

Lyceum 139 – March 19, 2026, a forum to Think, Discuss, Share, and Learn from one another. Your input is welcomed - Iron sharpens iron.

Neighborhood “The 1826, in Connecticut, a farmer named Josiah Holbrook started a school for ‘the general diffusion of knowledge and raising the moral and intellectual taste’ of Americans. In those days, the opportunities for higher education were limited to those venerable old universities that had long served the upper crust. Holbrook’s vision was to make learning – practical, liberal, and humane – available to working people of all kinds. He named his school the Lyceum, after the garden where Aristotle once taught his students philosophy.... We need to go deeper than the superficial fights that characterize public life. We need to return to the first principles and meet each other there as human beings.”– Nathan Beacom, Plough Magazine, Autumn 2023, p. 9.

Will the real Jesus come forth – searching for the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith. As many would assume, the story of Jesus Christ isn’t limited to the Bible. Outside the religious texts, an impressive series of historical sources also testify to his existence. Imagine discovering that ancient Roman historians, Jewish scholars, and even early critics all left traces of Jesus in their records. These sources bring a fresh perspective, further bridging the gap between faith and history.

Roger J. Vanden Busch

Ancient sources confirming Jesus Christ's existence

Tacitus: The Roman Historian’s Testimony. In the Annals, written around 116 A. a sharp critique of early Christians reveals an accidental proof of Jesus’s existence. This work by the Roman historian Tacitus, who mentions “Christus” being executed under Pontius Pilate, shows that even skeptics of the time could not ignore his influence.

Josephus: A Jewish Historian’s Record.

Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, provides a rare glimpse into Jesus’s life from a non-Christian perspective. In his Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus acknowledges Jesus as a wise man and wonderworker and further recognizes his crucifixion.

Pliny the Younger: In a letter to Emperor Trajan, confusion about handling the growing Christian population highlights Jesus's influence on Roman society. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, notes their worship of Christ as a deity by 112 A.D. revealing the widespread impact of Jesus's teachings.

Suetonius: A brief mention of disturbances caused by followers of "Chrestus" in Rome around 49 AD highlights the early spread of Jesus's influence. In his biography of Emperor Claudius, Suetonius captures this moment, presenting a glimpse of how Jesus's followers were viewed in the Roman Empire.

Thallus: Attempting to explain the darkness during Jesus's crucifixion as a solar eclipse, Thallus provides a unique historical perspective. Although his works are lost, Julius Africanus preserved this account, showing how even non-Christians tried to make sense of the extraordinary events surrounding Jesus's death.

Mara Bar-Serapion: Comparing Jesus to other philosophers who faced unjust deaths, Mara Bar-Serapion's letter to his son reflects on the moral and philosophical significance of Jesus. Written from a Roman prison, this stoic philosopher's reflection shows how non-Christians recognized the impact of Jesus's teachings.

Lucian of Samosata: Mocking Christians for their worship of a "crucified sage," Lucian of Samosata, unintentionally affirms Jesus's existence. His biting sarcasm, typical of the second century, presents insight into how intellectuals of the time viewed the rapid spread of Christianity and its origins.

Celsus: Attempting to debunk Jesus and His teachings, Celsus's second-century work, "The True Word," ironically provides indirect evidence of Jesus's life. His critiques illuminate the intellectual tensions between early Christians and their opponents.

The Talmud: Scattered throughout the Talmud, references to "Yeshu" and His trial and execution reflect the significant impact Jesus had on Jewish communities. Although

often negative, these passages illustrate how Jesus was viewed within his own cultural context, marking Him as a controversial figure.

Julius Africanus: By preserving earlier references to Jesus, Julius Africanus played a crucial role in connecting early secular accounts with the Gospel narratives. His third-century writings, which quote historians like Thallus, ensured that critical historical evidence was not lost to time.

Phlegon: The works of Phlegon, a Greek historian and astronomer, record a significant solar eclipse and earthquake around the time of Jesus's crucifixion. Although his observations focused on natural events, they align with biblical accounts, adding another layer of historical credibility.

Origen: In his rebuttals to critics like Celsus, Origen preserved numerous references to Jesus from non-Christian sources. His third-century writings highlight the intellectual conflicts of the time and provide valuable documentation of the historical debates surrounding Jesus's life.

Tertullian: Roman records acknowledging Jesus's execution are mentioned by Tertullian, an early Christian apologist. Although these records have not survived, Tertullian's claims suggest that official Roman documents recognized Jesus's existence, reflecting his widespread impact even in official circles.

