

Using *Lectio Divina* as an in-class contemplative tool¹

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I. Introduction

Contemplative Pedagogy represents one example among a collection of pedagogical theories, including Socratic and Critical Pedagogies, aimed at addressing the shortcomings of more traditional pedagogies, especially with respect to traditional pedagogy's perceived production of uncritical, unquestioning students (Gregory, 2015). Contemplative pedagogies and practices have a number of benefits for students, including increased attention, a reduction in distractive thoughts, increased creativity, and the ability to process information (Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2008), as well as the ability to integrate multiple self-identities and experience personal growth (Coburn et al., 2011). Further, contemplative pedagogies often allow students to engage with "hidden, pre-reflective realms of experience" that have been heretofore unexamined (Pulkki, Dahlin, & Värri, 2017, p. 227).

As one might expect from any contemplation-based theory, Contemplative Pedagogy seeks to realize these goals by increasing metacognitive skills like attention (Shapiro et al., 2008) and critical reflection (Coburn et al., 2011), often through practical, experiential reflection (Coburn et al., 2011; Gregory, 2015; Pulkki et al., 2017). Opportunities to engage in such deep reflection can often be hard to come by in one's daily life (O'Donnell, 2015).

Contemplative Pedagogy has engaged in a number of meditative traditions, often adapting secularized versions of practices from religious traditions with rich contemplative histories (Simmer-Brown, 2013). One such practice is *Lectio Divina* (lit. "divine reading"), a medieval monastic practice codified in the 12th Century by the Carthusian monk Guigo II.

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Though brief discussions of *Lectio Divina* have occurred in the formal and informal literature on Contemplative Pedagogy (see, e.g., [Barbezat & Pingree, 2012; Burggraf & Grossenbacher, 2007; Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2012; Craig, 2011; AUTHOR, 2018; Zajonc, 2016]), there has not yet been an extended formal discussion of the practice, its origins, its applications, and the practicalities of engaging with *Lectio Divina* in the college classroom.²

This article aims to fill that gap by discussing the author's experience implementing *Lectio Divina* in an introductory philosophy classroom as a tool for students to reflect on both philosophical material and their personal reactions to that material. My hope is that via this discussion, those interested in Contemplative Pedagogy generally and *Lectio Divina* specifically will have a fuller understanding of both the practice and how it may be successfully incorporated into one's classroom.

My discussion will proceed as follows: First, I will present a brief overview of *Lectio Divina* in Section 2. Following this, I will describe how *Lectio Divina* was incorporated into an introductory philosophy classroom in Section 3. Section 4 presents a discussion of the benefits and challenges related to the practice, and Section 5 discusses potential changes that might make future efforts to incorporate *Lectio Divina* into the classroom more fruitful.

2. A brief overview of *Lectio Divina*

As discussed in Duncan Robertson's (2011) exhaustive history of the practice, what is today known as *Lectio Divina* represents the codification of centuries of evolving monastic practice.³

In the scholastic tradition, reading was viewed as a process aimed at developing virtuous character traits. For example, St. Jerome, whose letters "offer strikingly vivid

² Indeed, several of the mentions cited above merely note that particular instructors have employed *Lectio Divina* in the classroom without any discussion at all of what the practice entails or aims to accomplish.

³ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is taken from (Robertson, 2011).

descriptions” (Robertson, 2011, p. 81) of practices that would later be codified into *Lectio Divina*, praised literacy as producing “a high level of intellectual and spiritual maturity” (80) that allowed for rereading, reflection, and the application of critical judgment.

Monks, for whom literacy was a prerequisite for entry, were admonished to read scripture aloud and meditate on its meaning. This was due in part to the expense of books at the time—though monks were not in short supply, Bibles were—but also part of an effort to internalize a passage of text and make the text one’s own. *Lectio Divina* discourages exegetical reading in favor of personal understanding; one of the main ideas behind the fully developed practice is that true understanding is fundamentally internal and cannot be imposed externally. As Foster describes the practice, *Lectio Divina* allows one to “enter into” understanding, rather than “dissecting” the passage under consideration (Foster, 1983, p. 24). The 20th Century theologian Jean Leclercq described *Lectio Divina* as the solution to the “studies problem” (Robertson, 2011, p. 5), or how to reconcile abstract learning with contemplation of one’s lived experience.

