

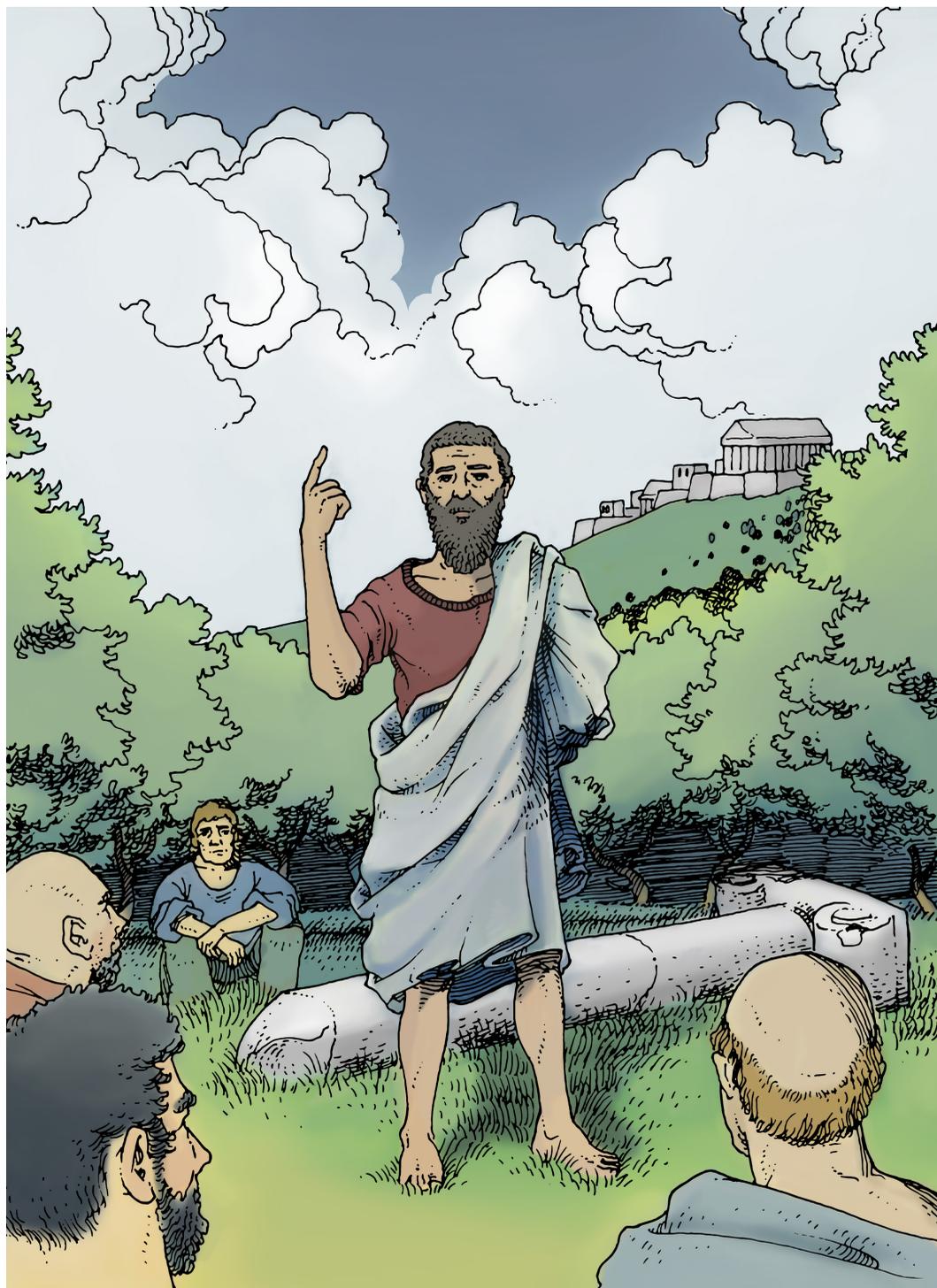
Two Ecosystems

BEING *an* INTRODUCTION *to the*
STUDIO MODEL *of* CREATIVE EDUCATION

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A FEW THOUSAND YEARS AGO, a small group of men began meeting to discuss deep questions about the nature of life, the universe, and everything. At first they gathered at the home of their leader, the philosopher Plato, who lived just outside the ancient Greek city of Athens. But their numbers quickly swelled, and they were forced to find larger accommodations in a nearby public park.

There, nestled in a shady patch of olive groves, Plato's small club for contemplation grew into a great institution for learning, and became known throughout the realm as the Academy.



FOR CENTURIES, Plato's Academy stood as a sanctuary for all those who were dedicated to the life of the mind. Then it was razed to the ground—destroyed so thoroughly by invading Roman soldiers that it could not be repaired or reopened. The olive groves were abandoned, the old masters were forgotten, and darkness fell over the Western world.

