

**THE INFLUENCE OF MORAL  
CAUSES UPON  
OPINION, SCIENCE, AND  
LITERATURE: A DISCOURSE**

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The Influence of Moral Causes Upon Opinion, Science, and Literature: A discourse by Gulian C. Verplanck

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**GULIAN C. VERPLANCK**

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A DISCOURSE  
DELIVERED ON  
THE DAY PRECEDING THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT  
OF  
AMHERST COLLEGE,  
AUGUST 27TH, 1834,  
AT THE REQUEST OF THE LITERARY SOCIETIES OF THAT  
INSTITUTION.

BY GULIAN C. VERPLANCK,  
LL.D., *Am. Coll.*

*Est intellectus humanus instar speculi inaequalis ad radios rerum, qui suam naturam naturae rerum immiscet eamque detorquet et inficit.—BACON.*

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NEW-YORK:  
HARPER AND BROTHERS.

M DCCC XXXIV.

**THE**  
**INFLUENCE OF MORAL CAUSES**  
**UPON**  
**OPINION, SCIENCE, AND LITERATURE.**

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in financial matters.

2. The second part outlines the various methods and tools used to collect and analyze data. This includes the use of surveys, interviews, and statistical software to ensure that the information gathered is reliable and valid.

3. The third part focuses on the ethical considerations surrounding data collection and analysis. It highlights the need to protect individual privacy and to use data responsibly, ensuring that it is not misused or shared without proper consent.

4. The fourth part discusses the challenges and limitations of data analysis. It notes that while data can provide valuable insights, it is not always straightforward to interpret, and there are often limitations in the data itself.

5. The fifth part concludes by summarizing the key findings and recommendations. It stresses the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the data remains relevant and that the analysis continues to provide useful information.

## D I S C O U R S E .

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*DURING* the last year the partiality of one of the colleges of my native state of New-York selected me for the discharge of a literary duty similar to the one with which your kindness has now honoured me. In performing that duty, I endeavoured to call the attention of my young hearers—who, like yourselves, were soon to join in the throng and participate in the struggles of active life—to the consideration of those moral uses and influences that ought rightly to flow from their recent studies and acquirements.\* The business of the scholar was, I urged, the study of truth,—of truth, either necessary, as in mathematical, and, to some extent, in moral speculation,—or else universal or general, as in the investigation of nature and the analysis and classification of the complex phenomena presented to our senses. Truth, too,—in another sense,—the truth of human nature, is the source of all literary control, and grace,

\* Discourse delivered after the commencement of Geneva College, 1833.



and interest ; for it is the reality or the faithful echo of human feeling alone that can awaken and keep alive human sympathy ; and without these, literary fame and influence must be but local and ephemeral.

But the natural and legitimate tendency of the knowledge and feeling of all sorts of truth, though capable of abuse and perversion—must be, cannot but be, in unison with sound morals. The enlightened understanding gives light to the conscience ; the genius, once fired by the contemplation of man's duties and powers and of his Maker's wisdom, will warm the affections and heart. Any other result—and quite another result is but too frequent—is the deliberate and wicked perversion of Heaven's best gifts entrusted to the discretion of man, and a violation of the declared design of their Author legibly inscribed upon them. The gifts of science and learning bear upon them the evidence that they were designed for the diffusion of happiness and for the elevation of the human race in the scale of universal being. They were confided to man that he might be the instrument of beneficence towards his race. The pervading fact that the results of science and the accumulations of knowledge are far beyond the means of any single and unaided intellect to work out for itself, reads to the scholar the silent but impressive lesson, that, as he owes these treasures to the conjoint labours of many others, so it is also for the good of others that he is bound to employ them.

The difficulties and doubts that overcloud our best knowledge show us our weakness and teach us humility, whilst the grandeur of the Creator's works and laws places in the strongest light, by the contrast, the littleness of all human pride, the falseness of the glories, and the insignificance of the vexations of life. The discipline of the mind in the search for scientific truth habituates the student to the consideration of leading principles on all subjects, and can thus emancipate him (unless he make himself a voluntary slave) from the control of mere authority, of interest, of habit, or of passion, in the formation of those opinions which are to be the guides of intelligent action in life. Thus may he be enabled to preserve for himself a consistency of character and thought, above the fluctuations and continual self-contradictions of sects and parties, above the temptations of personal interests, above the weakness and caprices of passion and pride, of base fear or low desire. Taught to strive for the dominion of truth and not for the victory of party, he will find, in that reverence for truth as an ultimate end, a sure antidote to the bitter poison of intolerance. Thus, the larger and the clearer his views of creation and its mighty laws, of man and his mysterious powers, duties, and destinies, the more distinct ought naturally to become his perception of moral accountability, the greater, too, may be his freedom from the thralldom of sense, and the nobler his capacity for beneficent action.

But whilst such are the right and natural, they are, unhappily, by no means, the necessary influences of these rich gifts and glorious privileges. Mathematical and physical science may but furnish arms to tyranny, or, worse than that, forge the weapons of sophistry against the dearest consolations and hopes of man. The imagination, cultivated by taste, enriched by learning, may become—as it, indeed, has too often actually become!—incorporate with and subservient to the poorest lusts ; so that, like the foul sorceress described by Milton as keeping hell's adamantine gates, whilst it rears its goodly front towards the skies, beaming with seductive beauty, it, at the same time, winds its poisonous length in many a scaly fold, far along upon the earth ;

————— a serpent armed  
With mortal sting. —————

Such is the dread responsibility accompanying the gifts of talent and knowledge—such their benign, natural use—such and so dire their effect when abused.

With topics and arguments like these, I endeavoured to impress upon the young and ardent minds whom I then addressed, the conviction that knowledge was not merely power, but that it ought to be, and might be virtue. It was a grand and fertile subject, to which the best powers of reasoning and eloquence would have scarcely been able to do justice within the narrow limits of a single academic discourse. In tracing, therefore,