

Spring 2008

Abdicating the Philosopher King: a Look at the Critical Thinking for the Everyman

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**ABDICATING THE PHILOSOPHER KING:
A Look at Critical Thinking for the Everyman**

Regis College

A thesis submitted to

**The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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Defense Date: April 15th, 2008

May 2008

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ABDICATING THE PHILOSOPHER KING: A Look at Critical Thinking for the Everyman

Ron DiSanto, Ph.D

People regard philosophy as a self-righteous, circuitous, never ending debate over semantics reserved solely for old, white, male academics and arm-chair thinkers. It pains me to understand philosophy, one of the oldest (and formerly, most revered) subjects of study, currently cast aside as a frippery. Thus, I have found a deep, and what I believe, noble quest. I shall ride in to save my love, my damsel in despair, from this post-modern dragon, and slay the conception that philosophy has done nothing for the common man. I shall urge my brothers and sisters of today to stand up and demand that philosophy be savored again. 'Tis not against the Sophists that I rally against, but the conception of a philosopher king. Philosophy is not only for kings, but rather is the tool to make us all kings; kings of our minds. I will do so be asking the question what is a philosopher, what does one do, and why is that important. By determining that philosophy is a method of thinking based on critical thinking, I will assert that critical thinking is not dependent on intelligence, but education and that such a philosophical education is possible for all people.

Acknowledgements

“It is well to remember that the entire universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others.”

- John Andrew Holmes.

I am so utterly grateful to my friends and family. If it had not been for them, I would have given up total and complete faith in myself, thrown my computer out the window and devoted my life to baking. I wish to thank my parents Renee and Shane Kokoszka and Pamela and David Silverman, as well as my friends Jaclyn Rose, Annaliz Hilberg, and Rosanna Hardin for their continued support and, occasionally, blatant lies to maintain my confidence in myself. I am endlessly thankful to my friends Scott Beckman and Benjamin Mann for their philosophical conversations; thank you both for continuing my education by constantly challenging me, and helping me sort through difficult times in my thesis. To the academics in my life; a huge hug (I mean seriously gigantic) to Dr. DiSanto for not only aiding in my thought process, providing me with direction when I strayed, reading, re-reading and yet again, re-reading all the while providing me with brilliant insights. To Dr. Doty, I am so thankful for all the hours you devoted to discussing my drafts and teasing out my thoughts. To Dr. Bowie, thank you for everything that you have done for me throughout my career here at Regis University. Your teachings and guidance have helped me through more than just my thesis, but in my life as well. I cannot profess my gratitude enough. To all these people, I owe you the equivalent of my first born child, but for now, I hope that my humble thanks will suffice.

Introduction

“There are two mistakes one can make along the road to truth...not going all the way and not starting.”
~Siddhartha

As a student of philosophy, and a would-be philosopher myself, it pains me to understand my passion as useless in the eyes of the greater community. People regard philosophy as a self-righteous, circuitous, never ending debate over semantics reserved solely for old, white, male academics and arm-chair thinkers. It pains me to understand philosophy, one of the oldest (and formerly, most revered) subjects of study, currently cast aside as a frippery.

Thus, I have found a deep, and what I believe, noble quest. I shall ride in to save my love, my damsel in despair, from this post-modern dragon, and slay the conception that philosophy has done nothing for the common man. I shall urge my brothers and sisters of today to stand up and demand that philosophy be savored again. 'Tis not the Sophists that I rally against, but the conception of a philosopher king. Philosophy is not only for kings, but rather is the tool to make us all kings-- kings of our minds.

So, I begin. Rather than take on the onus of exploiting every facet of this study's offerings, I choose the foundation. I choose to move that we must begin from the base of philosophy and understand this single element in all its glory. I believe that we

must understand what it is, why it is valuable, how to attain it and exploit it, and where its use is most applicable. I will fight against any and all that argue we cannot give this tool to every man, woman, and developing child. I will stand to shout, “This is useful to all of humanity!”

Therefore, I propose that philosophy’s greatest building block is critical thinking. Without a solid foundation of critical thinking, logic, and reasoning, philosophy does not exist. Philosophical questions, thought experiments, writings, debates, and teachings are all based on the principles of critical thinking. Employed in its practice, and taught through its use, philosophy both finds necessary and promotes critical thinking.

It is from this premise that I will take only the necessary amount of time to prove my hypothesis; that the base of philosophy, critical thinking, is an applied mental science which we use everyday, and which every person is capable of using. Every person has the ability to critically examine the world and thence draw premises and logical conclusions. Especially with the use of informal logic, every person is a potential philosopher.

I shall define certain terms to lay the foundation of my work, I will show why critical thinking is important, and I will exemplify how to improve critical thinking skills. I will argue against individuals of the past who have stated that philosophy is not for all, while standing in solidarity with those who understand that yes, philosophy is everyone’s to study. These are my goals which I lay out before you, my reader and companion in my quest.

Let us set forth on this intellectual, and more importantly, teleological, journey.

Chapter One

Who is a Philosopher?

“Sometimes I sits and thinks and sometimes I just sits.”

The title of this paper is “Abdicating the Philosopher King: Philosophy for the Everyman.” What precisely does this mean? Plato, as we will later discuss, creates the notion of the philosopher king, a man, or to be true to the text, a group of individuals of either gender who are of the philosophizing type. This notion of philosophy as an esoteric, and ironically, gender neutral, study through the glories of history comes to be passed down and inherited. Well, I say pish posh to that! So then, we might be best off by asking the question, “What does it mean to be of the ‘philosophizing type?’”

We have a notion of a philosopher: old, white, male, academic, perhaps a man who is a functional alcoholic and obsessive compulsive. Although we just discussed how, according to Plato, the philosopher is a gender neutral position, over the ages philosophy has been a field of study typically male dominated and thusly, our

stereotypical philosopher is male. A man that is too arrogant both in his attitude and diction to be of much use to anyone other than those like himself. He owns leather bound books and most everything in his home is covered in dust to preserve the artifacts. Thrilling, indeed. Then we have a notion of another individual, lets call him Samuel. Samuel is an average North American. He is of the middle class, has had a public education up through only the twelfth grade, and earns his living selling cars. His family is non-religious. In the following examples, Sam is our everyman. These two gentlemen seem to have little to nothing in common. Yet, I claim that both can and in fact do, use philosophy.

Philosophy is a field that covers areas such as metaphysics, epistemology, linguistics, morality, ethics, science, history, selected thinkers, etc. Yet what is common to all and inherent in the field is the ability to think critically. Now, Samuel does not know of many philosophical principles or thinkers. “Utilitarianism” sounds like some form of diarrhea to him. “Kant” is a misspelling. Yet, he still uses philosophy in two critical ways. The first is that he asks himself metaphysical questions such as “Why am I here? What is my purpose?” and he uses critical thinking and reasoning. To avoid any confusion, let us pause and flesh out some definitions for these terms.