In the 12th Century, the Carthusian monk Guigo II’s *Scala Claustralium*, or *Ladder of the Monks*, collected a number of contemplative scriptural exercises into what is now recognized as the four steps of *Lectio Divina*: *lectio* (first reading), *meditatio* (repetition and reflection), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (rest in the presence of the Holy Spirit). Throughout the four steps, practitioners contemplate a short scriptural passage that is easily memorizable. For example, one might choose Luke 10:29, “But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

In the first step, the practitioner merely reads the passage aloud. In the second step, the practitioner repeats the passage while reflecting on how they understand the text. For example, the (presumably Christian) practitioner may focus on the fact that the speaker

wishes to justify himself to Jesus or reflect on the hubris necessary to argue against the Son of God. They might examine their own emotional reaction to such an event or whether they have reacted in such a prideful manner. Following this repetition and reflection, the practitioner engages in prayer spontaneously motivated by their reaction to the passage. They might, for example, ask for strength to avoid such hubris or forgiveness for when they have acted thusly. Finally, the practitioner reflects again on the totality of the exercise, what they have learned, and how this newfound understanding impact them, perhaps resolving to live a life of humility. Other practitioners might concentrate on other aspects of the text, like the question of being one's neighbor, and reach a different sort of understanding based on the different meditative focus. The Jesuit priest James Martin (2017) paraphrases the goal of each step as a question: What does the text say? What does the text say to me? What do I want to say to God about the text? And, what difference will this text make in my life?

3. *Lectio Divina* in the philosophy classroom

Though philosophy is often taken to be the search for universal, normative, nonempirical truth, this search is not the only—and in the case of introductory courses, not the primary—goal (AUTHOR, Forthcoming). Philosophy courses also aim to develop students' abilities to understand philosophical concepts, analyze arguments, develop personal philosophical views, and successfully engage in philosophical practice (Besong, 2016; Burkard, 2017). These disciplinary skills are themselves often based on more fundamental disciplinary skills like distinguishing between argument types (Turner, 2013), argument construction, and evaluation (Cashmore, 2015), as well as transdisciplinary skills like college-level writing (Burkard, 2017; Cashmore, 2015; Turner, 2013) and metacognitive skills (Stokes, 2012).

In developing these skills in our students, it would be wrong to ignore noncognitive features of students' cognitive practices. Besides ignoring the arguably vital role noncognitive reactions (e.g., emotional reactions like joy or disgust) play in successful reasoning, so doing would further fail to recognize students' cognitive development and reduce the probability that students will develop virtuous reasoning habits. For example, introductory students are often either uncritical, tribal realists about the nature of truth or uncritical skeptics of truth who view all 'facts' merely as matters of personal opinion (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, & Norman, 2010; Lochrie, 1989). Students also regularly face social pressures to not offend others (Erion, 2005) and to at least appear tolerant of views with which they disagree (Delaney, 2004; Erion, 2005; Irvine, 2000; Lewis, 2015; Momeyer, 1995).

Not all facts are universal, and not all views are deserving of tolerance. Put differently, sometimes it really is a matter of taste (e.g., the deliciousness of the cheeseburger), and sometimes it is not wrong to offend (e.g., describing Bull Connor as a racist). Ignoring or setting aside students' reactions to course material, both cognitive and noncognitive, makes students more likely to adopt problematic views of rational enquiry as a result of the above considerations—for example, naïve skepticism—rather than views that will help students successfully engage with the world around them (AUTHOR, Forthcoming).

I introduced a secularized version of *Lectio Divina* to my introductory philosophy class in an effort to give students space to explore their reactions to course material in a way that made them more aware of their reactions and how those reactions informed their views. As Barbezat and Pingree note, *Lectio Divina* can give students the rare opportunity to “sink into their experience of reading” (2012, p. 184). As outlined below, my hope in employing this exercise was to provide students with a space that would allow them to engage in sustained contemplation of a text that illustrated an important philosophical concept.

At the beginning of the semester, I discussed with students the history of *Lectio Divina*, the goals of contemplative pedagogy, how the modified *Lectio Divina* exercise would work in our class, and how, specifically, I hoped students would benefit from this practice.

