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A Liberal Studies Discussion

PREFACE

The Liberal Studies Major is designed for you to examine the process of becoming a person and the basic questions it involves. It enables you to do this by selecting learning activities that cover seven categories, namely, identity, work, nature, institutions, language, heritage, and art. You have been given a brochure with excerpts from Ernest Boyer that describe these categories and articulate some of the life-questions involved. What follows is an additional discussion of these categories and questions that presupposes your acquaintance with the Boyer selections. As you proceed, you will probably find it helpful to intersperse your reading with a rereading of Boyer. The aim is to help you create an initial formulation of your own agenda. This agenda will be a set of life-questions that you would like to focus on, together with a statement of your educational goals. At the end of each section you will find a summary of the questions discussed. You will find that they overlap but do not duplicate those articulated by Boyer. Each set is merely one way of posing these questions and you may well decide on a different formulation.

Naturally, in the course of your studies, you are likely to modify these questions and goals but your initial design will give you a rationale for planning your learning activities and will provide a basic continuity to your learning. You are asked to keep a journal in which you record your learnings about and reflections on the questions you select. It is the questions you are concerned with and want to work on that enable you to be an active rather than a passive learner.

Let me emphasize that what follows is not intended as a kind of textbook whose materials you are expected to master and give an account of in papers or exams. Much fuller treatment would be necessary for this purpose. Rather it is intended both to stimulate your thinking about what you wish to learn and to contribute to class discussion of the Boyer categories. Some of what you read will probably be fairly clear and familiar and some of it not. When you find a discussion difficult, simply take from it whatever you can about the questions involved and move on. New ideas are never easy and it is the aim of liberal studies to help you make some of them part of how you see life.

Edward Cell, April, 1996

1. Creating a Liberal Studies Agenda

Beginning with its Latin derivation, "education" has referred to a process that leads someplace. It has an agenda. The agenda of your Liberal Studies major is to enable you to enhance your quality of life by a deeper understanding of how we become persons. In becoming someone, we learn how to answer some basic life questions. We may think of these answers as our philosophy of life--our way of providing our life with meaning, our decisions with foundation, and ourselves with identity.

We create our answers not in isolation but in transaction. As we connect with others, we absorb something of the way our culture formulates both those basic life questions and some general answers to them. We then work out our individuality by giving a particular, unique form to these answers. We achieve a sense of our humanity--of belonging to a human community--by answering in a way that those who are most important to us can make sense of and validate. We become human by making a difference that both we and significant others can regard as life-affirming and distinctively human.

Self and society, then, are distinguishable but not separable. They are tied together by our need for meaning and identity. Whether it concerns self or society, our fundamental quest for knowledge and understanding is a search for how life's existential questions are responded to. Thus, to know someone, ourselves included, is to know how that person answers these questions. But, equally, to know a society and its culture, or way of life, is to know the general answers its people live by--that which their individual orientations share. The same is true of our understanding of a historical period. Further still, the benchmark of understanding a language is our grasp of how it formulates these forms of becoming a person and, so, how it is lived as part of a peoples' way of life.

What all this means for your work in Liberal Studies is that, unavoidably, your agenda will have two levels and, ideally, also a third. It will be uniquely yours insofar as you attend to what these questions mean to you personally. It will be social in that you will be studying how these questions are dealt with in the discourse either of your own society or that of others. Finally, it will have universal implications because, in examining the way of life of other societies, whether present or past, you not only can see your own more clearly by the differences you note but also can discern what is common to all of us as human by the similarities you find.

To put this another way, your learning will move between individual and shared perspectives. We can only understand the ideas and beliefs we study if we use our own experience to enter into them. Some of these ways of seeing things will already be a general version of our own, while others will only be alternative possibilities for us. But there will almost always be more to what we study than we have fully appropriated in our lives. Since we create our individual answers only by using some of the general answers we receive from our culture, we can enhance our own by grasping these shared perspectives more fully and richly. As the University catalogue states, the Liberal Studies major will "utilize a variety of disciplines to explore answers to basic life questions" and these questions will have both their subjective, individual levels and their objective, social ones. As Charles Frankel has put it, "If you have a liberal education . . . at least

sometimes you will see your fate, whatever it is, as an illustration of the human condition and of the destiny of man."

Recognizing this dialectic between individual and shared meanings, the Liberal Studies Program encourages you to consider a variety of learning activities as you design your curriculum. Our personal development is an intricate combination of first-hand, experiential learning and second-hand, received learning. First hand learning is based on direct involvement with what we are learning about. We do the fundamentals of this learning as we are transacting with our environment or attending to our feelings and other inner experiences.

Second-hand learning is mediated by what others say, write, or do. Our socialization into shared meanings and expectations begins with what we encounter in our parents or parent figures. We fervently look to the big people to discover what life is all about and how it is to be conducted. As we act on what we discover, we learn from these others whether our attempts are praiseworthy and we learn from our organism whether they are pleasurable.

Gradually, of course, the social basis of our quest for a life orientation expands as we engage a wider circle of significant people, are read to, read for ourselves, enter school and perhaps church, engage in civic activities, and very likely work in an organizational setting. What remains constant in this increasing complexity is that we are continually negotiating and confirming an identity. Education becomes liberal only insofar as we use it to contribute to that identity-creating process and we can do this most effectively by combining first-hand and second-hand learning.