Terms

The terms that I will now define are: “critical thinking,” “informal logic,” “reasoning,” “logical fallacy,” and “intelligence.”

Critical Thinking: some definitions or attempts...

“Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information

gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.”

(“Defining Critical Thinking” at CriticalThinking.org)

“Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them.”

(“Defining Critical Thinking” at CriticalThinking.org)

“Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism.”

(“Defining Critical Thinking” at CriticalThinking.org)

For our purposes, we therefore understand that critical thinking is not bound to any particular field of study or methodology. Rather, critical thinking is applicable to both objective and subjective areas of life in which individuals may find themselves. It is not necessarily prescribed by a certain education, but rather, is simply the notion and application of reasonable, rational, and logical modes of thought.

Informal Logic

“Informal logic is the attempt to develop a logic to assess, analyze and improve ordinary language (or “everyday”) reasoning. It intersects with attempts to understand such reasoning from the point of view of philosophy, formal logic, cognitive psychology, and a range of other disciplines. Most of the work in informal logic focuses on the reasoning and argument (in the premise-conclusion sense) one finds in personal exchange, advertising, political debate, legal argument, and the social commentary that characterizes newspapers, television, the World Wide Web and other forms of mass media.”(Shapiro “Classical Logic,” 2000)

We speak of “informal logic” as “everyday logic” in that unlike mathematics which requires a definite pattern for analysis, and unlike linguistic diagramming, everyday logic is the task of using reason to understand situations in which one finds

oneself and to reach reasonable judgments and decisions. It is the pattern that one lays over one's critical thinking in order to reason in a less arbitrary fashion.

Reasoning

“The attempts to reach a conclusion on the basis of premises that one already accepts or the attempt to find supporting premises for a position that one is entertaining.”
Disanto

To put the three terms we have been defining together: when we think critically (and not haphazardly) we make use of logic and we reason well. Let us contextualize this and tease these concepts out a bit further with an example. Samuel is working at the car lot one fine day and comes upon a problem. His customer is interested in test-driving a particular used vehicle, but when Sam attempts to pull the car around for the customer, the car will not start. Sam using what he already knows (his premises) to solve the problem in a timely manner, he reasons thusly. He checks to see if the car has gasoline, oil, and if the cables to the battery are secure. Why? He does so because he already knows that these are pertinent to the car's being able to start. Assuming these all check out, he has thus eliminated several of the possibilities for why the car may not be starting. This is informal logic at work. Sam then begins to use his memory to reflect upon the situation, and he also calls over his mechanic to ask if he is aware of the car having any trouble recently. It strikes the two of them that there had been some vandalism a few days back and that perhaps this car had been victim to that mischief. Upon further examination, Sam finds that the battery is not the original but rather has been replaced with a drained one. He quickly finds a new battery, the car starts and Sam is off to make the sale. In this example we see that Sam

logically undertakes the problem of discovering why the car is not functioning properly by using his reasoning, or knowledge base, to systematically rule out possible causes. He then reflects further upon his ideas by both communicating and recalling outside events. With these activities, he has provided an example of critical thinking, in that he has employed the use of logical thought patterns to understand the many facets of a situation.

Let me now introduce another term:

Logical Fallacy

“[A logical] fallacy is a pattern of poor reasoning which appears to be (and in this sense mimics) a pattern of good reasoning” (Groarke, “Informal Logic,” 2007)

Let us use the same example to illustrate an obvious instance of a logical fallacy. If instead of actually checking the gas and oil, Sam had simply made the assumption that the car had gas because it is the lot’s policy that the gas level for all cars is maintained at three quarters of a tank, Sam would be committing a logical fallacy, because his reasoning is poor in that he lacks certain key knowledge necessary for the actual systematic elimination of potential causes. It appears to be a pattern of good reasoning in that he has the belief that the car ought to be filled with gas, or at least enough, but he lacks the knowledge that the car actually is filled with gas.

And now, another term:

Intelligence

The definition of intelligence is highly debated, so for our purposes we will simply say that intelligence is the given range of cognitive abilities in a person. These abilities include the retrieval of information via the use of long and short term memory, the ability to acquire new knowledge and process information, and the ability to think abstractly. Intelligence varies widely as many people have different

types of intelligence (allegedly the number is now ten), for example a visual information processing method vs. an auditory one.

The reader may now be wondering, “Why is intelligence a term that requires defining for this paper?” Excellent question. The goal of this paper is to establish that all people, with the exception of those with certain mental disabilities, are capable of thinking critically. This requires that only average intelligence is necessary to perform these skills, and not that a higher level of intelligence be mandatory. Therefore, it becomes vital to my arguments that we define intelligence early on in order to separate the two concepts. However, like the suspenseful author that I am, this will not be fully teased out until a later chapter, and yes, good reader, it will take an entire chapter to separate this out.

Now that we have analyzed our terms a bit and become familiar with what we understand them to mean, let us move forward. We asked earlier, “What makes an individual of the philosophizing type?” Philosophy and its main backbone, critical reasoning, are less of a subject matter and more of a methodology. Think of philosophy as science for the faculty of reason. Where science makes observations on the material world, and uses certain forms of testing, philosophy also analyzes the world and thoughts within the world, continually checking for validity in search of truth as supported through reason. Although Samuel may be concerned with philosophy to a lesser degree than his counterpart, the academic, he still employs it in his day to day living while he uses practical reasoning to solve his minor problems. Aristotle, known in the medieval times as “The Philosopher,” believed that we are not born with any true, instinctual, or innate knowledge. He believed that we are born

with the capability attributed to *nous*, loosely translated as “mind,” and this ability allows us to use the process of induction to take in empirical, sense data and create premises to draw conclusions (Tarnas, 63). We come to know our first principles, from which we will derive our terrestrial knowledge (Ackrill, pg. 24). In other words, each of us uses the ability to reason to come to understand the world. Each of us is a philosopher at least in this sense.

Chapter Two

Plato and Mill: On a Philosopher's Education

“People sometimes say they cannot make any judgment about this or that because they have not studied philosophy. This is irritating nonsense, because the pretense is that philosophy is some sort of science. People speak of it almost as they might speak of medicine.”

-Wittgenstein

This chapter will discuss the divide between intelligence and reasoning by underscoring the emphasis of discussion and education in order to prove that all people can reason and think relatively critically, regardless of their level of intelligence. The proponent and mouth piece for this section is John S. Mill against that of Plato, speaking to the philosopher king, whom I assume confused “intelligent” with “well-trained.”