The exercise took place at the beginning of each class period, following daily housekeeping announcements with a pre-selected text intended to illustrate an important or difficult facet of the day's topic. For example, in a unit discussing how we should react to our own deaths, the class spent a day discussing Aristotle's view that death is bad because it robs us of that which is most valuable to us—our selves and our experiences. Rather than use an Aristotelian excerpt, however, our exercise for the day focused on a passage from Don Marquis' "Why abortion is immoral," discussing why we think murder is an especially serious crime:

The loss of one's life is one of the greatest losses one can suffer. The loss of one's life deprives one of all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments that would otherwise have constituted one's future... When I am killed, I am deprived both of what I now value which would have been part of my future personal life, but also what I would come to value. Therefore, when I die, I am deprived of all of the value of my future. (Marquis, 1989, pp. 189–190)

Before beginning, students are encouraged to make whatever preparations they view necessary for engaging with the text, such as lowering laptop screens or sitting comfortably. After the class has settled in, I read the passage aloud to students. The excerpt for the day is included in the daily handouts so that students can read along.

For the *meditatio* step, I would read the passage aloud a second time and give students time to reread the passage and reflect on their reaction to the text. Initially, students were given approximately three minutes of reflection time, though this gradually shortened to about two minutes as the semester went on. As Fr. Martin described it above, the *meditatio* step gives practitioners a chance to contemplate what the text means. Thus, students were encouraged to reflect on features of the text like its main idea, why the author makes a point in a particular way, the difficulty of understanding the text, or one's emotional reaction to the text.

The next step, *oratio*, was perhaps the most heavily modified of the four steps for secular practice. Rather than have students pray over the object of their contemplation, this step encouraged students to participate in small group discussions about their reactions in the previous *meditatio* step.⁴ In the spirit of Fr. Martin's description of *oratio* as asking what one wants to say about the text, students were asked to share an insight that they had during the previous step's contemplation. Typically, this step lasted for two or three minutes and was frequently cut off, despite ongoing discussion, in the interest of time.

The final step, *contemplatio*, was another opportunity for students to reflect on the overall experience before beginning class discussion. Like the *meditatio* step, students were initially given about three minutes, though this gradually reduced to about two.

Following the exercise, I facilitated an all-class discussion by asking what takeaways or insights students had to the text we had just examined. It was stressed to students both at the beginning of the semester in the initial discussion and periodically throughout the semester that the goal of this discussion was merely to catalogue reactions, rather than examine them critically, in an effort to encourage students to share even tentative or potentially problematic

⁴ Conveniently for the purposes of this exercise, *oratio* also translates as "speaking" as well as "prayer".

reactions to the text. This discussion was allowed to run as long as students had contributions to make; on average, daily discussion lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. Overall, the exercise took between 20 and 25 minutes from soup to nuts, with some individual sections taking as long as 35 minutes.

This discussion served as a bridge between the *Lectio Divina* exercise and the remainder of the class. By giving them space to voice their views and reactions in a judgment-free context, students were able to begin the process of both working through their noncognitive responses to the day's material and engage in rudimentary philosophical analysis. As the instructor, I was able to collate student reactions in a way that allowed me to quickly note common areas of concern or struggle, points of interest, and content mastery. This allowed me to modify my lesson to maximize its impact on students; I had a sense of which concepts I needed to spend more time on, what seemingly secondary issues were worth further exploration because of student interest, and how student emotional reactions were coloring their responses to the day's topic. The ability to do this led to a number of benefits, discussed below.

4. The benefits and challenges of incorporating *Lectio Divina* into the classroom

Because much of the work students did throughout this exercise was personal—I obviously had no access to students' mental states during reflection and as the instructor, I deliberately refrained from inserting myself into small group discussions—much of my discussion in this section will focus on the end-of-exercise discussions. However, my experience with these discussions suggests that *Lectio Divina* played a beneficial role in helping novice philosophy

students succeed. In this section, I discuss both the benefits and challenges faced by my incorporation of this practice into my class.

