

Agnes Scott

Class of 2011 Last Lecture

**Remarks by Elizabeth Kiss
President
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I'd like to thank the Class of 2011 for honoring me with this fascinating, and intimidating, assignment: if you knew you had one final opportunity to teach, one last chance to share a message, what would you say?

In thinking about this assignment I drew inspiration from three examples of "last messages" that have stuck with me over the years. The first is a legend of St. Francis of Assisi that my sister Agnes once shared with me. St. Francis, it's said, was working in his garden one morning when some visitors approached him and asked, "Brother Francis, if you knew you would die this afternoon, what would you do?" St. Francis leaned on his hoe and reflected for a moment, then smiled and replied, "I would finish hoeing my garden."

I love this little story and the deep truths it conveys about a life well-lived. Can you imagine being so happy, so at peace with yourself, your loved ones, and your life, so committed to what you are doing right now, at this moment, that the thought of your impending death would not even ruffle your daily routine?

For me, the story takes on added resonance because it is a cherished memory of my sister Agnes' own spiritual journey and teaching. Agnes died very young, a few months shy of her 30th birthday, and – although her death was in a car accident and thus could not, in any conventionally rational way, have been foreseen – she seemed, in the final year or two of her life, to have achieved a preternatural wisdom and even some kind of premonition that her life was coming to an end. So when I think about St. Francis smiling in his garden I also think of my beautiful smiling sister. She had been the most brilliant, rebellious, and restless member of our family, but she gradually added to these qualities a striking serenity and self-awareness. My memories of her in her late 20's reveal a spiritual contentment that had not been present before. Her death when I was a first-year college student was an enormous blow – but it has prompted me, again and again, to reflect on her bold and creative life and the wisdom she attained and casually shared with me, as in this St. Francis story.

The second example of a "last message" that has influenced me comes from a speech I heard when I was a high school senior. I was competing for a merit scholarship named for a young man, Edward Crosland Stuart, who had died very young. Edward's brother Bill read a letter Edward had written from India, where he traveled after graduating from Davidson College, in which Edward drew a contrast between "shiny things" and "shining things." Building on his brother's letter, Bill Stuart admonished us to seek, and to treasure, that which is not merely shiny, but shines from within. Shiny things reflect the light in their immediate vicinity -- they have a momentary and contextual sparkle -- whereas shining things radiate light from within.

That metaphor of shiny versus shining things has stuck with me through all of these years. I guess I came to think of it as a sort of "last message" and challenge that Edward Stuart had sent to those of us who received the scholarship named for him.

Let's face it, unless you are a hermit, fakir or ascetic, we all love shiny things and spend a lot of our daily lives pursuing them. Grades, awards, popularity, promotions, salary increases, stylish new wardrobes, fabulous gadgets – we adore them and want them. But take a shiny thing out of its immediate context and it loses its sparkle. What was "in" is now "out" – in fact it is SO "last year." The new gadget is made obsolete by the next generation gadget. You go to a new school where no one cares what your grades were or what awards you got at your old school. Shiny things don't travel too well across space and time. As someone said to me recently when I confessed to having only sent half a dozen text messages in my life, "Wow. Email is so twentieth century." Shiny things don't tend to stay shiny – they don't travel too well across time.

Shiny things also don't travel too well across space. I had the opportunity some years ago to get to know Dr. Baruch Blumberg, who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1976. He told a funny story on himself which nicely captures how shiny things only sparkle in a particular context. (And by the way, the fact that he told the story as a self-deprecating joke demonstrates that he understood the difference between shiny and shining things.) He had taken up running in his 50's and was very pleased with the progress he had made. He signed up for a 5K race and proudly announced his plans to some of his departmental colleagues. One junior colleague replied, "Oh, I'm running in that race, too. Maybe I'll see you on the course!" Well come race day Dr. Blumberg found himself getting very, very tired after a couple of kilometers. As he slowed way down at the bottom of a long hill, breathing hard, his young colleague sprinted past him with a cheery wave and a breezy "good luck, Barry!" It was so irritating that Dr. Blumberg couldn't help himself and yelled out, "Okay, show-off. But I have a Nobel Prize!"

