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OTHERS SAY ■  
THOMAS PALAIMA

## Excess in education hurts everyone

The ancient Greeks had two famous sayings that have been used as guides to ethical conduct even in modern times: gnothi sauton "know yourself" and meden agan "nothing to excess."

Diodorus Siculus reports in his "Library of History" how the Spartan statesman Chilon (sixth century BCE) carved these two maxims, and a third one, on a column in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi as offerings to the god. Diodorus declared that Chilon's apophthegms were worth more than all the magnificent dedications set up at Delphi during its long history by rich and powerful men, cities and countries. His sayings helped men lead good, humanly rewarding lives rather than accumulate wealth and power.

In Diodorus' view, we can only know ourselves by becoming truly educated. True education will make us wise, moderate and prudent. False education will lead us to wrong values and eventually to ruinous excess.

"Observing due measure in all things" was equally important. Chilon therefore advised that we should "prefer to lose money to gaining it dishonestly because the one causes misery in the short term, the other in the long term." Oliver Stone will never make a movie about this maxim.

Still reading about Chilon gets students thinking about moral and ethical values. In McGuffey's "New Fifth Eclectic Reader," widely used in the late 19th century, lesson XLII took up the theme: We must educate. It did not mean education to acquire the skills to make money, but education to develop "the conscience and the heart," because otherwise "we must perish by our own prosperity in our haste to be rich and mighty."

I have been thinking about what is called the "ethics flag" in undergraduate courses at the University of Texas at Austin. Ethics is a tricky and sensitive subject. It therefore tends to be avoided or given lip service in higher education. One assumption seems to be that, like former U.S. Supreme Court justice

Potter Stewart and pornography, we will recognize unethical behaviors when we see them, and also know where they will lead.

Let's take the recent scandal in the UT Law School as a case in point. As the American-Statesman's Ralph K.M. Haurwitz reported this month, An outside foundation provides private money that the dean controls. Is this a bad idea?

It is if the dean never read or thought about what concerned Chilon and McGuffey's Reader and awards himself a \$500,000 forgivable loan or if he offers a spokesperson the title of "visiting scholar" and \$101,292 and she accepts: Where would they get the idea that to do such "not illegal" things was OK?

As we might guess, they had a model ready to hand. The chancellor and all the presidents in the UT System have modest base salaries paid by state appropriations. They get whopping amounts of money from supplemental outside sources called excellence and gift funds or interest on temporary investments. In fiscal year 2011, UT President Bill Powers' base salary was \$65,945. He received a \$547,667 dollop from such other sources. Coaches' salaries work the same way.

But university salaries should be determined by guidelines based on a holistic vision of the true good of public education.

Wealth and power act upon ethics like narcotics. In the aftermath of the Penn State child sexual abuse scandal that has ruined the lives of at least 10 boys and those who know and love them, the IMG Intercollegiate Athletics Forum met in New York City Dec. 7-8, "a must-attend by college athletics glitterati." Penn State and its ethical issues were barely mentioned.

But Powers attended and spoke against reining in immoderation, or, as he put it, "We need to be careful not to punish success."

But we should punish what is called success, wherever it leads to habits of behavior that cause those entrusted with the common good to act contrary to sound ethics, in extreme cases, to leave young boys undefended from adult predators.

Why, after Penn State and many other intercollegiate sports scandals, would the president of our public university want to help big business go on as usual?

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