4.1. Benefits of incorporating Lectio Divina

My experience suggests that incorporating *Lectio Divina* into my classroom has had at least four benefits. First, it provided students an opportunity to engage with the noncognitive aspects of philosophical practice, like attending to one's emotional reaction, in a way that many philosophy courses and philosophical exercises do not allow. Second, students were given space to express confusion, frustration, and other noncognitive reactions in a more accepting environment than is traditionally found in the classroom. Third, students seemed more willing to propose interpretations—even novel or non-standard interpretations—than is normally found in introductory classes. Relatedly and finally, this exercise provided a valuable opportunity for students to engage in important aspects of philosophical practice independent of my instruction.

Lectio Divina allows students to attend to noncognitive aspects of philosophical practice and gives students space to discuss certain noncognitive responses not normally found in class

For good or ill, our emotional and other noncognitive responses influence our reasoning. It would therefore be both inappropriate and inauthentic to ignore these responses. Often in philosophy, some of these responses are taken seriously in the form of intuitions (e.g., the seemingly obvious wrongness of murder), while discounting or ignoring other noncognitive responses like confusion or frustration. Further, we are sometimes unaware of these responses when we are not afforded the chance to experience them directly and reflect on that

experience. As Pulkki et al. (2017) note, contemplative pedagogy gives us a valuable opportunity to engage with these hidden experiences. Confusion and frustration are regular parts of even the most gifted philosopher's practice, and these responses are especially common among introductory students.

While much of the discussion following the *Lectio Divina* exercise unsurprisingly focused on textual interpretation in some way—such interpretation is often both familiar and safe for students—discussion was also able to reflect on and discuss important noncognitive responses to the text and the day's topic that students were sometimes unaware of absent the opportunity to reflect.

For example, on the day we discussed the excerpt from Marquis referenced in the previous section, students were able to successfully suss out Marquis' main point; murder is among the worst crimes because it robs the victim of the present and future value of their life. However, the students were also able to use the discussion as a space to discuss emotional reactions to the text; multiple students discussing the topic noted that it felt "heavy," "scary," or "dark." This was, in part, the result of having never expressly considered how students' mortality made them feel. Another student expressed discomfort with Marquis' argument not because of the narrow point about life's value and the badness of death, but because Marquis uses this argument to underpin a view the student disagreed with—the moral impermissibility of abortion.

For other topics, students felt much more comfortable expressing confusion or frustration with a particular text or topic. On days discussing aspects of metaphilosophy and the nature of art, students expressed legitimate confusion over the day's text, and nearly every day's reflection led to questions about the text, its meaning, the author, or the author's intention. Such expressions often went well beyond the typical, "I don't get it" of confused

students. In our metaphilosophy unit, for example, students asked precise questions about the meaning of particular sentences and phrases. During a unit on the nature of health and disease, students asked questions about particular terminology, wanting to know why one set of terms was preferable to another. A reflection during a unit on death and the meaning of life led to precise questions about Kierkegaard's leap of faith and what the leap involved. Such questions, in addition to making it easier to see where student difficulty lay on these precise questions, made general expressions of confusion more helpful as well; students who expressed such confusion were more likely to be genuinely, totally confused, which signaled where additional time needed to be spent helping students understand.

Similarly, students were comfortable voicing concerns that the arguments presented in daily excerpts were weak, incomplete, or insufficiently charitable. For example, students expressed concerns that a particular view of health and disease would lead to stigmatizing the mentally ill, that Kelly James Clark's (2008) argument from direct experience wasn't philosophy, or that Mackie's version of the argument from evil was mocking and contemptuous of genuine believers.

Students are more willing to offer novel and risky interpretations of class material

Because the stated goal of the discussion is merely to collect student responses with evaluation of any interpretations to come later in the class, students seemed comparatively more willing to offer novel, nonstandard, or risky interpretations of the text after we reflected on it, perhaps due in part due to contemplation's ability to increase creativity and information processing (Shapiro et al., 2008). In perhaps the clearest example of this, briefly alluded to above, students were comfortable voicing concerns that Clark's argument for God's existence

via direct experience didn't constitute doing philosophy, which in essence meant that introductory students with less than a semester's formal training felt comfortable challenging whether a respected philosopher was actually engaging in philosophy. Such interpretations can be risky for students, especially at the introductory level, and in all my years of teaching, I can't recall another instance of a student flatly declaring that what we did simply wasn't philosophy outside of this exercise.