Yes, it's true: shiny things – even something as shiny as a Nobel Prize – don't always travel very well across time and space. If you look to them for happiness or self-worth, you will ultimately find yourself disappointed. I am not trying to suggest that it's wrong to pursue shiny things – in fact, let me encourage all of you to boldly pursue

shiny things like graduate fellowships, internships, and other honors. No, the important thing is to keep shiny things in perspective and to recognize that their value depends on their link to shining things. It's a lesson I've had to relearn time and again, a lesson it's easy to forget.

My third example of a "last message" may first appear to be as different from the first two as it is possible to be. Who could be more different from the gentle, humble St. Francis of Assisi than that supremely sarcastic critic of Christian humility, that blasphemous champion of the Anti-Christ, Friedrich Nietzsche? Just four weeks before he succumbed to a debilitating illness from which he never recovered, Nietzsche completed a book, *Ecce Homo*, subtitled "How One Becomes What One Is," which is a sort of intellectual and spiritual autobiography and last message to the world. It's almost as if Nietzsche, like my sister, had some sort of premonition that his life was coming to an end. In the book he reviews his life's journey and summarizes and reflects on each of his previous books. One of the reasons I love this book is that it boasts the most wickedly funny chapter titles of any autobiography I've ever read. They are:

Why I am So Wise
Why I am So Clever
Why I write such good books
Why I am a Destiny

Clearly, we are in a very different psychological territory here from St. Francis of Assisi. And indeed *Ecce Homo* is a prime example of Nietzsche's brilliant, at times infuriating, but always provocative thinking. For all of us whose world views are deeply shaped by Judeo-Christian thinking, it is a bracing invitation to rethink what we take for granted. Here's one of my favorite examples: reflecting back on the critique of modernity at the heart of his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche remarks, "theologically speaking -- listen closely, for I rarely speak as a theologian -- it was God himself who at the end of his days' work lay down as a serpent under the tree of knowledge: thus he recuperated from being God. He had made everything too beautiful. The devil is merely the leisure of God on that seventh day."

Now that's good stuff. In just three sentences, Nietzsche challenges me to reevaluate my views about good and evil, God, and more besides. He shakes up and widens my perspective. Here's another example: Nietzsche rejects the injunction to love your enemies, arguing that this puts your enemy to shame. "Rather," he says, "prove your enemy did you some good."

I like that phrase because Nietzsche's philosophy has played a role in my own life of something like a worthy enemy – someone I will never be able to embrace wholeheartedly but who does me a world of good by shaking me up. Indeed, I've found it is so often the people who make me uncomfortable, who challenge and

disagree with me, who have prompted me to reflect more deeply on what's shining, not just shiny, in my life.

But for all the ways the pointed rhetoric of *Ecce Homo* is the opposite of the gentle spirit of St. Francis, there are some amazing similarities of spirit in these contrasting "last messages". Consider this passage from Nietzsche:

On this beautiful day, when everything is ripening and not only the grape turns brown, the eye of the sun just fell upon my life: I looked back, I looked forward, and never saw so many and such good things at once. It was not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today; I had the right to bury it; whatever was life in it has been saved, is immortal. The first book of the Revaluation of All Values, the *Songs of Zarathustra*, the *Twilight of the Idols*, my attempt to philosophize with a hammer – all presents of this year, indeed of its last quarter! How could I fail to be grateful for my whole life? And so I tell my life to myself. (221)

And a bit later in the book he writes: "My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati (love of fate): that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it – but love it. (258)

So St. Francis and Nietzsche offer a similar "last lesson," after all: a well-lived life leaves you grateful for it all – the good, the bad, the ugly. At the dimming of the day you affirm and love it all. And so, given foreknowledge of your impending death, you'd be fine with continuing to work in your garden – or with "telling your life to yourself" as a writer – if that's what you happened to be doing on the fateful day.

So, what are the things about my life I've come to affirm and love – that I would want to just keep on doing if I only had a little time left? What are my "shining things"? What would the chapter titles of my version of *Ecce Homo* be?

