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Philosophy 501/CCT 603

Metacognitive Assignment

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It has been rewarding and challenging to study Philosophy this semester. I did not take a Philosophy course as part of my undergraduate curriculum. And, somehow, I moved through life without dipping into philosophical works by Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, and so many other thinkers. Much of what we’ve read, pondered, and discussed during this semester is new to me.

I am still trying to wrap my head around the notion of how one *does* Philosophy. Aristotle said that it starts with wonder. Gareth Matthews says that we need to use a child's mind to engage in Philosophy. We need to have humility and the ability to suspend judgment. And we need to be excited about everything -- the simplicity *and* the complexity of our world. My sons help me to engage in a type of active, excited, and grateful observation. I have been fortunate to listen to and reflect upon their perspectives on the world as I've moved through the ideas we've grappled with in this course.
 Sometimes, doing Philosophy comes easily to me, such as when we discussed terrorism and torture. At other times, I find doing Philosophy to be difficult. It took me a great deal of time to ponder and sort out my thoughts on abortion. In the end, I believe I wrote a very thoughtful essay based on new conclusions of my own about gender and the issue of abortion, and the need for individuals to engage in methodological belief to dwell in, take on, and begin to understand the beliefs of others.
 Some of the essays on Justice -- by Rawls, Mill, and Hobbes -- put me to sleep. So, I thought about my learning style and altered it. I tried to learn about Rawls', Mill's, and Hobbes' theories by watching professors' lectures on YouTube. I found some videos by Dr. Jason J. Campbell, Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution and Philosophy at Nova Southeastern University. Those helped. But a video lecture on Rawls by Dr. Joe Oppenheimer put me to sleep. Earlier in the semester, I found that I understood and retained more information about Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito* by listening to Libravox recordings of the dialogues.  So, I learned that I sometimes fare better as an auditory learner, than through reading.
        I have found that the difficulty of some of the course material is OK. Doing Philosophy is a necessary mental practice, like the physical practice of yoga, which I think becomes easier and more fluid with repetition. I've found that Philosophy fills in what was a giant gap in my knowledge and my critical thinking. I see that an understanding of philosophical theories is essential for a person who hopes to move from non-critical thinking, to weak sense critical thinking, and to strong sense critical thinking. I also see how essential this course is to the CCT curriculum.
        I have noted several instances during this class when I realized I had never thought deeply about issues, such as torture. I was profoundly swayed by Henry Shue's essay "Torture in Dreamland: Disposing of the Ticking Bomb." Now, I see that advocates of torture base their reasoning on the assumption on ticking bomb scenarios involving having found *the right man*, *prompt and accurate disclosure* of critical information, and torture as a *rare option* used in *isolated cases*.
        Upon reflection, I find it embarrassing that I had not thought critically about many issues that are essential to life. However, instead of wallowing in embarrassment, it's more productive to report that I've engaged in deep learning through the readings and discussions for this course. I've questioned what I think I know and why, in the spirit of Rene Descartes. And I've come to conclusions regarding what I really think about certain issues.
        I have become enamored with Aristotle’s writing. I am especially taken with his discussion of anger, and how one may influence members of society by understanding what motivates them to feel shamed or like victims -- and how those feelings trigger anger. Aristotle's tutorial, written perhaps in about 340 B.C. teaches one how to move the public to action through the use of emotion. I am filled with wonder -- like a child --upon reading "On Anger," because I see that human emotion has not changed through the centuries. This essay is still useful to organizers of Occupy Wall Street, leaders of protests against the grand jury verdict in the Darren Wilson case, and politicians who hope to sway the public. Understanding the lasting usefulness of Philosophy is one of the great gifts I'll take from this course.
        Through my work for this class, I have often engaged in research to learn more about a subject, and to read other perspectives on an issue. When reading and writing about terrorism and torture, I happened upon the work of Elaine Scarry, a professor at Harvard University and the author of The Body in Pain. Scarry asserts that permitting the infliction of physical pain through torture leads to destruction and the unmaking of the human world. Scarry also asks why we settle conflicts with the body. Why don't humans engage in some type of contest to settle disputes between countries instead of destroying the bodies of citizens in our wars?
        Such brilliant questions were new to me. While pondering them, I felt profoundly new, and delighted -- like a child. Yet, the topic I was studying was decidedly serious and not suitable for a child. The task I will take with me beyond this class is how to get myself into the mindset of a child more often so that I may engage with Philosophy with wonder, and with joy. I learned a helpful lesson in my Dialogue Processes class that assists in *doing* Philosophy. In that course, in the midst of learning mindfulness practices, I realized that immersion in nature takes me to a state removed from adult worry and very close to the child I once was. I have found that long walks in the woods help to transport me to a state of wonder, which gives me the capacity to regard the world in a simpler, more open manner. And according to Gareth Matthews, this is the right frame of mind to engage in philosophical thought.