But all was not lost. Eventually the great texts were rediscovered, and that ancient institution remembered. Plato's Academy was long gone, but it would serve as a prototype for something even grander: a new academy that continues to thrive at the heart of society.



OUR MODERN ACADEMY is built upon the same intellectual foundations as Plato's old institution, yet ours is no mere club for contemplation. Nor is it simply a school, society, or single institution of any sort.

Instead, the academy today is best understood as an ecosystem. Its ecology comprises a vast distributed landscape of campuses that house a diverse collection of people, culture, and activities. These are not fixed mechanical components, but organic elements with complex relationships. From this network of elements and their interactions emerges the academic ecosystem we know so well today.



THE ACADEMY is not a natural ecosystem; it was built by humankind to serve a particular purpose. It is an ecosystem that exists to support the systematic quest for knowledge—the relentless, dispassionate pursuit of truth and wisdom.

This is *the work of inquiry*. It is the heart and soul of the academic ecosystem, and it is carried out by a society of people we call the faculty.

Faculty members are the torchbearers for the intellectual fire first lit by Plato's original crew of contemplators. They're the academy's primary permanent residents, the living bank of humanity's wisdom and our main engine for the acquisition of new knowledge. Yet as important as they are, faculty are not the only people of note in this ecosystem.



EVERY YEAR, tens of thousands of young men and women leave their homes, migrate across the country, and take up residency in the academy. Most of them stay for a handful of years and then leave permanently. They are not tourists, but students. They work under the guidance of faculty to complete a rigorous program of study, while maintaining an active social and co-curricular life.

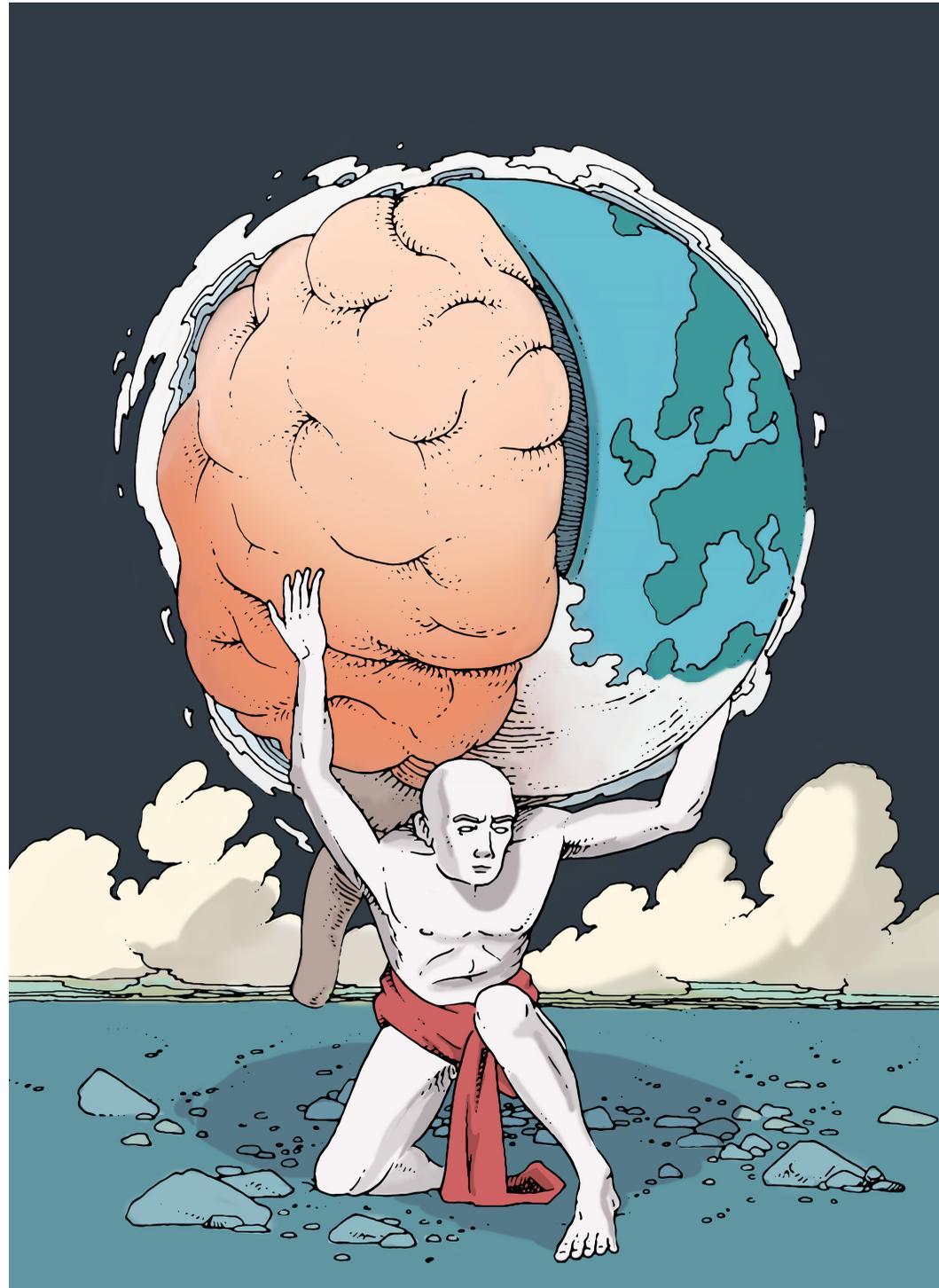
Students are engaged in the work of inquiry. Yet unlike faculty, they generally do not contribute to the academy's store of knowledge. Instead, students engage in the work of inquiry as a means for personal growth and intellectual development. They have come here to pursue a higher education.