Maybe something like this:

Why Ethics is Cool
Why I am crazy enough to love this job
Why it's important to "just go for it"
What makes my heart sing

Why Ethics is Cool: My intellectual journey so far has been a spiral circling around some key questions that are ultimately questions of ethics. I became a philosophy major because I realized I loved texts that everyone else hated. I was taking an interdisciplinary Humanities course sequence as a first-year student and when we read Plato and Aristotle everyone in my class just hated them. They complained bitterly about having to read these strange, boring texts. I thought they were utterly fascinating. So I realized it made sense to take more classes where we read these kinds

of texts. But as I took more philosophy courses I came to realize that what really fascinated me were questions in an ethical register. I could never get excited about questions other philosophy majors loved – questions in metaphysics and epistemology. How do we know this is podium? Are there other minds? I know that brilliant people have been intrigued by these kinds of questions but I just found them at best mildly interesting and at worst completely irritating. No, what I wanted to think and talk about was: How ought we to live? What is justice? What is a good life? How do people make the world a better place? How can I help make the world a better place?

Finding and pursuing the questions that interested me was a journey, and there were some false starts and detours along the way. For example, when I first arrived at Oxford for graduate school I found myself in a circle of philosophy students who were all frightfully clever and utterly engaged by questions in the philosophy of mind. Because they were so clever – and spoke with English accents to boot, which made them seem so much smarter than me – I spent several months trying to fit in and just feeling miserable and dumb. It took me a while, and some good luck, to realize that the problem wasn't me, or them, or my level of intelligence. It was that their questions weren't the ones I was passionate about. I had to find the intellectual circle where questions about human rights, justice, about gender and race and class, were central. I had to find the courage to say "ethics is cool" and I'm going to find other people who think so too. And I had to find, and in many cases stumble upon, the questions, issues and approaches that really engaged me. Feminist philosophy played a critical role along the way -- in fact I vividly remember two moments when a particular text, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* when I was an undergraduate and Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman's "Have We Got a Theory for You!" when I was in graduate school, made me sit up and think WOW. These are the questions I've been struggling to formulate. I didn't know anyone else was thinking like this.

Finding the space and support to formulate and pursue the questions you are passionate about is a journey. And because there is a human, all-too-human tendency to draw boundaries and hierarchies in intellectual life and then to measure yourself against those boundaries and hierarchies there were several points along the way where my confidence and courage faltered because I didn't fit in. For example, some people wanted to draw thick and sharp boundaries between what is philosophy and what isn't, or they wanted to label some kinds of philosophy (like ethics) "softer" and therefore "less interesting" than other kinds of philosophy. There were philosophy fellowships I applied for where I was told, "Yes, well, this is very interesting, but it isn't philosophy." I had to learn, again and again, that it was okay for me to say "ethics is cool," to follow the questions that excited me, to challenge the boundaries or simply to ignore them. In the end, I defended my doctoral dissertation with a committee consisting of one legal scholar and one politics scholar.

But it was more than figuring out which questions I wanted to pursue – it was also HOW I wanted to pursue them. Which brings me to my second chapter, Why I am crazy enough to love this job. After I left graduate school in England I managed to

land a dream job – a tenure-track professorship at Princeton University. The old boundary issues still came up – I applied for a job in the philosophy department and got hired by the politics department. But there I was, with a dream job. And I was miserable. Well, not entirely miserable – there are lots of things about my Princeton experience that I look back on with great fondness. But the research university assistant professorship thing just wasn't me. I loved teaching too much. And I kept wanting to get involved in things – in the Trenton community, or on university-wide committees – things that were, from the perspective of what I was supposed to be doing, a distraction.

What I didn't realize was that it just wasn't a good fit between, in Frederick Buechner's wonderful phrase about vocation, my deep gladness and the world's deep need met. It was a dream job – but not for me. I was lucky enough to get an opportunity to do something – run an ethics center – that actually did connect my deep gladness and the world's need, where I had an opportunity to exercise my interest and skills in bringing people together and trying to think about and change organizational cultures. It was an opportunity to pursue ethics as a practical vocation. And then, amazingly, I had a chance to come to Agnes Scott, a college whose mission I find so exciting and where I get to pursue the college presidency – a job that I think is fundamentally a job of applied ethics – in a community that affirms as its core mission the goal of living honorably. Yes, I am crazy enough to love this job. It suits me and it enables me to bring together the various parts of my being – intellectual curiosity and commitment to women's empowerment and love of teaching and the desire to work in community and change organizational cultures and ultimately help make a difference in the world – together.

