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## *Introduction*

### A LIFE WORTH LIVING, IS TO BEGIN AGAIN

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The theme for our 2019 Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society meeting was Feeling, Thinking, and Doing: Education's Role in Creating a Life Worth Living. We brought William James to the forefront with the assertion that both the project of American philosophy and, by our extension, American Philosophy of Education challenges us to address the question, *Is Life Worth Living?* Recognizing that continual consideration and reconsideration of the relationship in education amongst emotion, reason, and action in the projects of meaning making and even in creating a *life worth living* are necessary. While this theme set the stage for our conference and the papers that arose, evolved, and are the substance of this journal, it also sets the tone for this introduction. As I reflect on both the conference and the subsequent polished articles, I find myself in a world that continues to challenge us daily in ways that were unimagined.

Is a life worth living? A rational response to the question is, "of course." Yet, William James responded with a pragmatic, "maybe." This response is one worth pondering in both our organization, The Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society, and here in our journal. It has been more than a year since the call for OVPES 2019 went out; however, it has been more than 400 years since 1619, when our American experiment was stricken with, and continues to suffer from, the disease of racism, enabling all forms of othering to continue destroying the human spirit. Our American experiment is currently in the midst of two pandemics: COVID-19 and the fascism of white supremacy. Should we consider not only if we can survive them, but how will we survive them and live *a life worth living?* I continue to seek out the opinions of members in an organization that I am a part of regarding what side of history we will find ourselves. The world is a very different place today. The world of education is in the midst of an existential crisis as school districts across the country are scrambling to 'reopen,' while at the same time America is on the verge of a great awakening following the recent lynching of George Floyd,<sup>1</sup> the protests and railing cries that Black Lives Matter, and the U.S. Government's response.

Sadly, on July 17, 2020, America lost two great civil rights leaders: U.S. Representative John Lewis and Macomb Illinois' own Reverend Dr. C.T.

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Fountain, "A modern-day lynching in Minneapolis," *Chicago Sun Times*, June 5, 2020, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/columnists/2020/6/5/21282034/george-floyd-killing-lynching-racism-police-brutality-derek-chauvin-john-fountain>.

Vivian.<sup>2</sup> We must learn from the legacy of two human beings who dedicated their lives to the struggle for civil rights. And we must strive to emulate their lifelong fight for justice through laws and education. Both men experienced beatings and jail at the hands of their own government—would we say their lives measured up to *A Life Worth Living*? I believe that both Vivian and Lewis would recognize and acknowledge James’s pragmatic *maybe* to the question, when asked about their own life’s work and struggles. Vivian wrote in the closing of *Black Power and the American Myth*, “We must think radically enough to begin reshaping this nation so that human values are supreme. We must begin to think about the question of survival, of survival for us all, and of how we want to survive. That is the most basic of all questions. *How do we want to live?*”<sup>3</sup> Vivian was asking this question as he was reflecting on the failure of the civil rights movement at the end of the 1960s. Fifty years later, I am asking similar questions. My rereading of both James and Vivian remind me that these are essential questions we must ask ourselves as human beings, especially as educators, and perhaps more acutely as educational philosophers.

It is not an easy task to conjure responses to James’s question *Is life worth living* and Vivian’s *How do we want to live?* I realize that these are truly interconnected. James’s own response of “maybe” is qualified by Vivian’s call for human values that exist within an existential crisis more dire than ever before for our species and our planet. Returning to our conference theme of Feeling, Thinking, and Doing, I am reminded of the role of education in the making and remaking of a democratic way of living where progress comes through struggle. I find the guiding words, “We have to run toward trouble that makes us afraid of life.”<sup>4</sup> We must choose life and face our troubles. To *begin again* recognizing our American experiment as both fragile and abounding with ignorance. Yet, it must be through a process of a love of humanity and our planet to strive for a genuine democratic community where all can flourish, if we so choose—to *make a life worth living*.