Challenging whether or not Clark was actually doing philosophy was not the only novel or risky view to come out of the *Lectio Divina* exercise, though it was certainly the hottest take. During our unit on death, for example, students questioned whether one's desire to die impacted the seeming badness of death or whether Kierkegaard's response to the absurdness of our existence could justify wholehearted belief in conspiracy theories like the anti-vaccination movement. An excerpt from Morris Lazerowitz's (1970) "A note on metaphilosophy," in which the author notes that so-called serious philosophers must attend to the nature of philosophy itself, led students to question why it took thousands of years for a philosopher to express that view, whether Lazerowitz's claim meant that all past philosophy was somehow unserious, and what the impact of philosophers' previous seeming failure to attend to philosophy's nature was.

Naturally, some of the interpretations offered by students were problematic, incomplete, or simply wrong; though this exercise motivated students to engage more deeply in independent philosophical practice than they normally would have otherwise, they remained novice philosophers. For example, though Lazerowitz is credited with coining the phrase *metaphilosophy* and the idea of metaphilosophy as a distinct field of philosophical study is comparatively new, it's not the case that past philosophers failed to consider what philosophy was in some important sense. The value in this case comes from the opportunity

the exercise provides to students to risk these interpretations by providing a low-stakes environment. These interpretations provide a valuable jumping-off point for daily discussion; I not only have a better sense of what my students are thinking, but the interpretations are often either right or at least wrong in very interesting ways meriting further discussion.

Students are able to engage in independent philosophical practice

The final advantage offered by the *Lectio Divina* exercise in my class was the opportunity it afforded, mentioned briefly above, for students to engage in key aspects of philosophical practice independent of my instruction. As Gregory (2015) notes, traditional pedagogies struggle to produce critical, questioning students because such pedagogies aim to assess students mainly via repetition of knowledge first provided by the instructor. Similarly, introductory students often crave an environment where knowledge is transferred from instructor to student, rather than constructed, because of their present state of intellectual development (Ambrose et al., 2010; Lochrie, 1989; Perry, 1970).

As a result, one of the greatest challenges of introductory philosophy—though not one I think is unique to philosophy—is moving students away from the view that the instructor is the sole source of knowledge and towards student confidence in their own abilities to analyze, interpret, and construct arguments independently. In other words, one of the primary challenges I face each semester is how to get students to do philosophy either without me or alongside me. This exercise has proven to be an invaluable resource for realizing this aim.

For example, throughout the semester, daily reflections led to basic versions of the free will defense, discussions of the limits on God's perfection, conditions under which evidence-free belief might be appropriate, and whether there was a meaningful distinction between

death and an unrecoverable coma. In each case, the ideas expressed by students were concepts or arguments I intended to raise after the exercise had been completed. Further, these ideas are necessarily provided independent of my instruction because of when the exercise takes place during class; our reflection takes place at the beginning of class before I've provided any instruction, and throughout the process, I merely serve as a facilitator. While I'm facilitating, however, students are using the reflection as an opportunity to do philosophy.

The sorts of responses offered in this section and previous sections often just do constitute doing philosophy. Students are constructing meaning and interpreting views. They are attending to noncognitive reactions and how those reactions impact their beliefs. They are crafting objections and counterexamples. They were able to do this each day without my help. Furthermore, because of the bridge function the end-of-exercise discussion served, interpretations offered by students frequently formed the foundation of the remainder of class by serving as a jumping off point or callback when discussing the bulk of the day's material. A question about interpretation, for example, can serve as a valuable starting point when introducing a topic. A nascent objection can both be previewed during presentation of an argument (e.g., noting that a particular premise might need additional defense because of concerns raised earlier) and serve as the basis for a more fully-developed objection. In short, I've never done a regular exercise that has led me to respond to students with some version of "We're going to come back to this" as frequently as this exercise did.

4.2. Drawbacks and challenges related to in-class use of Lectio Divina

While there are a number of benefits that accompany the *Lectio Divina* exercise described above, there are some important challenges instructors who wish to implement this strategy or one like it would face.

The first major challenge this activity faces is the time involved in completing it. The four steps of the *Lectio Divina* reflection took approximately ten minutes each day, and the discussion following the activity took an additional 10 to 15 minutes. This meant that, on average, the entire activity took between 20 and 25 minutes, with some daily discussions pushing the total time to 30 minutes or more.