Another concern of the Program is that your increase your ability to enhance your identity through dialogue others. Sometimes determining who we can be in our relationships with others will be a kind of power struggle. At other times, it will be a more respectful kind of bargaining based on fairness and reciprocity. But, if we are fortunate, there will be occasions when our quest for personal significance and connectedness will be a supportive exploration, or dialogue, characterized by care, empathy, and openness. It is, we believe, only through such dialogue that we achieve the core sense of self that enables us to be self-directed. We see as an ideal, then, that your educational agenda will include the subject of dialogue and that this learning will be first hand as well as second, practiced in your courses as well as sometimes lectured on or read about. At the very least, we hope to facilitate this practice both in this first LIS course and in the Senior Seminar.

2. Identity: the Search for Meaning

Notice that Boyer sees this category as fundamental: "Ultimately, the aim of common learning is the understanding of oneself and a capacity for sound judgment." Sound judgment concerns, especially, how we see ourselves connected to others and to nature, and what we sense as an overall purpose or meaning in our lives. A good starting point for your agenda, then, is to compose an initial list of questions about self-knowledge, connectedness, meaning, and how the three are related. Let's examine these questions.

2.1 Self-knowledge and Connectedness

There is an ambiguity in being human that will pervade your work on self-knowledge and related questions. On the one hand, we have a basic nature that includes genetic instructions about both how we are to develop and also, as we shall soon consider, what very general sorts of values we will find indispensable and most fulfilling. On the other hand, we become persons only by interacting in certain ways with one another, or, as many sociologists would put it, only by playing a successful part in the social drama. We need to know, then, what our basic nature is, what society requires of us if we are to be included in, and how we can gain this social recognition while acting in accord with our nature. Only on the basis of such knowledge can we reflect profitably on how we currently are attempting to combine the natural and the social, the given and the negotiated.

All of life is played out in the tensions and harmonies between human nature and social requirements. In making it possible for us to become selves, society demands a good bit of conformity, some of it necessary, some not. Some of it connects us with one another, some distributes power in divisive ways. Some of it enables us to live in accord with our nature, some estranges us from that nature. Our understanding of and response to the conflict side of the nature-nurture relationship depends on our view of our genetic makeup. For example, society expects us to be caring toward at least some other persons and yet, on one view, it is our very nature to be uncaring. Alternatively, some work place situations may pressure us to act without care for others and yet we may have a fundamental need to be caring. Further still, much of main-stream society demands that we live as heterosexuals, while we have evidence that many persons are genetically programmed to be homosexual.

2.1a. Human Nature

We all face basic questions, then, concerning our essential nature, the expectations of other persons and groups, and the process by which we learn to combine the natural and social. As is indicated by the examples we have just considered, our culture holds widely differing conceptions of human nature. Many, including Skinner, Sartre, and Freud, take the reductionistic view that our essential needs are largely physical, pretty much those of the chimpanzees from whom we are descended. On this view, our nature is not a distinctively human one.

Others, including Carl Rogers, Erich Fromm, and, in a sense, Karl Marx, take the organismic view that, in becoming selves through the evolution of society and of a language that results in self-awareness, our organismically-based needs have been elaborated to include a set of

psychological or spiritual ones. A need for sensuous strokes now extends to strokes that are psychological. A need for organismic actualization has resulted in one for self-actualization. A requirement for physical closeness now embraces one for union as whole persons. Differences within these organismic views tend to come down to an emphasis on a need for self-esteem and one that includes a need for union as well.

The issue here is very important for us. However our nature is viewed, there is a consensus that our essential needs are very powerful. They command great energy and fulfilling them brings a kind of joy in living, as a Rogers or Marx might put it, or a deep sense of pleasure, as a Skinner or Freud might say. Conversely, frustrating them results in a concupiscent discontent and desire to injure.

Consider, then, the desire to care for, and be deeply connected with, another as a whole person. On the reductionist view, this desire lacks genetic force. It may become quite strong through conditioning, but, in the final analysis, it is only subjective. It doesn't have the deep roots in us that our physiological needs do and so is inherently less powerful and less deeply pleasurable when acted on.

Contrast this with Erich Fromm's contention that "The deepest need of man . . . is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity. . . ." This need for caring union, he maintained, is "the source of all psychic forces which motivate" and "the force which keeps the human race together." What we believe about our nature, then, will determine greatly the significance we see in needs, such as those for self-esteem and personal union, that are distinctively human and, consequently, the way we assess the motivations of ourselves and of others.

Summary: What does human nature require of us? Are our essential needs largely physical or also those of being a person? Are our distinctively personal needs centered on self-esteem and self-worth or are they also oriented around union and connectedness? Ultimately, do our genes urge us more toward separation and conflict than toward unity and cooperation?

2.1.b. The Process of Becoming a Self

What of the process by which we learn to combine attention to our genetically based needs and to social requirements? Our understanding here will depend on how we conceive of the self in relation to its environment. Three main views of this in our culture may be thought of as insular, pliable, and dramatic. Those who take the island view see the self as programmed to unfold from within in much the sense that a tree is. Thus, by nature we are the sole arbiters of the person we need to become. Our teachers and others may only help or hinder us in attending to our programming and in pursuing the specific desires that we determine by looking within. We find this view expressed in Rousseau's "incontrovertible rule that the first [un-socialized] impulses of nature are always right."

On this view, then, "individuals' essential characteristics, their needs and interests, their capacities and desires, are given independently of their social context and are not created or even

fundamentally altered by that context." Our most authentic impulse is to actualize these essential characteristics. Carl Rogers provides the following account:

The actualizing tendency can, of course, be thwarted or warped, but it cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism. I remember that, in my boyhood, the bin in which we stored our winter's supply of potatoes was in the basement several feet below a small window. The conditions were unfavorable, but the potatoes would begin to sprout--pale white sprouts, so unlike the healthy green shoots they sent up when planted in the soil in the spring. . . . In dealing with clients whose lives have been terribly warped . . . I often think of those potato sprouts. So unfavorable have been the conditions in which these people have developed that their lives often seem abnormal, twisted, scarcely human. Yet, the directional tendency in them can be trusted.