Plato's King: The Straight 'A' Student

As many may well know, the concept of a “philosopher king” dates back to the writings of Plato in his *Republic*, in which he determines that the best ought to lead the rest (§ 375a). However, rather than thoroughly examining what makes an individual a member of the elite thinking class, he simply concludes that some are

naturally more inclined towards philosophical thinking. Ironic, given his own nature as an educator and witness to the thinking and teaching of Socrates who educated the sons of Athens's wealthy how to think like philosophers rather than Sophists.

However, this notion that the best ought to lead the rest is continually carried through to contemporary thinking in political philosophy. We see in modern philosophy, that many thinkers, Hobbes especially, are apt to believe that there is a single individual capable of leading the other and maintaining a sense of justice and the fundamental ordering of society. Even through to modernity, in Einstein's personal correspondence with Freud, Einstein advocates for the concept of this philosopher king in his attempt to reduce the violent nature which he believes to be inherent in mankind (DiSanto). (Perhaps the best advocate against the philosopher king is John Stuart Mill in his writing *On Liberty* wherein any sort of overarching leader is denied. We will return to Mill later.)

Plato defines the philosopher king as an individual who possesses the following traits: "a philosophic disposition, high spirits, speed, and strength," (§376a). The philosophic disposition is comprised of two separate traits: the love of learning and the ability to discriminate most notably between friend and foe. However, neither of these traits are congenital, but rather are highly susceptible to environmental and educational factors. Plato cites neither genetics nor intelligence as his necessary traits for the philosopher king, but rather traits that are solely sociologically determined. He even admits this when he discusses, at multiple separate instances within his writings¹, the education necessary to develop and maintain the above mentioned traits.

¹Due to the argumentative style of Plato, it is difficult to cite precisely the point where Plato would say, "The education of a Guardian is vital to the state because...." Rather, Plato builds up these ideas thus

He discusses that these individuals must not only be learned in particular texts and ways of thinking like a philosopher, but also that their fortitude and ability to uphold these traits must be subjected to frequent testing from a young age to ensure their loyalty to the state and continued ability to discriminate between that which is virtuous for the state and that which is vicious. Although Plato simply asserts (in a rather *a priori*) fashion that certain members of the state are better suited for political responsibility with his famous metal analogy, he is still wont to recognize the highly important role of education in the individual's lives and abilities, so much so that the analogy he creates to determine who is and who is not apt for philosophical study seems ironic (§412*c*). The analogy simply asserts that there are those with liquid bronze running through their veins, and these are the workers, there are those with silver and those with gold. Silver individuals become the auxiliaries and the warriors and those with gold are the philosopher kings. This simple analogy is based off observations of individuals within current communities. Plato simply observes that there are certain individuals who seem better suited for higher study and some that seem better suited for manual labor with some still that land in-between. However, there is no examination of how or why these individuals seem to possess these traits. Socrates himself was unaware of his greatness until the oracle at Delphi informed him of this superiority and launched his philosophical mission (Tarnas, pg. 33). It was not his natural intellectual prowess that gave him glory above the rest, but his thirst for knowledge and love of learning that was the source of his praiseworthy wisdom.

These traits are social traits. If an individual is told that they can never study because

leading the reader to such a point. Ergo, I point my kind reader to Book Three §392*a* thru §412 and then again §412*b* thru § 415*a*.

they can never afford it, then it simply follows that they do not develop a love for that which they can never have. Likewise, if a person has never tasted the fruit, how can they come to appreciate it? Socio-economic status, in the ancient classical age, and through to today, has a great deal to do with one's education and the application one gains from education. Plato acknowledges that one's education shapes the continued beliefs of an individual; however he is blind to the notion that one's education shapes one's attitude towards those same beliefs and abilities. He sees the matter of ability and continuing education as a matter of a single track process rather than one of reciprocal causality despite his own admission of the necessary nature of education to continue underscoring one's beliefs and abilities.

Separately, in his line and cave analogies¹¹, he is placing a value scale on knowledge. First, Plato makes the assertion that our world is not one of perfection, but rather an imperfect copy of the ultimate reality. The analogy of the Cave explains how we perceive our world and illustrates the multiple steps necessary to reach the ultimate goal of the world of the forms and understanding these things. The line analogy, then places greater value on the differing stages of knowledge. The most valuable knowledge is the knowledge of the forms, whereas the least valuable knowledge is that of empirical sense data. The different lengths of the line segments correlate to the importance of that particular form of knowledge. This illustrates Plato's "*conviction* that knowledge is not a matter of observing the material world," (Melchert). Plato illustrates his reasoning for why the material world is deceptive and not true knowledge in his cave analogy rather than in his line analogy. In his allegory of the cave, Plato assumes the premise that we are in a world which is deceptively

¹¹ See §511a thru §511e and §516b thru §517d.

real but not necessarily the ultimate. The fact that this world is all that we have known and can perceive does not make it the ultimate; it simply means that this is as much as we have experienced thus far. Our experience is akin to that of a small child; this small child understands only that which he has been exposed to, but this does not mean that his experiences are therefore the entirety of the world.

For Plato the greatest knowledge cannot be found via experience but rather through an understanding of the forms. The philosopher need not be bothered examining this world; but rather he must think about the other world, the world of the forms. However, the world of the forms cannot be experienced immediately; the philosopher must be taught to come to understand it. Plato thus creates a distinction between science and philosophy. To be blunt, the distinction between science and philosophy is that although both attempt to find Truth, science attempts to discover it via observation of phenomena in this world, whereas philosophy (according to Plato) ought to concern itself with the metaphysical phenomena outside of the physical. The fascinating, and pertinent to our discussion, item is that in this sketch of philosophy, there is no inherent ability that the philosopher must possess. Rather, in Plato's view, all the would-be philosopher requires is a correct and proper education!

Essentially, what Plato is demanding of would be philosophers is the undergoing of a curriculum that promotes critical thinking. Developing critical thinking is to develop a skill that “involves not only knowledge of content but also concept formation and analysis, reasoning and drawing conclusions, [and] recognizing and avoiding contradiction...” (Scheinin, 1995 cited in Supon, 1998, p. 294). Critical thinking is primarily developed through the use of thoughtful discussion which

involves questioning. In our high-tech age, we have required tests and studies to tell us what Plato and Socrates were already well aware of. These studies indicate that the greatest use of a teacher's time during instruction is in the asking of questions (Dillon 1982; Feldhusen & Treffinger 1980; USDOE 1986). The greater percentage of that time is spent asking students questions that require factual recall, despite the fact that most of that information will not be retained anyway. However, questions that stimulate higher level processes promote a higher retention rate among students. Where 80 to 90 percent of what students learn factually is forgotten, 80 to 85 percent of what students learn from higher level discussion is retained (Muilenburg & Berge, 2006) The point of education, therefore, becomes less about what one knows, but how one examines a given set of information. Sound like philosophy? I think so! This type of thinking is stimulated by a particular set of questions: convergent, divergent, evaluative, contrasting, and comparative. What is especially interesting to note is that the latter three questions all promote a particular type of thinking that demands the student develop the ability to discriminate, which is also the same ability Plato demands of his guardians. However, Plato notes that the guardian cannot simply have this ability, but must maintain this ability for a life long period and this is promoted via his education (§487*a*). As we see in recent research, this ability is promoted via an education inquisitive in nature.