In my case, this was not a particularly serious challenge because class sessions lasted 75 minutes; even on days that generated the most discussion, I still had over half of the total class time to cover course material. The most serious impact the exercise had on my class was that it often precluded other group activities, since such activities tend to be similarly time-intensive. More seriously, not every instructor has 75 minutes for each class period; classes that meet for an hour or less are much more standard, and in such cases, the exercise has the potential to essentially swallow a class whole. There are some strategies that I believe could be implemented to mitigate both the concern that the *Lectio Divina* exercise would take up entire class meetings and the concern that it precludes other activities that I shall discuss in the next section, but I think it is important at this juncture to note the challenge that such an involved exercise poses from a time-management perspective.

The second major challenge I faced dealt with student engagement. During the semester I piloted this activity with my class, I taught three sections of Introduction to Philosophy. In two of the sections, the activity seemed to be well received with active engagement and robust participation, even if the discussion sometimes took a minute or two to get rolling. For the third class, however, engagement proved to be a serious, persistent problem. Reviewing discussion summaries for each section, the disengaged section regularly contributed less and seemed to move on more quickly in the third *oratio* step; while I frequently had to cut discussion short in this step for other sections, I moved on with the

disengaged section because either the discussion petered out or because it seemed to drift off topic from the snippets of discussion I was able to pick up. In such cases, there was no reason to delay the final reflective portion and good reason to accelerate it in an effort to prevent the exercise from coming off the rails.

Unlike the time commitment issue discussed above, I do not have concrete ideas for how to address student disengagement with the exercise; this general disengagement from one section was particularly difficult for me. Though I hope and suspect some of the possible changes outlined in the next section may work to address this issue, I continue to reflect in search of more concrete strategies.

5. What could be done differently

On the whole, I felt that the benefits *Lectio Divina* exercise I employed outweighed any drawbacks or challenges. That being said, I also feel that the exercise could have been improved both to address some of the challenges I faced and to improve the overall quality of the exercise. In this section, I offer some thoughts on how instructors who wish to incorporate the *Lectio Divina* exercise into their class might modify the practice outlined above to gain maximum impact from its implementation.

Keep in mind that students are likely novice meditators

The first thing I think could have been done differently, or perhaps more intentionally in this case, would be greater recognition that the students participating in the exercise are essentially novice meditators who have not chosen the class because of its contemplative component. In speaking with my students, few if any indicated any meaningful experience

with meditation or contemplative practice, and the incorporation of contemplative techniques was not an advertised part of the class. Though the exercise explicitly took these facts into account—for example, the beginning-of-term overview of what *Lectio Divina* was and why it was being utilized was accompanied by a range of resources to further student understanding—there were aspects of the exercise where greater implicit recognition of this fact would have been beneficial.

To cite one such instance, the time spent in silent reflection during both the *meditatio* and *contemplatio* steps may have been too long at first. Three minutes can seem like a long time to engage in silent, unguided meditation if one lacks previous experience. A major impetus for reducing the length of silent reflection throughout the semester from about three minutes to about two was the recognition that some students were struggling to remain focused for the entire time. Reducing the time spent on silent reflection seemed to help, but future versions of this exercise might benefit from a reduced period of reflection or greater guidance on how to engage in silent reflection effectively. In addition to the greater overall benefit such attention might produce, such attention may help with issues of student engagement; in short, a better-constructed environment for successful practice might reasonably be expected to lead to more engaged student participants.

Keep textual selections explicitly related to the day's topic

A second change I would make moving forward would be to keep all of the reflections related to the central topic itself. There are many ways for a text to be related to the day's topic, and some proved to be more fruitful for my students than others.

For example, during a unit discussing the nature of art, I departed from my usual practice of selecting an excerpt from the assigned reading or a closely-related reading, instead choosing a poem to reflect on.⁵ The goal was to give students a common touch point from which they could react and reflect on the theories of art we were discussing. In some respects, this effort was successful; having students offer interpretations of an intentionally meaningless Dadaist poem did an effective job of motivating antiessentialist theories of art, for example.

Upon reflection, many of the benefits found in reflecting on these texts might have been better realized by analyzing them in a different context. As Robertson (2011) notes, though *Lectio Divina* can have an analytical component that emerges out of an imagined dialogue between practitioner and text, the practice is not intended to be a merely exegetical tool. To do so would interfere with the open, unguided aspect of *Lectio Divina*.