At the other end of the spectrum, the pliable view compares us not with a tree but with a ball of clay which others mold by rewarding, punishing, or being unresponsive to what we do. We simply become what the environment conditions us to be. Education is one of the processes by which we are molded. Thus, James McConnell has argued, "You had no say about the kind of personality you acquired, and there's no reason to believe you should have the right to refuse to acquire a new personality if your old one is antisocial."

For an example of being molded by our environment, we shall take the case of Professor Rasa, as we shall rename him, who was in the middle of a lecture on conditioning human behavior. Bit by bit his students had begun snickering and now were struggling to suppress outright laughter. When he ask what in the world was going on, they pointed to the blackboard. As always, he had used it a good bit but he found that this time he had written almost entirely on its right side. This behavior had been controlled by the students who had withdrawn their attention whenever he used its left side while becoming very attentive when he shifted to its right. He, in turn, although unwittingly, had rewarded their behavior by responding in the way they found rewarding.

The dramatic view sees becoming a person as a two-way street. The metaphor used to conceive of the self is neither a tree nor a lump of clay but a dramatic performer. The key idea is from George Meade: we become a self only when we experience ourselves from the perspective of another. We gradually come to understand that the other assigns us the status of being a self, gives us that special meaning--that sort of role in the social drama, and transacts with us accordingly. As Irving Goffman maintains, "The self is . . . the product of a successful performance."

Becoming a person is seen as a two-way street on grounds that we bring two things to that performance. First, we bring our experience of those impulses that convey a sense of our genetic endowment and, so, are not a product of our social conditioning. Second, although we gain a social identity by seeing ourselves through the eyes of others, we then form these experiences into an autobiography or private identity that unites past, present, and future around personal goals and concerns. This autobiography functions as a private identity that we often must sustain in tension with our social one. We become selves, then, through a process of negotiation with others in which both we and they contribute something essential to our identity. The self, we might say, is both private and public in its very nature. On this view, the ideal in education is that

we both discover more fully what it can mean to be a person in our society and, in light of that, determine which of these possibilities we wish to embrace and in what particular way.

The kinds of performance that are seen as crucial to becoming a self are included in what Alasdaire MacIntyre describes as practices. A practice is a "cooperative human activity" which we engage in for its own sake, and not primarily as a means to anything else, and which is defined by society. Music, science, literature, and medicine are commonly engaged in as practices. So are friendship, marriage, and parenting. On the dramatic view, we become persons only by learning to engage in some of these activities and this learning will be directed both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly we must experience the activity, say friendship, as inherently rewarding. Outwardly, we must learn from others what it means to be a friend in our society and whether we are succeeding in this. What it means to be a self, then, will depend on how a given society defines such essential social activities as friendship, marriage, parenting, and creative work.

Summary: How are persons related to their environment, including that of their education? Is the environment purely external to us as selves so that our essential characteristics are given independently of it and we should minimize its role in determining who we choose to become; or do we simply become whatever it is others reward us for; or is our development a two-way street in which our essential characteristics as a self are determined both from within and from without and our basic task is to coordinate our individual and social identities? In what ways and to what extent have various societies enabled people to meet social expectations while acting in accord with their basic nature?

We are examining the complexities involved in understanding ourselves and others in that we must consider both our human nature and the social requirements and expectations that govern recognition and acceptance as a person. These requirements and expectations focus on our behavior but extend to key beliefs, attitudes, values, and life-orienting metaphors--in short, to a vision of human life. In our society, for example, among the assumptions we are generally socialized to live by, patriarchy and individualism are especially prominent. At the same time, these orientations are increasingly called into question. Much of our thinking, feeling, and acting is informed both by these ways of seeing and also by the challenges to them. Thus, they are deeply important instances of those basic orientations, the knowledge of which is vital to our understanding of ourselves and our society. Let's look briefly at these two powerful ways of seeing.

2.1c. Patriarchy as a Way of Seeing

James Ogilvy speaks of patriarchy, or father rule, in terms of an interlocking metaphorical structure linking the self, the state, and the cosmos. . . . In moving from self-creation to social and political philosophy, it is helpful to locate these issues in their microcosmic form, namely, the family. Patriarchy . . . has its biological roots in the family [and] the family has often been taken as the rudimentary model of social and political organization.

But patriarchy is under fire, both from the women's liberation movement and . . . many third-world movements. . . . Not surprisingly, the political and sexual assault on patriarchy comes

when there is much talk of the "decline of the family" . . . [and] of the decline and death of the great Father in the sky, God. . . . While it may be clear that historically patriarchy is on the decline, the meaning of that decline will not be clear until we have reflected on its ramifications, political, social, sexual, and personal.

Notice what Ogilvy is saying about the power of the concept of father rule in the whole gamut of our relations from family, through various organizations, to the cosmos itself. Any change in the basic way we conceive of our relationships will produce a great deal of strain in our personal and social lives. While some see the growing rejection of patriarchy as liberation others feel it as decline, and, for most, it fosters an ill-defined sense of being somewhat adrift--perhaps most evident in confusion about gender roles. Obviously, it plays an important part in our thinking about abortion and a woman's control of her capacity for child-bearing and thus of her subsequent role in the family and in society. Equally important is its affect on our conception of authority and of power relations generally. Its consequences are, and will continue to be, far reaching and, therefore, in need of careful attention. Ultimately, how we think of our relations is how we think of ourselves and of life as a whole.

Summary: Where do you see patriarchal assumptions in peoples' sense of self, of social relations, of government, and of religion? Where do you see a waning of or challenge to this way of seeing and what do you see as the consequences of this for questions of gender, authority, and religion? Do you see it as liberation or decline and why?

