

11/10/06

Response to the Philosophical Thought Honors Seminar

Last Wednesday's Philosophical Thought seminar was a force that compelled me to reflect upon *my* values. For example, I have always put value upon the idea of attaining a good and suitable job in my future. First of all, what does that mean, to be a suitable or a good job? Well for me, suitable had always meant that it was a job which held my interest, that could be fun for me to do, and that would allow me to make a difference in the world for the better. Good, admittedly, meant that it would allow for monetary or some sort of physical reward. For many years now, since I was little even, I have wished to become a musician, an architect, a graphic design artist, or a lawyer. However, this seminar opened my eyes to the reality of these positions. In the grand scheme of events, what are these jobs accomplishing? Dr. Michael Palmer, the University of Maine professor leading the event, insisted that his motive was not to turn students away from entering into "further education," (which he defined as an extension of high school education where students embark on a journey of job training and have not to encounter difficult philosophical questions regarding reality and human existence) but to **be inspired** by "higher" and "liberal" education. As I listened to Dr. Palmer express the **benefits** and difficulties one must face when pursuing higher education, "the exclusive study of the highest things," and liberal education, "liberating education," I was forced to question these job choices that had always seemed exciting and relevant options for my future. Was it just me, or did these things now seem like petty human materialistic desires?

I eventually realized that my original job choices were still important goals for my future, and that though higher education or liberal education would be pertinent steps in a career, I continued to be excited by my own decisions but less motivated by their monetary appeal.

Since I had really never explored this topic before the seminar, the idea of philosophy really became clearer to me during Dr. Palmer's presentation. I really enjoyed the thought provoking seminar and found it inspiring that our own University of Maine offered programs of higher education. My favorite part of the seminar was when Dr. Palmer was explaining the meaning and importance of liberal education. He gave details to us explaining Plato's Allegory of the Cave, and this is when the idea became tangible in my mind. I understood then, the role of further education which was the course of most human beings, and then liberal education, which liberates the single person from the cave because he is seeking "The Good" or God, represented by the sun, the source of light. In the visible realm, the one that most human beings exist in, light must be present for understanding. In the intelligible realm, where Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Francis Bacon,

and Arthur Schopenhauer existed, it is "The Good," or God that is searched for in order to build an understanding of reality and human nature.

This seminar was fascinating, and I am excited about the next one. I am also hoping that during the next seminar there will be more opportunity for discussion though I understand that this one was more of a learning experience than a topic to be debated. I am especially anticipating the last two seminars which seem to really encompass my interests.

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I enjoyed this honors seminar more than any other this year. Dr. Anderson was very funny and interesting which were excellent qualities considering how early in the morning the seminar took place!

The analogy that Dr. Anderson used to illustrate the impact that individuals have on the globe was really insightful. By thinking about the human "footprint" I was able to visualize the huge capacity of human destruction to the Earth. I also liked how he used a powerpoint with his presentation. This made it much more easy for me to follow his ideas because I am a definitely a visual learner.

It does not seem feasible that only .023% of energy from the sun is transformed to chemical energy by plants per day. How do we survive? How much longer will .023% of chemical energy be sufficient to support the needs of the human population? I guess the most important thing to think about is, like Dr. Anderson said, whether humans will do their part in changing their personal habits in order to better suit the space that we all have here on the planet. Though I have had a lot of experience talking about global warming and other environmental issues, I think it was this meeting that really opened my eyes to the vast quantity of damage a single person can do to the Earth. It was the umpteenth time I had heard a different story with the same moral, however, this time it really hit home. As soon as I got to my house, I took the online test that Dr. Anderson had suggested. I learned that I personally emit about 13 tons of carbon per year. One ton of carbon at 25 degrees Celsius occupies about 556m³ of space. This means that the amount of carbon that I emit yearly is approximately equivalent to the volume of three standard Olympic pools. Wow!

This is not only an issue of our environment. It is an issue of ethics as well. During the presentation, I learned that plants are autotrophs. This means that they produce their own food. Self-sufficiency is a really important solution to part of the problem that is occurring worldwide. As a youth activist for civil rights, I realize that this idea is more complex than environmentalists alone can even put into action. Really, living from the

Earth is the most natural and conscientious thing to do anyway, this is a way to respect the future, and therefore rights, of all humans. I really am making an effort to change the way I live, since I am part of the "society" that marks the middle passage of energy's cycle between its value of "energy and matter." I appreciate the opportunity to have this workshop very much.