Clement: Writing around 96 AD, Clement of Rome's letters affirm the teachings and resurrection of Jesus, providing a snapshot of how early Christian communities viewed Him. These writings deliver early evidence of the spread of the Christian faith across the Roman Empire.

The Gospel of Thomas: Reflecting an early Christian tradition distinct from the canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas investigates the diverse beliefs about Jesus. Although not a historical account in the traditional sense, this collection of sayings attributed to Jesus illustrates His profound influence on various theological interpretations.

-Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible. Lawrence Mykytiuk's feature article from January/February 2015.

FYI – Monday, March 23, 7 pm, Fort Howard Theater, Bemis International Center, St. Norbert College. Peter Wicks (Elm Institute) discusses Alasdair MacIntyre's emergence as one of the influential voices with reviving Aristotle's virtue. The following essay I wrote in 2009 on Aristotle's virtue ethics for your reading pleasure and review. I taught introduction to Ethics: Principles and Applications from 2009 to 2020.

What would Aristotle say about the revised Core Abilities and Virtue Ethics.

Aristotle would be captivated by the 7 Core Abilities (from now on known as CAs) that are the fundamental and guiding principles of academia that inspire our students at Northeast Wisconsin Technical Community) to build their character and to aspire to academic excellence. The Greek word for "ethics" is "ethos" which translates into "character;" and the Greek word for virtue is "arete" which means "excellence." For Aristotle, intellectual virtues are achieved primarily through the process of education. The CAs are the goal and/or purpose of the good life, the fulfilled life, the responsible life, and the balanced life. In Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, happiness is the good life we seek for its own sake by living the virtuous life, the pursuit of excellence, which in turn establishes the breadth and depth of our character. Secondly, the CAs are designed to help students reflect upon and pursue Aristotle's "Golden Mean" between their individual fulfillment and societal obligations, and between their inner harmony and outer harmony with others and the learning environment. These CAs are the practical wisdom students acquire through education to make decisions in accordance with their own understanding of the good life. In turn, in pursuit of the virtuous life, students have access to the deepest possibilities of personal fulfillment, individual happiness, and an opportunity to live the good life.

Aristotle distinguishes between two dimensions of virtue: Moral and Intellectual virtue: By means of practice and habit, the CAs become moral virtues when the student strives to act in a certain way. They are moral virtues if one seeks a mean or balance between extremes. Basically, four of the seven CAs highlight the mean or balance between the self and others or the environment: 1. Demonstrate personal accountability: recognize an obligation to self and others for your decisions and actions; 2. Work cooperatively and professionally: apply effective work habits and

attitudes within the learning environment; 3. Solve problems effectively: provide information, analyze issues, and make decisions within a group environment; 4. Value individual differences and abilities: demonstrate respect for self and others through behaviors consistent with personal values, striving to live an ethical and principled life; 5. Demonstrate community and global accountability: give evidence that we are interconnected, dependent, and need each other for global survival.

Secondly, the CAs become intellectual virtues if practical wisdom enhances one's knowledge, reasoning, and understanding through the processes of education as exemplified by the remaining CAs: 6. Communicate effectively: apply appropriate and effective writing, speaking, and listening skills in order to precisely convey information, ideas, and opinions; and 7. Think critically and creatively: apply principles and strategies of purposeful, active, organized, and logical thinking. Thus, for Aristotle, it is a human function to engage in "an activity of the soul which is in accordance with moral and intellectual virtues" which are fundamental to the seven CAs.

Finally, Aristotle promotes ethics and wisdom. As previously mentioned, the Greek word, "ethos," from which we derive our term "ethics" simply means "character." For Aristotle, character is a set of dispositions or habits of thinking, feeling, and acting that make you who you are much like CAs. Wisdom is a form of understanding, an understanding of how we ought to live as evidenced by CA number 6: "to value self positively – to demonstrate respect for self through behaviors consistent with personal values, striving to live an ethical and principled life," and number 1: "to recognize an obligation to self and others for your decisions and actions." Aristotle's character tradition in ethics maintains that the core of ethics is not about good actions, but rather about good people. It is not primarily about what we do, but about who we are, as manifested in what we do. It is about settled habits of attitude and action that the CAs challenge us to become. It is important that for every class a student takes, the CAs become the surrounding and permeating presence of our pursuit of excellence while shaping and forming our character. As Aristotle reminds us, "It is easy to perform a good action, but not easy to acquire a settled habit of performing such actions."

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