

A Canon Philosophy

In this section, we will publish a series of Personal Canons. You are invited to contribute yours as well. The working title "From and Ample Nation: Literature, Medicine, and a Personal Canon" refers to Emily Dickenson's poem:

The soul selects her own Society --
Then -- shuts the door --
On her divine Majority --
Present no more --

Unmoved -- she notes the Chariots -- pausing --
At her low Gate --
Unmoved -- an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat --

I've known her -- from an ample nation --
Choose One --
Then -- close the Valves of her attention --
Like stone --

Like Emily Dickinson, each of us selects a few boon companions from the thousands of books available. Our thesis is that spending time with great minds, through their writings, is essential to being a complete physician, healer, care giver.

You are invited to select ten books, poems, essays, articles that quickly come to mind as those which have greatly influenced you or which you would want your

students, trainees or colleagues to have read. These do not have to be classics (indeed our lists contain contemporary books and essays that are inspirational as well as works that have been in existence for hundreds or thousands of years. The distinction Horace makes in *Ars Poetica* fits here. He divides good authors into those who simply delight and the great ones who mix the useful with the sweet: "qui miscuit utile dulci." This is where the Canon Project is going.

To date, we have collected almost fifty personal canons. Some respondents have listed individual poems as well - and this is acceptable. Others have included movies - and this is fine, too.

At some point, we will place all of the canons on a web site and make them available to medical libraries and the public. They will form a core humanities library of sorts for health professionals and students who wish to look further than their science and technology. What "Why Read" addresses is the contributors' ideas of what 'creative reading' for a physician, nurse or other health care professional or future caregiver should comprise.