2.1d. Individualism as a Way of Seeing

Another paradigm that has long affected every level of our thinking, feeling, and acting is individualism. Right from its inception historically, it has been under challenge by critics of both genders. Individualistic assumptions differ from patriarchal ones in that they do not affect assignments of power in so direct a manner and they often include a rationally defensible and widely held moral value which we shall term authenticity. Perhaps in consequence, criticism of individualism has not had so clearly visible a constituency as has the challenge to male dominance or to paternalistic attitudes in international relations. Additionally, the stresses its critics associate with individualism seem to be manifested less in on-going changes in the roles by which we relate than in, often vaguely felt, personal discontents. At the same time, because individualism has long worked side by side with patriarchy in shaping our culture, the two are intricately intertwined and are often embraced or resisted together. You may, of course, find disagreement with some of this analysis but the basic point is to indicate something of the complexity and importance of this subject and the need for disciplined thinking about it.

"Individualism" has two closely related meanings. It may refer to the nature of the self or to a value orientation. Concerning the self, we have already touched on conceiving of the self as an island rather than as rooted in social and ecological systems. This emphasis on our separateness is really one aspect of seeing everything as separate. If we have this mind-set, for example, we view organizations, nations and other groups as essentially independent rather than interdependent; the mind is conceived as an entity inhabiting the body rather than as a dimension or function of the human organism; and God is thought of as a separate being rather than as, say, the divine ground of, or sacred depth in, all things.

When we see things in this individualistic way, Carol Gilligan is arguing, we will also view our ethical obligations differently than if we conceive of ourselves as relational beings who are essentially connected. Our sense of responsibility will be an ethics of justice as distinguished from an ethics of care. From a justice perspective, we will focus on the rights and respect that are due to each individual, the equality of worth that we all share. Our concern will center on our common vulnerability to oppression. Men are typically raised to take this individualistic view of the moral claim we have on one another.

An ethics of care, as Gilligan describes it, rests on seeing ourselves as essentially connected with one another. If we live by this view, we will see concern for the well being of the other as taking us beyond a respect for her separate rights to a focus on staying connected with her in a caring relationship. Our concern will be oriented less around oppression than around abandonment. Gilligan notes that women are likely to hold this point of view.

Critics of individualism, such as Gilligan, point to social costs of this way of seeing, contending that it makes it far easier for us to respond to the rights of others than to their need for caring relationship, to experience conflict rather than synergy, to attend to narcissistic impulses instead of altruistic ones, to feel loneliness instead of belongingness, to relate through contract rather than community, to relate to nature on a basis of use rather than of kinship, to understand the sacred in terms of requirements imposed and promises conveyed at a distance rather than empowerment found and healing undergone within a relationship of union, and to think of values as private rather than as uniting us in a shared heritage and mutual understanding.

Individualism, then, is not only an account of the nature of the self but also, and consequently, a perspective on values. Critics are alarmed by an acquisitive individualism that is preoccupied with what persons can have. But there is another sort of individualism that embraces what Charles Taylor has termed "the ethics of authenticity." Here the focus is on the moral importance of what we make of ourselves in our separateness. We owe this way of seeing to a conviction originating in the eighteenth century, namely, that "each of us has an original way of being human" and that, if I fail to live in this unique way, "I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me."

Taylor agrees with critics that the ethics of authenticity is "an ideal that has degraded" into a preoccupation with oneself. But, he also maintains that it is "very worthwhile in itself, and indeed, . . . un-reputable by moderns." Taylor believes, and Gilligan agrees, that our need is to achieve a perspective that balances separateness and connectedness. It is his view that we do not become selves in separation and that our development as a unique self is stultified if we fail to achieve deep relatedness. There are goods fundamental to being a self, they maintain, such as friendship, that can only be realized in concert with others.

Summary: Where do you discern individualistic assumptions in peoples' sense of self, of social relations, of organizations, and of religion? What do you see to be the costs and/or benefits of this way of seeing? Does it take both authentic and inauthentic forms?

2.2 The Nature and Basis of Meaning

2.2a. Narratives and the Creation of Meaning

We have been emphasizing the age-old questions concerning nature vs. nurture as fundamental to understanding who we are. Asking about the role of autobiography in becoming a self gives us another question of great power in our self-understanding. The idea that life tells a story runs through our understanding not only of ourselves, but of other persons, groups, nations, the human species, and even the entire universe. We seem to need narratives in each of these aspects of life to gain a sense of meaning and significance.

Consider that, in reading a novel or watching a film, we understand what is happening in the present in terms of what we have previously read or seen and what we anticipate or wonder about concerning the future. Someone beginning the novel or the film someplace in the middle would have very little sense of what is going on. This is similar to our experience if we lose memory of our past or lack knowledge of who our parents are or even of our family history or cultural roots. The meaning that the present has for us is how we see it growing out of the past and moving into the future.

Think, too, of our understanding of other persons. We scarcely know who they are if we have learned little of their life story, the way they give meaning to their past, present, and future. When we want to become better acquainted with one another, we talk about memories of the past and plans for the future. Even in serving on a jury, our judgment of someone's guilt or innocence will depend in part on whose story we use to interpret the facts and impressions we have received, the story presented by the prosecution or that by the defense.

Our need to find meaning through narratives also applies to our understanding of social groups and, consequently, of ourselves and others as participants in them. Groups achieve identity and bind people together by the way they construct their history--the events that have shaped them and the meanings they give to these events. Thus we Americans commemorate our wars, the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the civil rights movement. We enshrine in our cultural discourse tales of the Western Frontier, the great depression, various riots and assassinations, national displays of generosity of spirit, and space explorations.