Certainly, there were some reactions to the surprise twist at the end of one poem or the anger in some of the text, but the exercise itself tended to veer off into an analytical one, suggesting that a more analytical exercise would have been appropriate for those texts. In addition, spending time engaging with the poem, rather than a text focused directly on one of the day's key points, seemed to lower student engagement with the material itself; students seemed less sure-footed because they lacked the normal opportunity to reflect intentionally on the topic, rather than an exemplar.

Have students complete the exercise on their own outside of class

⁵ In this case, the selections were a Dadaist poem of my own invention, "The parable of the old man and the young" by Wilfred Owen, and a verse from Jay-Z and Eminem's "Renegade."

A third change that might be beneficial, especially if available in-class time were reduced, would be to offload some of the initial reflection steps. In discussion with peers about this practice, the main concern that has been raised has been the time involved. 20-30 minutes is not insignificant, even if one has 75 minute class times as I do. Thus, a common suggestion has been to offload a portion of the initial reflection as homework. For example, one might provide the text in advance and ask students to read, reflect, and journal as the *oratio* step, rather than discuss in small groups. Doing so would significantly reduce the amount of in-class time required for the exercise; perhaps all that would be necessary during class itself would be the final discussion after students complete the *Lectio Divina* on their own.

While this may be a fruitful strategy and I have mentioned it here because it may be best aligned with other instructors' intentions, I have avoided this for three reasons. I mention them below so that instructors who wish to adopt the exercise to their classroom can better understand whether this change would be fruitful for them.

First, completing the exercise in class provides a level of quality control, so to speak. If the activity takes place in class, I can be assured that all students, at some level, are engaging in the practice and can take steps to encourage or direct student attention as necessary. For example, if students seem distracted by their laptop screens, I can gently suggest that the exercise may be more fruitful if screens were closed. Offloading the exercise offers no guarantee that students are properly engaging in the activity itself, rather than, say, quickly reading the text and jotting down a brief journal.

Second, it seems to me there is some benefit to having the all-class discussion immediately after the exercise because the thoughts that occurred to students are fresh in their minds. This is not to say that there would be no benefits from the added reflection time

that students may engage in having done the exercise prior to class, but on balance, my pedagogical goals seemed to align better with an immediate turnaround.

Finally, I have endeavored to keep my secularized *Lectio Divina* as close as possible to the monastic form outlined above. One aspect of the monastic form is the collective nature of the exercise; texts were intended to be read together as a group. Given the changes already made to adapt *Lectio Divina* to a secular college classroom, I was hesitant to make additional changes that were not strictly necessary for the activity to work successfully.

Engage in the exercise less frequently

For a variety of reasons, I chose to lead each class session with the *Lectio Divina* exercise—the benefits of textual reflection were there for each day’s topic, it was fruitful to start class with a meditative exercise, and so on. As mentioned above, I also chose to engage in the practice in class, rather than as homework. This led to a significant time commitment. If the time commitment is of concern to instructors who wish to utilize *Lectio Divina* in class, one option for reducing that commitment would be to engage in the exercise less frequently. For example, one might lead students in this exercise one per week or once per unit.

Doing so would remove the benefit the exercise provided each day, but such a modification could provide much of the benefit with a greatly reduced time commitment. Perhaps, for example, one could lead a reflection on a major or overarching theme that presented itself over several days. Also, engaging in this less-regular *Lectio Divina* might afford the opportunity to reflect as a capstone activity, rather than a kick-off; meditating on a text at the end of the week or unit would almost certainly allow for different insights than would be manifest at the beginning of a discussion.

6. Conclusion

Lectio Divina has a rich tradition that lends itself well to in-class contemplative practice. This essay has sought to provide both background and context for the practice and an analysis of one course's implementation of a secularized form of *Lectio Divina*, including a discussion of the benefits, challenges, and additional considerations one might take into account when implementing this or similar strategies. Though the context of this discussion was an introductory philosophy class because this was the context in which the practice itself took place, it is my hope that the practice itself and the benefits it confers are generalizable enough that one can adapt the practice to one's own classroom regardless of discipline.

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