and recruited Lee and others for the study.

Gathering data was much harder than Lee expected. A team of 15 undergraduates used floor plans, staff directories, and their feet to track down the specific office and laboratory addresses of the 7,300 Harvard authors across several Harvard campuses and Massachusetts General Hospital, as well as addresses for the non-Harvard scientists included in the study. Then they built a three-dimensional image of authors' locations, calculated the distances separating them, and evaluated the relationship between citations and distances.

Visit harvardmag.com/extras to see a map of collocation and collaboration at Harvard Medical School.

More research is needed to explain why proximity seems to enhance scientific productivity, the group says, but Lee knows firsthand the difference it can make. Early on, he worked on the fourth floor of Countway Library, while Kohane was one flight above. Eventually, Kohane moved to Lee's floor, and the two wound up chatting a lot in the center's kitchenette. "I became more active in exchanging ideas because of this experience," Lee recalls. "Science is all about communicating your ideas so others can build on them." ~DEBRA BRADLEY RUDER

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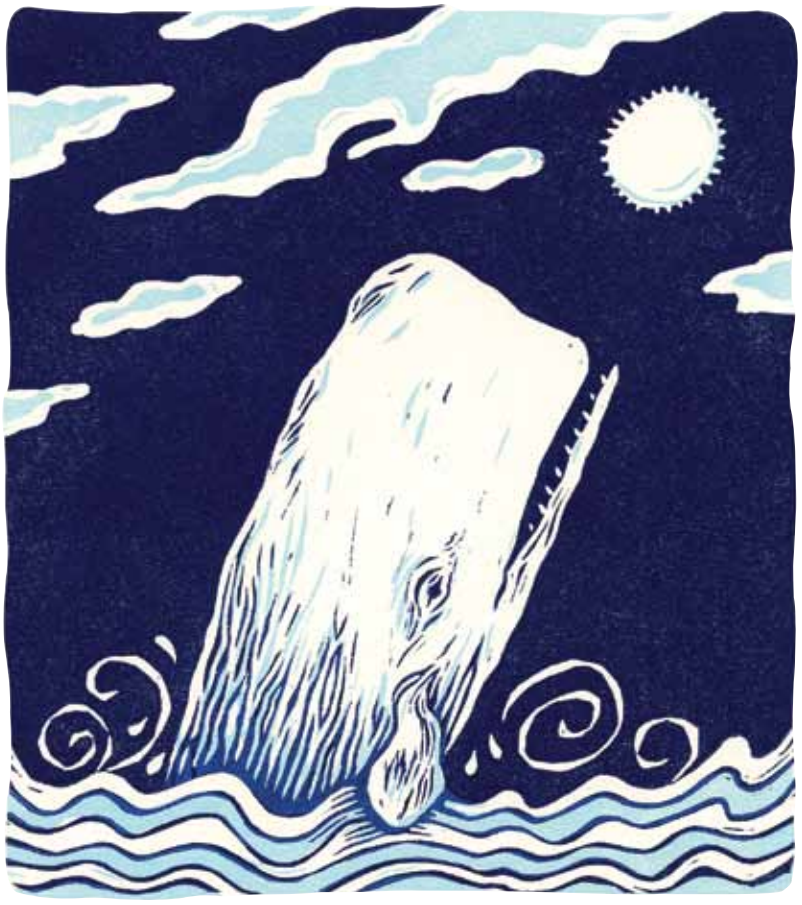
MINING "WHOOSH" MOMENTS

The Dilemma of Choice

In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab pursues a great white whale that years earlier bit off his leg. Ahab, says Sean Dorrance Kelly, is on a monomaniacal quest to answer an existential question: Did the "inscrutable" whale act unthinkingly, or with calculated malice? Caught up in "monotheistic fanaticism," Ahab wants to know if there is purpose behind what happened to him—and, by extension, in the universe. But Ahab is asking the wrong kind of question, Kelly believes: the kind that can never be answered.

Kelly, chair of Harvard's philosophy department, is embarked instead on a project to understand how, in what he characterizes as a largely post-monotheistic world, one can live a meaningful life. In a society without widespread belief in God, and increasingly without a shared set of common cultural values, he sees the potential for nihilism, the rejection of all religious and moral principles to the point that nothing matters. "The contemporary threat of nihilism is different from the one faced by nineteenth-century Victorians," he says, because never before have people had so much individual autonomy. Until relatively recently, shared culture largely dictated how people would live their lives: there was a system of beliefs, reinforced by social hierarchy, that meant people had very few, if any, existential choices to make. But today, the burden of choice has been thrust upon the individual. The problem is how to choose in such a way that one constructs a worthy life.



Kelly believes it is possible to train our characters to respond reflexively during meaningful moments in life. His first book for a lay audience, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*, draws on the traditional canon of Western literature, from Homer to Dante to Melville, as a means of laying out a solution to the problem of contemporary nihilism: the cultivation of a knowledge or understanding so deep that when the need to choose is called for—however unexpectedly—its possessors will act correctly almost without thinking, drawing from their community or cultural heritage the knowledge of what to do. One of the few such sacred or "whoosh" moments (as Kelly calls them) left in modern life occurs, he says, when a crowd rises spontaneously to cheer a great play in a sports arena. Most people can identify with that reaction, and he hopes awareness of this visceral understanding can lead to the development of other kinds of consequential, shared experiences.

"We're a bit like Melville's Ishmael," Kelly says of his coauthor, Hubert

Illustration by Neil Brigham

RIGHT NOW

Dreyfus of the University of California, Berkeley, and himself. "We're taking readers through the history of the West, looking for places where they might find or recognize some way of life that's worthy of admiration" so they "can decide whether to appropriate any of that for themselves." The book adopts "a master-apprentice" model of learning, "except that some of your role models can be literary characters...who recognize distinctions of worth in the world" that make "their lives become meaningful."

Although the book's argument is grounded culturally in the Western tradition, "the general strategy of finding texts that you can relate to" applies to other cultures as well, he points out. During a recent speech in China on general education, he recalls, he told the story of his wife's 92-year-old grandmother, whose education from the age of seven consisted primarily of memorizing enormous quantities of classical Chinese literature and philosophy—500 lines of poetry a day as she grew older.

"At a certain point she asked her mother, 'Why do I have to do this? These poems don't mean anything to me,'" Kelly relates. "And her mother said to her, 'It is true they don't mean anything to you now. But someday, an event will occur in your life and the moment it occurs, a line of poetry will pop into your head, totally unbidden. And the event will make sense in terms of the line of poetry and the line of poetry will make sense in terms of the event, and in that way, the meaning of your life will be tied up with the history of your entire culture. You will become a person who lives on the shoulders of the great culture that you have been brought up in.'"

Kelly believes everyone has "the ability to cultivate in ourselves the skills required to let us be grabbed by distinctions of meaning and worth" in the same way. Individuals have to work hard to become open to such revelatory moments, to learn to see and respond to the world in the context of cultural history. But humans, he believes, "are the kind of being that has the capacity to bring ourselves and everything around us out at its best."

—JONATHAN SHAW

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