Shared stories, however, not only connect people with one another, but also both divide them from people of other groups and assign status within the group. Age old-enmities are often encoded in these histories and tend to have powerfully divisive effects. Consider the Israelis and Palestinians, or the Bosnian Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, or, in our country, various racial and ethnic conflicts, or, in Nazi Germany, the age old stories in which Jews were demonized and dehumanized, a way of thinking that, historians make clear, played a fundamental role in the holocaust.

Concerning status, we may reflect on what it means to a black child to learn history in which blacks play little part or to a young girl to learn mainly about the great things that men have done. Similarly, we may ponder the effects of emphasizing stories about Columbus, or the

Pilgrims and the Virginia colonists, in rehearsing who we are and where we came from. What does this sense of "we" mean for the status of blacks, native Americans, or those from Mexico who were early settlers of the Southwest? Yet again, we may think of the stories that families dwell on and in which members are portrayed as heroes, goats, comedians, or scarcely attended to at all. The power of such stories is well brought out when they are referred to as "scripts" that tell us who we are, individually or collectively, what our place is, and what sort of future we are moving into.

Perhaps most dramatic of all, concerning our approach to meaning, is our dependence on narrative to feel at home in the universe. Especially people of biblical faith, with their stories of creation, fall, and redemption, think not only of world history but of the whole cosmological process as a story unfolding in the mind of God according to a transcendent purpose. Even the secular ideas that evolution is moving to ever "higher" forms of life and that social change is adding up to progress appear to derive from this biblical way of seeing.

Increasingly, however, our poets, artists, therapists, spiritual leaders, and others attentive to our deepest experiencing are giving voice to widespread feelings of homelessness, emptiness, loss of a sense of meaning and purpose. One of the keys seems to be a deterioration in our ability to live humanely with one another and with nature. But another seems to be an ever lessening ability to see the universe in terms of a transcendent story. From the holocausts of our history to the emptiness of our cosmic spaces we experience much that seems entirely foreign to any sort of purposive story.

We have reason to believe, then, that to grasp the deepest tensions in our Western and Near-eastern cultures we need to come to terms with the question of how meaning and narrative are related and, specifically, what sorts of stories can now make sense of life not only in view of human evil but also in a universe of dark matter, black holes, inconceivable distances and eons of time, a big bang, and the like. There are many for whom, without a transcendent story, life would lose all meaning. This may be important in helping us to understand the current militancy of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim fundamentalists.

There are others who find meaning without recourse to what they might term a story-book cosmos. Consider, first of all, the many Jews, Christians, and Muslims for whom conceiving of God in terms of purposes and plans is too anthropocentric--too much oriented to our image of ourselves. Their conception tends to be more mystical, a sense of divinity as inwardly accessed. Next, we may think of such Eastern religions as Hinduism, with its strongly mystical bent, and Buddhism, with its view that we would be much less concerned with meaning and purpose if we came to understand that our everyday world is really one of illusion--a construction out of mere appearances. Finally, we might examine those secularists, some of whom feel the loss of a sense of cosmic purpose quite keenly, for whom meaning must rest on more limited stories of our own making. In each case, since the universe is not conceived of in terms of a story in the mind of God, the findings of science are more readily accommodated.

To know ourselves, our families, our country, or our world, then, is to know the stories that provide our identity and that unite and divide us. Asking about our stories can be an important past of a liberal education. It can lead not only to deeper understanding but a greater

responsibility for the way we experience and think. Our narratives, let's bear in mind, have a powerful affect on our behavior. Often our stories simply evolve with new experience and new decisions. Dorothy Canfield's story "Sex Education" gives dramatic expression to just how far reaching such change is likely to be. But sometimes we deliberately alter our stories by intense reflection, perhaps aided by a friend or therapist or studies we are engaged in.

Much of our power to be self-directed is our ability to change our stories. Similarly, our collective narratives--say as a society or as a group based on race or gender or ethnic heritage--are changed not only by dramatic events but by the work of historians, sociologists, poets, political leaders, and the like. Further still, the sense of the cosmos and of life as a whole that our religious heritage has given us may be influenced by contemporary visionaries and by our need to come to terms with findings about evolution and about the ultimate nature and origin of the physical universe.

Because stories are fundamental to our sense of meaning, identity and plans for the future, you will be asked in this course to start your liberal studies planning by writing an account of your own life-story. One of the activities of the Senior Seminar will be a revisiting of this account to see how your learning may have affected your sense of yourself and your world.

Summary: What narratives do you discern as shaping the meaning not only of your own life but that of groups and whole peoples? How are these stories related to science? In what ways do they unite and divide people? To whom do they assign preferred status? How do they affect perceptions in your own family?

2.2b. Categories of Meaning

In telling our stories, we humans seem universally to deal with six themes or categories of meaning. They permeate both our individual and collective ways of making sense of things. Self and society, we have said, are distinguishable but not separable, so that the way we deal with the categories of meaning at one level will affect how we come to terms with them at the other. All six show up again and again in our art and literature, our social sciences and our personal quest for identity. You may find it useful to bear these themes in mind as you formulate your questions about meaning. Among other things, you may decide there are better ways of analyzing meaning. Huston Smith, for example, uses just five categories. We shall begin with his account and then supplement it with a sixth category.

The first category is trouble. Smith emphasizes the endless forms in which this is experienced:

[Trouble] varies in acuteness from vague unrest to anguish so intense as to be unbearable. It varies similarly in frequency. To some it comes as episode, while for others it is a fixture so permanent as to reduce all life to bitterness or boredom and the whole world to bog. In guise it ranges from pain that is purely physical, through psychological neuroses, to despair in the self's deepest strata: the dark night of the soul. For the Bible, trouble is sin--a pervasive severance of man from the ground of his being, which precludes wholeness with himself and others. For the Buddha, it was dukka, an un-satisfactoriness grounded in life's impermanence and dependence.