The Millian Interlocator: Democratic Discussion

The discussion of many ideas, the openness to new and different, or even older and debunked theories reminds this writer and many others, of another controversial and debated philosopher, John Stuart Mill (Stanley, 603). The debate that surrounds J.S. Mill's work *On Liberty* asks, "Is John S. Mill supporting or refuting Utilitarianism?" I believe that the latter half of the section "Of Thought and Discussion" has certainly shed some light on this question. J.S. Mill is beginning to make the argument for the utility of liberty. He maintains via analogy that the presence of liberty in our social interactions provides a greater environment for intellectual pleasure, and therefore more utility. In many passages, he is simply making clear the point that there is no single method to 'enlightenment.' Rather, he glorifies the diversity of multiple paths to Truth. He states "that only through diversity of opinion is there... a chance of fair play to all sides of the truth" (pg 46). He begs for people to listen to both sides, not simply in order to choose the correct side, but rather to expand their horizons. I believe that although it may sound as though Mill is making an argument for Libertarianism in his fervent defense of free speech, he is actually reveling in an intellectual debate and simply enjoying the presence of liberty in conjunction with utilitarianism in the collective human consciousness. He is not upholding one school of thought over the other, but rather celebrating the reciprocal benefits from their inter-working. Mill's appreciation for many ideas is his version of pluralism. Yet, pluralism raises such sticky and philosophical questions such as, can we ever know Truth? How can we know if we have ever arrived at Truth? Mill asks these questions and offers analytical tools such as discussion to understand and decode beliefs.

J.S. Mill in *On Liberty* wrote that through open discussion of new ideas and old ideas laid to rest not only are we continually revisiting the reasons for why we hold certain beliefs, but we also are opening ourselves up to new truths. Stanley then notes that this market place of ideas then avoids dogmatism as we are continually revising our beliefs and are therefore forced to truly comprehend their meanings (605). In genuine discussion, involving both active speaking and listening, one fully grasps the position, not just superficially as in a high school debate contest, but truly and fully. The conceptual grounds for a belief as argued by one who truly believes in the counter position, remind us of the grounds for our own beliefs and make us revisit what the original and current meaning is. If the meanings for beliefs are not subjected to constant revisitation and possible revision, we live in a static and unchanging environment of blindness to new knowledge. Mill maintains that the attachment to binding principles without chance for revision prevents the possible chance for more desirable “given ends” upon modification (Stanley, 605). Furthermore, one goal of constantly revisiting a belief system is to avoid dogmatism. Mill maintains that theories have a finite lifespan, which implies that at some point every theory risks becoming dogmatic to preserve itself. (However, this applies to all theories, including pluralism. Thus, pluralism can also move towards dogma and the only thing that matters in pluralism is itself. A problem to be sure.)

Yet still, Mill strongly believes that it is essential to the collective consciousness of humanity to understand what a culture has as a set of particular paradigms and assumptions and why those views are held. He strongly disagrees with the notion of faith based acceptance with respect to beliefs. In his section “Of Individuality,” he

uses the term “individuality” almost as a synonym for the challenging of a culture’s belief system. He says,

“there is only too great a tendency in the beliefs and practices to degenerate into the mechanical; and unless there were a succession of persons whose ever-recurring originality prevents the grounds of those beliefs and practices from becoming merely traditional, such dead matter would not resist the smallest shock from anything really alive, and there would be no reason why civilization should not die out...” (p. 62)

For Mill, individuality and nonconformity are the catalysts for progress in society and the hallmark of a society whose individuals are geniuses and not simply a mass of mediocre sheep-humans (pages 63-64). He further explains that “a people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality,” (p. 68). We are to fear the potential monotony of civilization and to constantly assert our eccentricities. Part of this is to vocalize our objections and question the currently held beliefs. This liberty is especially applicable to the freedom within knowledge, or granted by knowledge. The ability to investigate and discover new information is synonymous with the ability to freely and intelligently express opinion (Tsou, 210). As Mill fervently argues, this pluralism in communication enriches each individual and humanity as a whole.

Concluding Comparison

We see that both Plato and Mill require the use of thoughtful discussion in their societies in order to promote the general well being of the whole. This recognition of the importance of discussion indicates that it is not the inherent ability of the individual which will make them worthy for leadership or not, but rather their exposure to thoughtful, critically engaging discussion. In chapter one of his

metaphysics, Aristotle says that the wise man is not simply the man of experience, or the man of intellectual superiority, but the man who can teach: “And in general it is a sign of the man who knows, that he can teach...” (§981*b* or *Metaphysics* Book I, Chapter 1). Wisdom is passed via education and is not congenital. Plato demands that his philosopher kings be subject to this education which will provide them with the necessary wisdom to discriminate with the state’s well being in mind. He recognizes future guardians as individuals who have a natural disposition for this type of thinking, but yet he also recognizes that this particular thought process and education is mandatory to the sustaining and enlarging of this ability: the ability to think critically. Therefore, the individual’s natural abilities are less important than the education she receives. Mill further teases out this point by asking that the society as a whole cultivate a learning environment for the entirety of the populace via the active engagement of varying thoughts and ideas with one another. This then also stresses the point that it is not the individual’s natural inclination to philosophize or think critically that is most important. Rather, the importance lies in education.

Chapter Three

Why is Critical Thinking Important?

“One person can make a difference, and every man should try”
John F. Kennedy

Let us begin a thought exercise, shall we? Let us explore as Plato does in *The Republic*, the ideal society. However, rather than begin from scratch, I believe it would be a more productive use of our time to take the society which our present day presents us with and to examine certain faults and then propose alternatives. In essence, we shall look at the world as it is and then hypothesis as to how it ought to be. But, a major part of this discussion will include the bridge between the world as it is and the world as it shall be. Let us then begin this mental adventure.

Firstly, the world today does not even meet the most basic criteria of feeding and sheltering all its human inhabitants. Rather, it is massively disproportionate in the allocation of resources. This is not even a simple schism between the wealthy and poorer countries, but rather it is between the haves and the have nots which are present in every country and, in this writer’s opinion, the allocation of resources reflect the allocation of power in these countries and globally as well. This then creates strife both domestically and internationally between the haves and the have

nots. This aggressive behavior fosters ignorance, intolerance, and hate cross culturally. So, although some countries and cultures consider themselves advanced, we still are nonetheless faced with a society that still has not met its inhabitants most basic needs and hunger, war, and struggle still flourish.

