



Painting by N.C. WYETH

Not Just Hype

Youth philosophy conference generates wonder

“Wonder is the feeling of the philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.” – Plato

Wonder is a good thing. When I came away from the 9th Annual HYPE (Hosting Young Philosophy Enthusiasts) Conference held two weeks ago at the University of New Hampshire, I came away with more questions than answers and that is, after all, the point. I was also struck by the energy and enthusiasm of the 1,000 New Hampshire high school students who had basically never met before, and their willingness to gather together to wonder as a community to ponder the question “What does democracy look like?”

In thinking about an image to capture the intangible idea of philosophy, I was reminded of my visit a few years ago



D. QUINCY WHITNEY

to the Hereford Cathedral in Hereford, England, home of the Mappa Mundi, the oldest medieval world map in the world and the largest chained library.

In Medieval times, a collection of 150 books constituted a major library. These hand-manuscripted and hand-bound volumes mostly on the topic

of law and religion were irreplaceable and therefore exceedingly valuable. Cathedral librarians solved the problem of potential theft by chaining the books to the shelves. Today the Hereford Chained Library contains 1500 rare books the largest chained library in existence.

Books contain ideas, knowledge, beliefs, and superstitions. Old books are of course especially precious like some beliefs we hold dear. But the chained library then took on another meaning for me. How many wars and deaths have been caused because of people chained to their beliefs or their superstitions tethered so strongly to their precious library of thoughts that the chains preclude them from standing in another's shoes?