Kierkegaard christened it Angst, the deep anxiety and unhappiness that arises from the fact that man is unable to resolve the conflicting drives and inhibitions that war in his deeply divided self.

The second category is hope. For life to move forward, trouble must be balanced by hope. Consequently, [T]here are as many hopes as there are discontents. Those who suffer from bondage and confinement dream of freedom; those who walk in darkness see (in their mind's eye) a great light. He who groans under the weight of death and transitoriness previsions eternity; while his neighbor, distraught, restless, and riven with conflict, yearns for peace that passes understanding.

A third aspect of meaning is endeavor. Life can have meaning only if our actions count for something. Thus if our hopes are not related to our responsibilities they become hollow and self-defeating.

A fourth theme is trust. "Endeavor can itself succeed," Smith notes, "only within a matrix that supports and sustains it." Trust is our sense of and confidence in that support. This feeling of support enriches the meaning that we experience in our endeavors.

The fifth category is mystery. The world we inhabit is of our own making, a way of ordering experience in light of our needs, interests, and concerns. Worlds vary from person to person and culture to culture. The more we are aware of this, the deeper our intuition of a universe that encompasses whatever orders we create, our "sense of an enveloping, undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience" as John Dewey expressed it. The world as we know it is the universe reduced to the compass of our cognitive and sensory capabilities, a manageable version of the whole on which every day life depends. Our feeling of the vastness beyond the horizon of our everyday meanings is the feeling of wonder, of mystery, of awe that adds dimension and fullness to these meanings. Spinoza is among many, through the ages, who have referred to this as living "under the aspect of eternity."

Smith emphasizes the close interdependence of these categories:

When the human spirit is in health these five categories of meaning . . . function in concert. . . . But the balance between them is precarious. . . . Obsession with trouble to the neglect of hope leads to spiritual defeat, while the reverse leaves on living in make-believe. Similarly, . . . to stress trust at the expense of responsibility encourages sloth, while the reverse excess leads to the weariness of the man who carries the world on his shoulders. Too much reliance on hope and trust together, to the neglect of facing one's problems and the effort required to extricate ourselves from them, makes a soul fatuous; while obsession with trouble and duty can turn it to lead. . . . Meanwhile, unless the four paired categories assume their structure within the context of the fifth . . . they remain superficial however precisely balanced.

The sixth aspect of meaning is relatedness. While life is a matter of growth and human life of progressing toward a meaningful future, the present is not simply a way station but a place in which values and meanings are lived. Hope, then, taken by itself, is too future oriented to enable us to love and affirm life despite its dark side. Ultimately we do not infer the good from some evidence of future fulfillment but know it through immediate experience. It is in living the value

inherent in certain ways of relating that we both learn what to hope for and also achieve the courage needed to pursue this good in the face of the under-side of life. For a great many of us, a paradigm of this is valuing friendship for its own sake. A second example is found in creative work, something we may hear in Hemingway's exclamation, "Who the hell wants fame. I want to write well."

Relatedness is not only a basis for hope and an answer to trouble but an essential aspect of both endeavor and trust. We need to experience our efforts not simply as means to an end but as inherently valuable, a giving meaning to our powers by connecting them to our world. Trust, too, is grounded in experiences of kinship, of having a nature that enables us to live in some accord with the environing reality. It is through such experience that our feelings of mystery or wonder are tied to what Dewey described as a sense that "we are citizens of this vast world beyond ourselves."

Summary: How do the narratives you discern in our lives, both individually and collectively, embody these categories of meaning? How are they given expression in the philosophy, history, literature, and social sciences you have studied? What is the effect of our cultural views of trouble, hope, and the rest on your personal sense of these meanings? To what extent do you see these meanings "functioning in concert" in our lives? Would you describe these categories differently than we have done here?

2.2c. Meaning and the Language of Myth

Our sense of meaning, we have been saying, depends on the stories by which we live. By means of these stories, we apply the categories of trouble, hope, endeavor, trust, mystery, and relatedness to our individual and collective lives. Our basic understanding of these categories themselves, however, is gained through the language of myth. As Gilbert Highet expressed it, by our myths we "deal with love, with war, with sin; with tyranny, with courage, with fate." Myth is the work of the creative imagination in fashioning narratives that both transcend and make possible the stories of actual persons and peoples. Our myths transcend us in being fictions. They make possible the shaping of our lives into stories by providing the idealized or archetypical patterns of meaning that we draw on in making sense of things. Our dependence on these dynamic fictions gives all autobiography and history a mythic dimension.

Perhaps in the West the term "myth" most readily brings to mind narratives depicting the desire of Adam and Eve for knowledge of good and evil, the creativity of Prometheus in his gift of fire, the conflict of Oedipus with his father, and the costs of each. But our contemporary story-tellers are also engaged in our need for myth. Consider, for example, our great difficulty in coming to terms with the cruelties and degradations of otherwise decent enough, ordinary young men who we subjected to the conditions of warfare in Viet Nam. It is only though the mythic creations of films such as "Platoon" that we have been enabled to take a step beyond our initial recoil into numbing disbelief and irrational dissociation, to find some place in our image of ourselves for what happened there. In much the way that children utilize accounts of witches and orgres, our participation in this mythic portrayal engages us emotionally while providing the arm's length of removal that brings catharsis and perspective.