This provides the rest of the needs of humanity with a rather grim outlook. Maslow argued that man is a creature whose goal is to reach self actualization, and that in order for him to accomplish this, he must have his most base needs met (Fridlund ed., pg. 614). Well, we have certainly established that man's most base needs are not being met, which implies that his ability to become a morally thoughtful, critically thinking member of society cannot be achieved. From this statement we can infer two very important givens. One: man's ability to think critically is not the issue at hand, it is his opportunity and two: when faced with the need to survive, man is going to choose whatever route possible to achieve this desired end, regardless of whether or not it is morally fulfilling because his basic needs must be met prior to his higher level desires.

Thusly we have addressed, in a very amateur and generalized manner, the situation of the have nots. But what about the haves? The haves are in a situation where they can continue down the path of self-actualization. Now, before I continue to describe the path, let us for a moment parse this particular goal. Maslow describes self-actualization as a human's want to fulfill one's goals and reach one's potential. In short, to steal the former motto of the US army, to be all that you can be. What about those members of society who are in a position rich with resources and therefore, having had their lower needs met, are able to become all that they can be? Well, they

must move up the pyramid and reach the level of cognitive need. This level most notably includes knowledge and understanding. But, knowledge of what you might ask, or perhaps, what are they to understand? Indeed, this is a very broad and vague description. I propose that the meaning of this critical level is not simply to address a particular working knowledge of what each and every man should know pragmatically, e.g. how to hunt/gather food, how to care for wounds, or how to operate a manual automobile. No, on this level, the key is what one knows, but rather how one knows it. I use the term “how” not in the sense of “how does one think” in regards to a particular paradigm, mindset, or frame of lens through which we view the world, for example Eastern vs. Western traditional thought. No, I am suggesting that this level encourages simple thought itself! You might ask, what is this “simple thought itself,”? Cognitive processes are the acts of learning/acquiring new information, recalling and associating information, and making critical examinations involving probing questions, which lead to conclusions. In the philosophical field this also includes a basic understanding of deductive and inductive logic and reasoning skills, along with the ability to recognize and dispute logical fallacies as part of the critical examination of new or revised information. Ideally, the haves of society will be educated in such as manner as to fulfill this level of the hierarchy of needs.

Now I know that I have made a logical jump here that I feel is very important to address as I have simply been self-righteously assuming that it is a given that people need to think, even though a simple glance at some of our members of society seems to argue against this point. Therefore I will address the following questions, why is

this particular level even included, what makes the act of critical thinking so very important?

In our basic animal nature, perception is everything. In order to survive, we must be able to perceive dangers, real or imagined, and then acknowledge and evaluate our options pertaining to the goal of survival. In a slightly less intense arena, our perceptions still shape our reactions and interactions within the world. The media is supposedly a barrage of facts which bombard us on a daily basis. How we perceive this information will in turn affect how we interact in the world. If, for example, we are continually fed a racist perspective, we will then be inclined to perceive a particular race as lesser than us, or perhaps more dangerous. By holding this particular perspective, we will then act towards this race in a manner that we feel appropriate based on our perception of them. Perception is an incredibly powerful, and therefore dangerous, tool of our mind. It is therefore, absolutely necessary that we be capable of critically examining, and essentially thinking about, the data input which our brains receive and be able to question its validity against our own experiences and in the light of logic. In essence, given particular methods of critical thinking, which we have already talked about, we need to have this data stand before the bar of logic in order that we better perceive our world and thence act with an educated will.

Let us now return to our thought experiment. The haves are given the opportunities to explore their critical thinking skills in that their basic needs are met and they can thus continue on the path of self-actualization. However, power is wont to breed greed. And given the perception of threat against their limited resources in

the midst of strife, the buck seems to stop here. Yet, with an education that does not focus on the acquisition and maintenance of resources, but rather on a more rounded understanding of the world, with the foundations of critical thinking, the haves can come to understand the importance of providing all people an education which requires that all people's needs be met. I admit that this last sentence may seem simplistic. Let me unpack it a bit. Given the opportunity, any person can become a capable thinker. However, as shown above, this rests on the necessities of survival having been met. Thus, if I am right, a power struggle for limited resources has prevented many people from seizing, or even being presented with, an opportunity to grow as thinkers. It becomes more important to survive on a day to day basis, than to look towards the future, when one is struggling for subsistence. Now, the bridge becomes a redistribution of resources that enables all people to become thinkers. Yet, what kind of knowledge would promote the haves to share with the have nots? This is not a subject that I wish to delve into too deeply as to distract the reader from my greater topic. However, I do believe that the examination of history, such as Bastille day, may prompt a mental change, as well as the understanding of philosophical texts, such as John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, political texts such as Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, and moral, or even theological texts would paint a picture that society becomes better for all when resources are allocated in a more even and stable manner. Not to mention the sociological, psychological, and environmental support for this statement. I believe that those who can engage in critical thinking ought to do so, and this will bring about change that allows all to become thinkers.

Now, perhaps this is an opportune moment to discuss why all people are capable of thinking critically, and not just some. This statement seems rather contrary to our day to day experiences, when we interact with the staff members in certain restaurants, or while driving. Indeed it often seems as though stupidity does surround us. So, given those experiences, what gives me grounds to write that all people are capable of becoming thinkers? As I have repeatedly stated, it is because we are not all provided the same resources and therefore opportunities to pursue an education which encourages higher level thought processes. Let us then, in this next thought experiment, assume that everyone involved has equal amounts of resources and does not have to worry or struggle to have their lower needs met. Likewise, also understand that the statement, “become a critical thinker” is in no way a basis for judging a person’s level of intelligence. That is to say that yes, some people will in fact be more intelligent in one particular way or another, but this does not discount that everyone can, in fact, think and think critically (barring, of course, certain forms of mental retardation). Let us assume that a child is born into a society and environment in which the struggle for survival is absent. They can focus on, and therefore are, presented with certain activities which promote critical thinking skills. As discussed in the last segment, these activities include a learning experience which reflects a Socratic method during which a student is presented with a certain set of data, statement, knowledge, or experiences and rather than reacting to this information with a pure opinion or regurgitated response, the student will be asked to look for patterns and overarching principles, check conclusions against evidence, use deductive and inductive reasoning, and investigate for logical fallacies by asking