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<sup>2</sup> President Barack Obama awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to C.T. Vivian on Nov. 20, 2013. He might be best known for his non-violent stance that drew national attention in Selma Alabama on Feb. 16, 1965 when Dallas County Sheriff James Clark’s fist found Vivian’s mouth just prior to C.T. being jailed on a charge of criminal provocation. Adam Bernstein, “C.T. Vivian, King aide bloodied on the front lines of civil rights protest, dies at 95,” *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/ct-vivian-king-aide-bloodied-on-the-front-lines-of-civil-rights-protest-dies-at-95/2020/07/17/a08e640c-c838-11ea-b037-f9711f89ee46\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/ct-vivian-king-aide-bloodied-on-the-front-lines-of-civil-rights-protest-dies-at-95/2020/07/17/a08e640c-c838-11ea-b037-f9711f89ee46_story.html).

<sup>3</sup> C.T. Vivian, *Black Power and the American Myth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 135.

<sup>4</sup> Eddie Glaude, Jr., *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* (New York: Crown, 2020), 215. Glaude challenges his readers through an autobiographical lens and his rereading of Jimmy Baldwin to reflect on and become the multiracial society that our American experiment began with whether we wanted to or not in 1619.

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In the process of choosing life and turning to what troubles us, Eric Sheffield's thought-provoking presidential address and Deron Boyles's laser-sharp response regarding the role of mediums in shaping our meaningful lives is well timed in the midst of today's misinformation. As Neil Postman's questions are so relevant today,<sup>5</sup> so is Jennifer Logue's article focusing on truth, emotions and psychoanalysis. She asks us how we can channel our hatred for ignorance to make us better educators, while calling for and introducing us to psychoanalytically informed pedagogy well suited for these emotionally charged times. Anthony DeCesare calls for public schools to become rejuvenated in their role as places for civically engaged learning in our democratic communities. Without question these discussions are essential as we face "our troubles" and begin again to rebuild our nation following the dueling pandemics of COVID-19 and racism.

Emily Wenneborg's article regarding parental ability to opt out of curriculum based on consciences' claim verses mandatory curriculum is an intriguing dilemma when bias and stereotypes often lead to racism, sexism and gendered violence. Josue Lopez's article focuses on the intersection of colonialism and racism in action research as a methodological approach in the complexity of social justice research and our political commitments to action. Together these articles remind readers that education is inherently an ethical and political practice. Michelle Powell's article centers on all too often marginalized voices in our research and challenges us and identity politics as she introduces our readers to the ethical storytelling lens of Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero. Bryan Warnick's article recognizes educational policy as a Greek tragedy and interestingly draws connections between *A Nation At Risk*, the *Gun Free Schools Act*, and the *Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act* as educational policies perhaps covering up our own insecurities. These intersections amongst voice and ethical storytelling are essential as we reflect on the living of our lives.

Amy Kuiken's article identifies the potential hegemonic practices in Foreign Language classrooms that might be countered by a Freiran approach that may lead to a praxis aligned with Noddings's ethic of care. Nicholas Eastman's article warns our readers that nihilistic consumerism is a potential driver of our feelings and choices; lurking is the power of social media with its dangers and the inability of public schools to provide a counternarrative. Susan Haarman's article critically reviews community-based learning and deliberative democratic discourse as educational practices questioning their potential as they do not seemingly materialize into active participation on a civic level. Dan Mamlok's article is a call to recognize the potential ambivalence may have as a means for mitigating contentiousness in political and social matters: a timely discussion as our nation is wrought with racial injustices, misinformation and governmental and scientific mistrust.

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<sup>5</sup> Deron Boyles, "Media As Message: Technology As Reductionism," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 51 (2020): 19.

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Kathleen Sellers’s article acknowledges that democracy needs citizens with both the knowledge of and the willingness to practice political dissent. She questions when and where citizens will form these habits, especially if they are educated in a private school. Gabriel Keehn’s article explores the educational potential that affective anarchism can bring when we have genuine options in creating a world we desire: a thoughtful dialogue as revolutionary moments are more a possibility today in the wake of 2020’s racial, social, civic and economical unrest. Fittingly, the final article is Devon Almond’s exploration into the process taken in constructing a life worth living with intriguing conversations between Rumi, John Dewey, Rollo May, Parker Palmer and others.

These articles represent the quality and diversity of discussions that flourished at OVPES 2019, and I hope that they encourage and stimulate the reader to continue to engage the tension between both James’s question *Is Life Worth Living?* and Vivian’s question *How do we want to live?* as we continue to *begin again*.

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