Beyond catharsis, however, we need to answer the destructive, alienating side of life by a compelling vision of its creative, uniting side. In the words of Peter Berger, "It is through myths that men are lifted above their captivity in the ordinary, attain powerful visions of the future, and realize such visions." But there is much question about the availability of such myths for our time. Rollo May seems typical of those who are dealing with this subject for us in speaking of

the lack of myths which will give us as individuals the inner security we need in order to live adequately in our day. The sharp increase in suicide among young people and surprising increase in depression among people of all ages are due . . . to the confusion and the unavailability of adequate myths in modern society.

Each age, May is saying, must have myths that speak to its particular conditions, especially the forms in which it faces the dark side of life, on the one hand, and the creative possibilities unique to its technologies, institutions, knowledge, therapeutic understandings, and the like, on the other. In times of rapid social change, May believes, myth lags behind. Thus, "When the myths of classical Greece broke down, as they did in the third and second centuries, Lucretius could see 'aching hearts in every home, racked incessantly by pangs the mind was powerless to assuage'. . . We in our day are in a similar situation."

Insofar as we fail to find myths that adequately bind us together and provide a feeling of community and collective destiny, we must make-do with the stories we create of our individual lives. Some groups, of course, achieve a stronger sense of community and myth than others but the experience of fully adequate meaning does seem to be more the exception than the rule. To rely mainly on our individual narratives and the poetry of our separate lives, however, is a lonely business and leaves us vulnerable to the demagogues, cults, and demonic myths that are injurious to our humanity. We might think here of Jonesville or of the mythology of Nazism. A basic function of education, then, is to enable us to become more keenly aware of our need for myth, to critique those that are available, and to live our myths more judiciously and effectively.

Summary: What myths do you see informing our individual and collective narratives. How are they given expression in the philosophy, art, history, literature, and social sciences you have studied? How do you evaluate them? Do they appeal to our cowardice or our courage, unite or divide us, enable us to live with ambiguity and uncertainty or provide us with full and final answers?

3. Work: the Value of Vocation

There is little that tells us more about ourselves and our society than the way we value and organize work. Many of our most astute thinkers, such as Freud, have contended that only love plays a comparable role in determining what life is for us and most of the same questions can be asked about each.

Consider, first, questions about our human nature and what sorts of needs are most deeply rooted in us. Are these needs largely physical or do they include those central to being a self? If the latter, does the humanistic tradition have it right in focusing on self actualization--the development and use of our distinctively human powers? Reference to these powers is really a reference to our genetic endowment. They are thought to include our capacity to care for ourselves and others, to act in self-chosen ways, to embrace an ethical vision of the point of human life, and to be creatively productive. On this view, it is vital that we find fulfillment in our work (and in our love) by giving expression to powers that make us human.

Consider, next, questions about how we become persons in our social transactions and how this accords with the demands of our human nature. If we achieve identity and meaning by our interactions with other persons, then work is basic to this process because of the great amount of time most of us devote to it and the decisive role it has in enabling us to maintain and enhance our lives. The identity-creating recognition that comes from work tends to be offered to us largely in terms of power and prestige. This situation encourages the "careerism" that Boyer refers to in which work is seen mainly in terms of climbing toward the top. The question we may wish to consider is whether this way of viewing work does not drain it of the sort of meaning we most need from it, namely, meaning that is experienced in putting our powers to creative, socially constructive use. Similarly, we could ask to what extent we are socially conditioned to see love as a matter of power, vanity, and the like.

We can also ask what work tells us about our society. What sorts of things do we most want to produce? How do we relate to each other in our work--who makes the decisions, what moral concerns are acted on, how is work evaluated? What does it mean that white males have the best chances of being hired, of finding the most prestigious and best paying jobs, and of being retained and promoted? How do the requirements of work success affect our non-work lives--our leisure, our family life, the values we impart to our children, and, generally, how we think and feel and even worship? A basic principle in all this is that the way social interactions are patterned in one area of life affects them in other areas, and what most of our interactions have in common tells us the kind of society we are. Consistencies in each area of social behavior are what we refer to as institutions and we turn now to this subject.

Summary: How are work and work relations in our society, or in other societies, related to human nature? Is work at best a means to something else--say, money or prestige--or do we need for it to be an expression of our powers to be productively creative? What do work and work relations tell us about our society, including the ways in which we distribute opportunity and wealth, provide social standing, and assign social responsibility? How do the requirements of work success affect our non-work lives?

4. Institutions: the Social Web

A major institution is "a well-established and structured pattern of behavior or of relationships that is accepted as a fundamental part of a culture." Included are marriage, slavery, school, work organization, news media, family, and legislative and judicial bodies. Minor institutions are less important regularities in our behavior and encompass politeness, styles of grooming, social greetings, and techniques of political campaigning.

The key is our need for social regularity. Our intelligence and self-awareness, which make us very adaptable, also exacerbate our vulnerability and feelings of insecurity and, so, place a premium on stability. We have a natural and deep need not to block change but to render change predictable. Robert Olson gives this account of the importance of social patterns:

. . . Some measure of stability is the most basic of all human needs. The fact that we live in a larger world [than do the other animals] means a greater awareness of dangers and outside threats. . . . And the fact that our behavior is less rigidly instinctual means that we must reflect and choose and are therefore prey to all the anxieties, doubts, and hesitations that accompany reflection and choice. Moreover, intelligence itself requires a reasonably stable environment in order to function well. Under completely unstable, or anarchic, social conditions nothing is predictable and intelligent planning is impossible.