WE ALL SPEND THE FIRST FEW DECADES of life being formed by others—parents, teachers, etc.—until eventually we come of age. Here, at the brink of adulthood, we are faced with a choice. We can enter the world as we are, wrought by the hands of others, or we can continue the project of personal development under our own direction.

The academy offers the opportunity to pursue the latter path. It is a context in which students can come to know the world, author their own identity, and figure out what it means to live an authentic life. This is the true purpose of higher education. The knowledge and skills that students learn are important, but are only part of a bigger picture. At its core, higher education is an *enterprise of self formation*.

Yet while self formation is a noble enterprise, it is not enough. Higher education can be more than a platform for students to shape themselves. It can also empower students to shape the world.



HUMAN BEINGS possess an immense capacity for self authorship. Yet the self is not the only thing we care about, nor is it the only thing we command. We also possess an enormous capacity to shape the world in which we live—to change our shared reality in ways that affect all things.

Self formation and world formation: these two capacities are central to the human experience, yet higher education today celebrates only half of the picture. We support students in their quest to author the self, while providing few opportunities for students to author the world they will one day inherit.

It's time for change. Higher education should be an enterprise of both *self formation* and *world formation*.



Academy

a New Ecosystem

THIS VISION OF EDUCATION is possible, but the academy cannot accommodate it on its own. Instead, we must invent an entirely new ecosystem—an ecosystem that is deeply interconnected with the academy, but with its own unique ecology, boundaries, and central purpose. This will give us a new landscape in which we can expand education to include the enterprise of world formation, while supporting and fortifying the academic ecosystem.

Together, these two ecosystems can provide the contexts for both self formation and world formation: dual ecosystems to support the dual enterprises of education.



Academy

Studio

THIS BOOK PRESENTS a model for such an ecosystem. It offers a framework that we've been designing and piloting for the last few years at Georgetown University and other partner institutions. We call it studio.

Studio is an ecosystem that supports *the work of creation*. Where the academy is centered around understanding the world, studio is centered around shaping the world. It's a context for making, inventing, innovation, design, art, writing, entrepreneurship, and every other creative activity.

While their core purpose differs, these two ecosystems function in harmony, fortifying each other and delivering an integrated educational experience.



TUDENTS WORK IN STUDIO TO CREATE—to steward new and valuable outcomes into existence. This isn't merely an exercise; students pursue authentic projects aimed to make a real impact on the world.

Students do this work collaboratively in creative environments. They operate under the mentorship of faculty, and their efforts are subjected to regular public critiques by faculty, peers, alumni, and external partners. Their projects span every discipline, and the outcomes include every sort of medium. In the last year at Georgetown, for example, students have produced books, businesses, products, art, games, strategies, federal policy, community programs, advocacy campaigns, educational initiatives, and much more.

Studio offers students the opportunity to make an immediate impact on the world, and it empowers them to be systematically creative in whatever career they pursue in the future. Yet to accomplish this, studio must exist in an intimate relationship with academia.



IF YOU WANT TO CREATE A REAL IMPACT, you are going to need a sophisticated level of knowledge about the context in which you are working. This is a lesson that students learn early in studio—you can't change the world without understanding the world.

This truth is the bridge between studio and the academy. Students work in studio to systematically create outcomes that impact the world, and this work frequently drives them back to the academy to learn the knowledge and modes of thinking unique to different disciplines. This is studio's reciprocal pedagogy: students learn to create and create to learn.

The resulting educational experience is a seamless dual citizenship in two ecosystems, across which students move frequently and fluidly, working to author the world as they author their own identity.



WE BELIEVE that studio has the potential to transform higher education, but we can't do it alone. We need other entrepreneuring educators and students to help shape and grow new ecosystems that empower students to create.

This book offers an initial framework—a studio model that can serve as a foundation for creative education at any level, for any discipline, at any institution. Studio is in its infancy, and there is much work to be done. But from the work we've done, we can offer a groundwork of philosophy, structure, and practice.

Join us in studio, and together we will shape the future.



