education and Knowledge is Progress

“Knowledge is power. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” At least that is what Kofi Annon believed and similarly my beliefs aren't too far. Knowledge and education are a part of our everyday life, from when we were just learning to walk to when we will grow old and have grandchildren. It is what helps our generation, and generations before and after us, grow and develop.

For starters, knowledge is not merely facts from science but it also includes one's experiences. It is all the information and details that we have acquired that guided us during the past and now. Knowledge is what we know and have learned. Think about family secrets, such as grandma's recipes for the best apple pie. Think about what we learn in school, such as the Enlightenment. All of it is knowledge that we acquire from generation to generation. We

continue to add onto our knowledge as we expand our horizons and continue to explore. It keeps account of our past and our present, all which is looked back at by others and ourselves to learn from.

Education is based upon our knowledge. It is vital to our human life because it is our way of teaching and passing down knowledge. As we pass it down, it helps future generations to flourish, as they learn from our experiences, observations and past mistakes. They learn that adding nutmeg, instead of cinnamon, is better for the perfect apple pie. They learn the crucial role John Locke played in the Enlightenment. As they take all of it into account, it helps them thrive as a society and community along with making progress over time.

Without either, it could be possible that we would be stuck in the same spot, making no progress, and just continuously repeating the same mistakes. If we were to lack knowledge, there would be no means for advancements and our society would also lack the potential to grow. We wouldn't acknowledge the new information and facts that we have learned. And we wouldn't keep account of our past and present. On another note, if we were to be lacking education then we would have great difficulty maintaining a prosperous or any type of society. Furthermore, we would also be unable to learn new knowledge and experiences of others.

Taking everything into account, we can see the importance of knowledge and education. Without either our society wouldn't be able to evolve greatly over each generation. Knowledge and education provide us with the ability to make advancements for our community. It is evident that knowledge and education hold great importance in our lives.

Kingston, 10th grade

Dealing with a Fly

I hated flies. These pesky creatures knew only how to stay on your skin or on food. Yet when you swat at them, they only return after a few seconds. I also hated bullies. There was one bully called Jack. Always in a group, he took pleasure in jeering and bullying students. The group was often called to the office, but that didn't seem to bother them.

The bullying process started subtly, from occasional jesting to actual violence. Yet one thing was certain – I was bullied. I'd been bullied in my previous school. Now I was once again facing one. Just thinking of this made me feel so angry.

Jack would take my bag and fling it on the floor, spilling everything out. He would shout curse words and jeer whenever possible. He would encourage others to isolate me during group work. I protested. I shot back curses. I told the teacher. It never worked. They would return, day after day, month after month.

It was hard for me to comprehend what was in Jack's mind when he dedicated his life to angering others and staying in the office. Why couldn't he just leave me alone? I knew that teachers always said that you could not change others' views, but I was so furious I would do anything for that. I wanted to torture them, make them cry for mercy, and then show their actions to the whole world just to make them regret ever bullying me.

The bullying only got more severe. One day, Jack and his friends caught me unexpectedly when I was in the toilet and locked it. With the brown things sticking to the lid and unknown water on the floor, I could not help but wonder why I chose this toilet. I pushed the door but it wouldn't budge. I pushed the door again, it still wouldn't budge. I wanted to cry. I screamed. They laughed on the outside, enjoying my reactions. There were no people around. Flies surrounded my legs and enjoyed the drama.

Help came at last, but it was too late. Although Mrs. Tan came rushing into the toilet and released me, tears of shame and anger were rolling down my cheeks. Later, Mrs. Tan explained the situation to the principal with me beside her. Then a fly landed on her leg. She didn't care about it. It flew away. Though on the verge of tears, I suddenly realized something. Then my anger disappeared.