questions. In order to perform these tasks, the student must use questions to understand the material in a deeper sense and therefore draw and make conclusions. As most children have a naturally inquisitive sense, this becomes a second nature to them. It is when they are not provided with an opportunity or environment to hone these skills that this sense becomes stifled and the following mental tasks fall short. Yet, in our thought experiment, this child, born with an average brain and mental abilities, who does not suffer from any inhibiting diseases, is presented with data: this ball is round and this ball is orange. The child then make logical conclusions, using inductive logic: all balls are round and all balls are orange. Yet, the child will more than likely either be corrected on the second point, or hopefully asked to explain their thinking: why do you believe that all balls are round and orange? The child can then reference back to their data set, “this ball is round and orange.” Then child should then be asked to reference other experiences and remember if they had even encountered a ball which was not round or orange. The child will recount that yes, they had seen a ball which was not orange, but they had all been round. The child can therefore understand that the shape of the ball, roundness, is a necessary property of being a ball, but that color is not. However, the child can then be prompted to think of or research experiences in which a ball might always be orange, for example in basketball. This can then lead her to a conclusion that all basketballs are round and orange. Therefore, the original ball was a basketball. None of these statements require a certain higher level of intelligence above average, but rather, that the child be at a particular point in the developmental stages, and have a willing facilitator to guide them into thinking critically. Therefore, this only reaffirms the point that people need

access to particular environments which teach and promote critical thinking skills, not that a person have a particular intelligence quotient.

As we now return to our original thought experiment, the formation of a perfect society based on our current society, we have established that the first step necessary is for those currently labeled as “haves” to develop the abilities to think critically in order to gain a better understanding of the world and its faults and to then envision a better world. This better world requires a redistribution of resources so that all the members of society can examine critically. Plato argues that it is not necessary for all the members of society to think critically. However he bases this assertion on the premise that not all members of society are able and therefore meant to think critically. Yet, as we have been arguing here, this premise begins to fall short. However, we do need to ask why it might be necessary for all the members of society to be critical thinkers? Here is my basic argument. We are living on a planet of limited resources, hence in order to solve basic problems such as hunger, we must understand and be willing to change the current distribution of power and resources. This in turn requires an extreme amount of logical persuasion and we will be well advised to base this off of excellent logic and reasoning. Everyone wants world peace and the end of global hunger, very few actually want to give up their resources to achieve this. Nor will we be stumbling upon many oppressive dictators willing to end the genocide in their countries when faced with simple logical reasoning. However, *if a great enough number of people become willing to examine a situation from a critical standpoint, this can lead to at least a consensus that something is amiss.* We can then hope and pray that people actually do agree to do something regarding

hunger and change the resources and lack thereof providing the basic needs for those currently without. Allowing these people to have their basic needs met puts them in the position to learn to think critically which in turn adds to the growing consensus.

Now, I do not wish to try to persuade the reader that I am naively thinking that it will be a massive switch from “there is hunger” to “there is no hunger.” Rather, I envision changes in communities generating more motivated thinkers, which in turn puts pressure on other communities creating a *cycle of change*. Hopefully, this can create enough people fighting for an equal allocation of resources, that not only hunger, but also strife, can be overturned at the hands of logic. Yes, I know, this is a very, very idealistic, very simple formula. Yet, I maintain that it must start somewhere. This seems the simplest idea.

Now, let us move up the hierarchy of needs towards the goal of every person achieving self-actualization. We have established that critical thinking enables others to help fulfill the needs of many. We have now met the first and most basic needs: food, shelter, and security. While creating an environment which sustains these needs, we have also, inadvertently met the third level, the level of community where affiliation, love, and acceptance are met based upon an organization of people working towards a single goal. As people make progress towards achieving this goal, they begin to meet the needs of the next level, the esteem level, and feel a sense of accomplishment not only in themselves, but also in each other and their greater community as a whole. This provides a sense of faith and confidence in humanity’s ability to better itself, such that it desires to then continue to seek peace, order, justice and knowledge, all of which make up the next level, the level of cognitive needs.

Once this is fulfilled, the individual moves to the final level, the level of self-actualization where s/he is “being all that they can be.” Notice, that as an individual has their needs met, it becomes not only easier for them to help others, but their helping others actually moves them towards their own final goal and speeds their process of self-actualization.

I have argued that those who already have will want to move to the next levels and upon reaching the level of cognitive fulfillment, will especially become aware of the changes that are necessary to improve the entire human community. And that this in turn will create a cycle of goodwill which will bring about solutions to some of the greatest problems facing the world today. Yet, what about the fact that self-preservation and greed may play into this, preventing my perfect world? Through critical reasoning, a sense of either morality, duty, or greater good is bound to come about. As humans view their world, the need to categorize things becomes overwhelming. Things must then be placed on a value scale ranging from good to bad to horrific. Morality becomes another part of logically reasoning one’s way through the world in terms of choices and subsequent actions. Also, even those who reason their way to the thought that there is no morality or value scale, or that this scale no longer matters because it is man made and not divinely ordained and we have no way of truly knowing this scale, can still reason their way to understanding that a world full of critical thinkers means that their views will have to stand up to less dogmatic attacks, and more thought oriented attacks. Thus, through critical examinations of the world, morality comes about naturally. This implies that if all people can critically reason, then all people can come to understand the importance of morality.

This brings me actually towards my point. This entire section and thought exercise has been necessary in order to prove that critical thinking is important. Although this has been somewhat vague and over-simplified, I used the same logic as Plato to understand a simple concept by magnifying it. Instead of asking his question, “What makes a good person?” I asked “Why is critical thinking important?” And like Plato, I blew up the process to answer the question, in order to gain a better understanding of my logic and its outcomes. It seems that if we now scale down our conclusions, we can see that thinking critically is an option once an individual’s lower needs have been met, and that it leads towards a better understanding of the world allowing for other needs to be met and thus encouraging the individual to become their best self. It also can lead to morality, and an understanding of ethics without a deity-dependent sense of right and wrong. However, and this is big, whether or not a person chooses to think critically and act morally is based off of *choice*, and not *ability*.

Chapter Four

What are the Assumptions Behind the Statement, “Everyone Can Think Critically?”

“Genius is accordingly the name of the promise that the private & the social will be achieved together.” ~Cavell

It is now time to address the assumptions that I have made thus far regarding the notion that every person can think critically. It seems that I have assumed our ability to reach truth. I now feel that it is appropriate to stand back and examine human cognitive ability.

