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CCT603 Foundations of Philosophical Thought

Metacognitive Reflection Paper

I had never formally studied philosophy prior to this course, though I have always enjoyed reading and thinking about big questions, debates, and concepts. Philosophy has a reputation of being a fluffy subject to study, I think. Like art, its applications are often thought to be limited to niche settings rather than the “real” world for the average person. Though I previously perceived great value in philosophy, this course has certainly furthered my understanding of the applications of philosophical thinking.

I had learned about Socratic questioning in the course Critical Thinking, but reading the dialogues in Plato’s work within the context of our studies this semester allowed me to grasp the concept more completely. Philosophical thinking is as much about questions as it is about answers- even more so. Asking questions is of utmost importance to learning. Asking ourselves (and/or others) questions that we feel we can answer helps to lay the foundation for what we feel we understand about something and it also helps to identify assumptions. Questions force us to think deeper as we must come up with explanations or evidence for what we express. I have found that this often reveals more questions of where ideas and beliefs come from, and it helps me to understand myself and others better.

Philosophical thinking is an active process through which we try to understand the beliefs and thoughts of ourselves and others about any subject. Both dialogue and reflective writing are valuable tools in this process and it was helpful to use these this semester. Writing, I am discovering, helps to reveal to me my understanding, or lack of understanding, of my own beliefs, thinking, and rationality. Sometimes I think I comprehend a concept, but writing it out

forces me to clarify my thoughts and explain my ideas. Appreciating the importance of language in both the expression and understanding of ideas has also intensified for me in this process.

Dialogue with others as well as reading multiple viewpoints shows new and unique perspectives to me whether sharing a belief or not. Learning about and practicing philosophical thinking in the past few months has reinforced for me the importance of challenging my own thinking and being open minded. It isn't only important but fun and contributes to greater well-being for me. There is a sense of freedom and excitement in being open to change and learning. Practicing philosophical thinking also creates greater understanding of thought and includes increased control of thinking which is empowering.

One of the topics that we explored this semester was the topic of identity. One might think about this topic in terms of who we think we are, who we want others to see us as or how they see us, who we want to be, etc. People define themselves in a multitude of ways simultaneously - by their work, family/friends, interests, beliefs, experiences/memories, accomplishments, knowledge, physicality, roles, possessions, and the list goes on. However, most people feel there is more to them than these types of things- that there is something internal which is the real person. Yet trying to determine individuality of a person when you strip away all the things that traditionally define and differentiate someone becomes perplexing. I liked this topic because it surprised me. Its contemplation quickly becomes intermingled with the mystifying topics of life and death. This concept and others such as emotion seem straightforward, but without philosophical examination there may not be awareness of the more abstract nature of the topic. Studying something from a philosophical point of view adds clarity to and of the complexity. It also helps us to make and understand connections among topics.

This course also made it clearer to me that philosophy is actually very practical. The contemplation of things such as the universe, life, or death can seem abstract and not practical. But with philosophical thinking, what *can* be explained and understood is used as a basis of inquiry into the unexplainable and theoretical. That being said, thinking philosophically isn't only about contemplating existence, but rather it is an approach to thinking about anything. When we think about what informs and motivates us in our lives, reflecting on and questioning why we do what we do, or why we believe what we do, has practical applications such as making positive life changes. It is said that to love fully one must first love the self. In that vein, what I have been discovering in this course and in this program is that self-inquiry opens the door to greater learning.