So how did I get here? I had people tell me "just go for it!" that's my third chapter. When I was on sabbatical from Princeton and learned about the ethics center Duke was starting, my first thought was "That's a cool job. I'd love that job when I grow up. Of course, they'll never hire me." I was lucky enough to have a mentor who said, and I quote, "Don't be crazy, Elizabeth. Just go for it!" Again and again, I have been blessed with people who cared for me – including my wonderful husband Jeff – who said "go for it!" I can think of so many instances in my life when I shut my eyes and went for it even though I really didn't think I was good enough, smart enough, or ready. The first time I gave a speech. My decision to start an Amnesty International chapter in college. Leaving the settled career path of a tenure-track position to become a center director. Becoming a college president. Again and again, I've come to realize that if we wait to make sure we're ready... or that we have all the information we need ... or we are assured of success ... we'll never even rise out of our chairs. The climate commitment is an example of a decision to "just go for it" that has borne extraordinary fruit for Agnes Scott – and promises to do much, much more in the years to come.

Finally, then, what makes my heart sing? Love and friendship. A really good, thoughtful, complex ethical argument. A sense of community and of people working

together, bringing their passions and insights and at times divergent views to the table, all out of a love of a shared enterprise. President Obama talked about this yesterday when he said we may disagree but we all love America – that truly makes my heart sing. The glorious beauty of Woodruff quad in the morning. The opportunity to, in some small way, make the world a better, more just, more compassionate place. So, if someone came and told me today was my last day, would I just keep on doing what I was doing? Have I reached that level of love of fate, of spiritual contentment. Do I always know the difference between shiny and shining things? I have a terrible feeling I would probably panic over the length of my "to do" list. I am definitely a work in progress – and still, as I've often said to my husband, don't know what I want to do when I grow up. But I can say that I've had the chance to pursue questions I care about, questions about important, shining things, and to find meaningful work that makes my heart sing. That's a lot. It's what I hope for all of you, Class of 2011.

Lecture Notes on Regularity Theory for the Navier-Stokes equations. G. Seregin Oxford University. March 2, 2014. Chapters I-V can be regarded as an Introduction to the Mathematical Theory of the Navier-Stokes equations, relying mainly on the classical PDE approach. First, the notion of weak solutions is introduced, then their existence is proven (where it is possible), and, afterwards, differentiability properties are analyzed. In other words, we treat the Navier-Stokes equations as a particular case, maybe very difficult, of the theory of nonlinear PDEs. From this point of view, the Lectures Notes do not pretend to be a complete mathematical theory of the Navier-Stokes equations. There are different approaches: I The Last Lecture. II Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams. III Adventures and Lessons Learned. IV Enabling the Dreams of Others. V It's About How to Live Your Life. VI Final Remarks. Acknowledgments. About the Authors. I lectured about the joy of life, about how much I appreciated life, even with so little of my own left. I talked about honesty, integrity, gratitude, and other things I hold dear. And I tried very hard not to be boring. 1 Review of last lecture. NP-completeness in practice. We discussed many of the approaches people use to cope with NP-complete problems in real life. We can prove $LOGSPACE = PSPACE$, using a Space Hierarchy Theorem similar to the Time Hierarchy Theorem that we saw in Lecture 7. As usual, it's not hard to prove that more of the same resource (time, space, etc) provides more computational power than less of it. The hard part is to compare different resources (like time vs. space, or determinism vs. nondeterminism). 1 Introductory remarks. Before sixties of XX century the list of problems of classical and quantum physics that admit exact solution in one or another form was very short and included just a few examples (some problems on tops in classical mechanics, Ising model, Heisenberg model) They seemed to be exotic exceptions. In these lectures we will be concerned with classical integrable models described by nonlinear partial differential equations. In the first approximation, our world is described by linear equations, since a response to a small perturbation is usually proportional to the perturbation. During last few decades it was understood that. Instructors reported providing a common metric for reliability: one can judge a site in part by its domain suffix: .edu is better than .org which is better than .com. Logistical limitations were mentioned as well: comparing sets of search results is difficult with current tools. Results must be read aloud to the class, or students need to bring individual computers to the front of the class to attach to a projected display, disrupting class flow and prohibiting retrospective analysis of queries. In either case, it is difficult for other students to investigate more deeply, as only two stu