There are two extreme schools of thought at play here. To give a very basic sketch of these in a rather black and white fashion, one school of thought understands that the human mind can come to know the nature of reality and even, perhaps, reach an understanding as to what is “God,” independent of the notion of faith. Meanwhile, the other school understands that the human mind is a poor instrument for knowing reality and that we create our own misleading theories about the world, which traps us in these ill conceived notions of truth. This school continues with the idea that there is no absolute truth and we can therefore know nothing. However, it seems to this particular reader, that in the most basic sense, by making the statement that we know

nothing, we have in fact, made a statement about something and therefore perceive it as true. This then slits the proverbial throat of the foundation of that logic. By understanding any statement, even one that claims we know nothing, as an overarching, fundamental principal and saying, “Yes, this is true” we come to a self-referencing which is irreconcilable with the original statement. This moves the thought process forward, reconciling, in a rather aggressive manner, the two schools of thought, by destroying one, and thusly somewhat admitting validity to the other. However, simply because one extreme is no longer viable as a legitimate option, does not necessarily admit victory to the other extreme. There is an entirety of middle ground still yet to consider, namely that of epistemological probablism. An excellent thinker that speaks as an example for this middle ground is Hume, whom one can assume would say that although the human mind is limited, it is not completely helpless. For example, in the field of the scientific, we cannot actually know anything for sure; however the probabilities are so great that we can make excellent assumptions and conclusions based off of the statistical analysis. Thus, in Hume’s world, although we may not ever be sure of anything, we are not helpless in that we are able to live comfortably, that is, without being in an eternal state of worry because we can trust in some probabilities (“I have still asserted that we have no *data...*” Popkin ed., pg. 45). Logic and science are able to “get away with” making enough fundamentally supported statements to secure our state of being and knowledge. Perhaps now is the best time to cite the historical shift of the understanding of the word “probablism,” ironically, after having directly cited an authority. Historically, speaking pre-scientific revolution, the word “probablism” meant the ability to cite a

majority, or one worthwhile authority on a particular subject, implied and was understood to mean that the argument was well supported enough to be “probably” true (Doty). For example we see in the style of medieval writers, especially in the well read Thomas Aquinas, the style of presenting an argument that takes on the objections and hashes them out against the writings of prior thinkers, such as “The Philosopher,” Aristotle, and Augustine.^{III} We likewise see this style in the dialogue between Simplicio and Salviati in Galileo’s “Dialogues Concerning the Two Chief World Systems.” However, in the time of the Scientific Revolution, we see, among a plethora of other shifts, the alteration of the meaning of “probablism.” Instead of motioning towards a particular thinker as the authority, we come to appreciate the empirical and mathematical evidence as being able to speak for themselves as knowledgeable for the world as it is. That is, we move towards a world view that accepts sense data as meaningful and expressive of the world. Yet, there is still a retention of appreciation for the logical. As Bacon describes metaphorically, the ant simply collects, the spider weaves from only himself, and yet the bee comes to reality by both collecting, and internalizing which brings forth meaning to his understanding of the world. Hold onto this notion, as we will surely revisit it later.

This form of reconciliation between the empirical and the purely logical comes to us in the relationship between science and mathematics. The best contemporary understanding of this is the example of Atomic Physics. This is essentially the ability to understand the world in a mathematical process that can completely deny our everyday sense data. This branch of scientific understanding completely shakes our

^{III} To better understand the style of Aquinas, see examples of his works such as “On Law, Morality, and Politics” or the Summa Theologica or “On Kingship.”

notion of the scientifically proven to be understood as solely the scientifically “likely.” We move from a world view that holds certain facts as fundamental overarching truths, to one in which nothing that we experience is in reality a provable truth. Ironically, we come to this, because of the work that is done mathematically, whose fundamental principals cannot be undermined, regardless of the larger world. These mathematical principals have come to not only create perhaps the second greatest scientific revolution, but also to act as a major bridge between the empirical and the logical.

The reader may now be wondering why exactly I just expressed the central role of mathematics in science. Mathematics is a form of logic, and this logic has lead to a greater understanding of the physical world. Likewise, it would follow that logic itself can lead to a greater understanding of both the physical world and the metaphysical world. The logical pulled from the understanding of basic assumptions, such as the mathematical (two and two is always four), or the grounds of cause and effect, coupled with a person’s own sense experience, leads one to believe particular ideas regarding particular phenomena. These beliefs thusly shape one’s own actions and how they choose to impact the world based on their perception of the world. Let us re-introduce Bacon’s bee-man here to demonstrate this last statement. The bee must first use his sense ability to seek out the pollen. This pollen then cannot be simply examined by the bee, but he must internalize it, take it in, process it, and come to terms with its interaction with his own self. It is only then that the bee can offer more than he originally could by the production of honey, whose central existence is entirely dependant on the consumption of pollen. Likewise, humanity comes to the

concrete world with certain sensual abilities and interacts with the greater whole of creation. Through these interactions, the person learns certain things about life, e.g. that fire is hot and hotness burns the human. Yet, it is with the internalization of this knowledge that the human can come to understand that heat cooks flesh. Fire is heat, and can cook the flesh of an animal. This tastes yummy. Here we have a primitive example of where an interaction in the corporal world has given an individual the opportunity to internalize the sense data and then contribute to this world. Obviously, I am arguing against the psychological stance that humans are simply nothing more than stimulus response beings. I must. My reasons for this are that based on the amount of time which I have spent experiencing the thought processes in my head, I can then conclude that there is much more than knee-jerk reactions inherent in humanity. Likewise, it would be a much too depressing conclusion to come to after having spent many a day and many a dollar at university expanding my capabilities to think. Yet, I digress. The main issue at hand is that the role of logic in human experience is analogous to that of mathematics and science. They are tools by which we come to understand the world and shape our impact on it, outside of simply our sense data, but also incorporating it.

We have begun to discuss the impact of logic and critical thinking on the person in the physical world and the impact of the physical world on the person and their critical thinking. Indeed, there is a reciprocal causality central to this understanding, and yet, logic is a tool necessary for understanding both situations. As in the relationship between the mathematical and the scientific, critical examination and logic come to the fore as inherent in our experience of the world. As we have already

discussed regarding the epistemological schools, we come to understand that we cannot make a statement in which we know nothing. We make statements in which we can assume the probability of knowing, which we may or may not ever come to understand, as we cannot say that we will never know anything about the world, as by having said this, we have come to know something. By coming to know something, we have come to the possible existence of some sort of truth. It is plausible that the only truth we may ever actually know is that there is some sort of truth, but we can never fully come to understand this. There then comes about a notion of inherent value, where all persons, regardless of background, will come to desire to know something greater than their own simple (or complex) experiences, as throughout the entire human experience, the empirical world is becoming more and more understood through experience and reasoning, however, more questions arise throughout the experience. Thusly, we seek and search out to understand these truths, just as we had with the empirical. The logic becomes that since logic could help one come to terms with the world on a particular level, it ought to be able to offer more knowledge on overarching principals of the world. Thusly, not only are all people able to use logic in their world, as a means of forming a greater understanding of the physical, but also do they have the desire to come to a greater understanding of the metaphysical. Certainly this search for Truth will not come about in a single way; just as researchers do not all use the same methods to seek data in the same fashion. And why should it? The notion that there is a single method to truth is unfounded, because part of what shapes logic is one's own personal experience, and thusly, no one's logic will ever be the same. Thusly, people cannot seek truth in the same manner, although all persons

remain capable of accepting the task. This leads the door open to understanding that some are going to seek truth by undertaking the philosophical means, others the empirical means, and still others the theological path.

In a brief encapsulation, we began our discussion by reasoning that the epistemological, the way in which we think, can lead, and has led us to a metaphysical understanding of the world, and in the most basic sense this understanding is that we simply know there is some greater truth and we seek to find it. How we set about on this search leads us as differing individuals, to different explanations of this truth, and the different interpretations and offerings also seek to shape our perceptions in ways that affect our behaviors. In short, the epistemological will affect the moral.

The reader will recall that the previous chapter addressed the social and political interactions between humans in a quasi utopian setting. This setting allowed for all members of society to think critically. As I have suggested in this chapter, certain epistemological methods assume some sort of metaphysical truths, or the probability of their existence. These metaphysical truths can affect the moral and therefore what one views to be the moral action towards one's fellow man. When one gathers data, be it a physical understanding, or a metaphysical truth, and examines it from a critical standpoint, the idea is either accepted, rejected, or modified, but this experience itself has an impact on the individual's understanding and perception of the world, and subsequently on their actions and further examinations of the world. Yet, especially in the metaphysical world of beliefs, the critical examination of such beliefs affects

one's thoughts regarding those beliefs and thus one's thought regarding action in the world, and as I claim, subsequently their morality.

Up to this point, I have taken on the assumption that thought precedes action, but it is nothing short of necessary to examine the opposing view, that thoughts do not necessarily precede action. I then feel that it follows that by being able to state that humans are actors in this world, that because they are acting, their experience is shaping their thought process, which may not have even been present originally. Again, I return to Bacon's bee, where in this case, the action is the pollen, the outcome of the action and the experience in its entirety the process which then creates the honey, the thoughts regarding the experience. In this case, this still supports my notion and original hypothesis that humans all have the ability to think critically. That by acting at all does a person come to acquire certain biases, expectations, understandings, and thoughts about a particular situation. This process then becomes reversible, where these expectations based on experience are re-applied to a similar situation, in which the person expects a similar outcome. Thusly, reason is being used. Over time, this process in regards to certain activities is not even recognized as a use of logic, but is taken for granted as knowledge that is totally acquired, such as a particular fondness or aversion towards a food. The process of taking in an experience and then coming away with a particular knowledge still fits with our original definition of critical thinking, which I will reproduce here to refresh the reader's memory:

“Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.”

Anyone who has spent any amount of time in the presence of a two year old will attest to the fact that children can distinguish what they like and what they dislike. For example, if a child is given a bowl of rice, and the option of salt or no salt, the child can try both options, make an evaluation, and decide that they do or do not prefer the salt. This is in accordance with our above definition. The tricky part comes into play in the child's life as she grows. The child will be faced with more difficult data to interpret, understand, evaluate, and then formulate a belief. Unfortunately, this faculty, which we are all endowed with, does not necessarily grow for all peoples at the same rate, especially in regards to how one is socialized, raised, and educated as opportunity may or may not provide, as discussed previously.

Concluding Discussion

“Heroes know that things must happen when it’s time for them to happen. A quest may not simply be abandoned; unicorns may go unrescued for a long time, but not forever; a happy ending cannot come in the middle of the story.” ~Peter S. Beagle

I set out on a quest. Like every great quest it may not end in the middle of the story. The question remains, is the philosopher king abdicated, or does he still reign? Is philosophy still an esoteric subject, and have I failed at my attempt to rescue it from despair? This cannot be answered with any certainty simply upon the reading of this paper. If the reader chooses to toss aside this manuscript and never again consider the merits of philosophical study, then my quest ceases unhappily. However, should the reader choose to recognize philosophy and its merits in their own lives, then their actions will shape the future of history and my quest lives on. Removing the tyrant cannot be done simply by words, but by actions. Making philosophy important, implementing critical thinking and reaping the benefits cannot stop here with the conclusion of this work, but must be carried in every man.

Let us draw together the main ideas of each chapter to tie them together in a final argument for the viewer that philosophy is not an activity reserved for certain academics, but rather that it is a democratic activity for all people. We first began our

journey by overcoming the obstacle of defining both who is a philosopher and what does a philosopher do? This task required the definition of many terms to create the base of philosophy, critical thinking. Philosophy is less of a study of certain thinkers or theories, but more of a methodology for thinking. This type of thinking requires the use of critical examination, informal logic, and reasoning. It is not, however, dependant on intelligence or a particular level thereof. Rather, philosophy is a way of checking one's reason via the ability to determine truth of certain statements based on the logic preceding such statements and the truth of the premises upon which the concluding idea rests. To do so does not require a particular level of intelligence at all, but rather simply a particular form of education. Thus, a philosopher is not necessarily one who knows philosophy, but one who thinks in a philosophical manner. This nicely leads us to our next point.

Plato argued that certain people were better suited because of an inclination to philosophize. However, he stresses the importance of the particular type of education which these people receive. He seems to confuse intelligence and education, therefore attributing ability to those educated as though it were inherent in them and not affected by their education. J.S. Mill spoke against that idea, demanding that ideas be traded freely, which would promote critical examination amongst all people. This conversing among all people is a type of education, and ironically, fashioned after the Socratic method. This education is indeed the education of a philosopher, the education to think critically. Mill believed that this type of environment would promote the well-being of all its inhabitants. We then expanded upon this notion. In a thought experiment we used Maslow's hierarchy of needs and a philosopher's

education to create and develop a world which was free from hunger and want because of the ability to think critically.

We then finally returned to the underlying assumption that all people could think critically. By looking at Hume's notion of probabilism in the sense that knowledge and its possession is based on the marriage between terrestrial facts and informal logic, we concluded that not only was it plausible for all people to think critically, but that it could even affect our metaphysical notions of things like morality. This logic also worked backwards, in that in certain instances, moral behavior could be an indication of critical thinking. I believe that the notion of elevating the standard of living for all people is such an example as we discussed in a previous chapter.

Having examined the issue of who is a philosopher, and what does one do from both a definitional standpoint and via the mouths of Plato and Mill, and what does critical thinking do and look like in action, I feel that I have presented a rather strong argument, although not an airtight one, that all people are capable of thinking critically. Again, however, the choice is up to you the reader.

Having said that, I would like to thank my readers for their time and attention to my ideas. I hope that my quest to marry philosophy to everyday life does not go down in vain and that we can come to realize that all people can philosophize, in that all are capable of critical thinking. I hope that we can come to approach critical thinking as not a method reserved solely for certain activities, but as a method for all of life and for the betterment of life.

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