Think, for example, of the dire consequences for a people when government becomes too weak to protect them, or for children when they are not nurtured by a strong family, or for employees when their organizations cannot be counted on. Think, too, of the deep importance to our future of the question as to whether the institution of capitalism is inherently unstable because it is premised on an overall good coming out of individuals acting purely on their economic self-interest. If there is this instability in our form of economy, the question then becomes whether government and, perhaps, unions can be stabilizing forces. We see here the significance of Boyer's question of how strong institutions are created and maintained.

Stability, however, has an ambiguous relation to other values such as justice and autonomy. While it is necessary to these values and they, in turn, may contribute to it, tensions inevitably arise. Institutions not only coordinate and harmonize our activities but also regulate our competing interests. If chaos is an enemy of human well-being, so too is injustice and oppression. Consider laws, now or in times past, that support slavery, strongly favor the rights of work institutions over those of employees, and are biased toward patriarchy. Institutions on which we most depend are tilted toward the interests and values of those with the most power to shape and control them. If we are to understand the enduring issues between conservative and liberal political orientations we need to grasp what it means to emphasize the value of stability, in the first case, and of justice and other competing values, in the second.

The most important and subtle aspect of the role of institutions in our lives is that they must depend heavily on socialization for their greatest effectiveness and long term survival. From their training we absorb everything from morality to deference to authority. Socialization benefits us in enabling us to coordinate our activities with those of others and to gain inclusion in the social

drama. It harms us in getting us to think and feel and act in ways that work against our true interests--especially against our need to live in accord with our human nature.

On the problematic side, consider, for example, our socialization into the life of our work organization. William Scott and David Hart argue that the organizational point of view into which most organizations seek to socialize us is what they term the "organizational imperative." This imperative is "based on a primary proposition, which is absolute. Whatever is good for the individual can only come from modern organizations." This is because it is they on which we depend for the goods and services on which our way of life is based. A secondary proposition is alleged to follow from and find its moral justification in the first: "All behavior must enhance the health of such organizations." The interests of the organization, that is, must take precedence over the interests of all others. The point of citing this passage is to illustrate the importance of asking, with Boyer, how our institutions influence us.

Summary: How effective are the key institutions in our society or in other societies? How well do they coordinate, harmonize, and stabilize activities and enable us to count on each other? How just are they in regulating competing interests? To what extent do they reflect patriarchal or individualistic assumptions and values? How does socialization affect our autonomy and the quality of our relationships?

5. Heritage: The Living Past

Meaning, we have said, is intimately connected to narrative. Thus, to understand the present we must we see it as growing out of the past and moving into the future. This applies not only to individuals but to all sorts of groups--ethnic, gender, racial, national, religious--and to the entire human species. We need to locate the present in a structure of meaning without which our collective lives fall apart and by which we, collectively, can make rational decisions in selecting a path into the future. This quest to make narrative sense of our collective lives must bring together past and future, history and vision.

Our historians are major voices in this conversation between past, present and future. In their work, we find the past interpreted in ways that, at least indirectly, say something about the future. To create their interpretations, our historians must utilize some of the meanings by which we now live and this includes some sense of the tomorrow we fear, hope for, or count on. To this degree, they are dependent on the work of our seers and myth makers--our poets and prophets--who, in turn, in creating their visions of our collective destiny, must draw from the work of the historians for part of their material. Thus, one the one hand, our historians describe the events we must make sense of as part of our story--our collective identity--and their descriptions contribute to that sense-making. On the other hand, they make of the past a kind of laboratory in which our ways of understanding and our visions of the future are tested against the facts, as best they can determine them.

There is another way that historians contribute to the narrative structures that house our present meanings. To understand a period in the past they must articulate the sense of past, present and future by which the people of that time conducted their lives. This throws light on our present terms of understanding because meanings are not created out of nothing but gradually evolve through creative response to changing circumstance.

Our study of history can not only deepen our sense of the meanings by which we live but also enable us to make wiser, better informed decisions about moving into the future. Let's look at this practical side of understanding out present in historical context.

It has often been said that if we are ignorant of or mistaken about the dark-sides of the past we are doomed to repeat them or to be victimized by their recurrence, something that applies to our collective as well as individual lives. We would like to avoid further Viet Nams, Great Depressions, world wars, Holocausts, times of mean-spiritedness, important institutions becoming weak or oppressive.

Surely a similar point can be made about the successes of the past. What ideas and ideals have proved realistic? What ways of organizing, regulating, and understanding life have fostered social stability, justice, freedom, and a sense of purpose in life, and under what conditions and procedures have we humans been able to do this? The more we know about our history, the better we understand ourselves, respond rationally to the flux of events, and tap the cumulative wisdom of that heritage.

Another pragmatic point is that to understand other peoples we must know something of their history. Some of the greatest blunders in international relations have come from a lack of such understanding. There are, of course, limitations on how well we can enter into the history and culture of other peoples just as there are on our understanding of earlier periods of our own history. We must always use something of our own meanings to enter into that of others. That we can do this at all tells us something about what we share in common in our nature and experience.

The idea of learning from history, our own and that of others, and thus avoiding mistakes and repeating successes, poses a more fundamental question. To what extent, collectively, do we have the power to exert very much, if any, control over the future? As we study history, do we get a sense that human purpose, planning and ideas really have much effect? Are there cusp points, moments of kairos as New Testament terminology would put it, times of special opportunity in which great men and women gather mass support to turn history in one direction or another?

Alternatively, do we learn that the complexities of history are so far beyond our grasp, or the deepest forces so irrational or otherwise beyond our control, that at best we can only muddle through, as British writers sometimes put it? Was Freud correct that "dark, unloving powers determine human destiny", or Plato and Spengler that history is metaphorically comparable to living things that endlessly grow and die, or right-wing Marxists that socio-economic forces push us inevitably toward a classless society, or conservative Christians that God pre-destines us to a transcendent purpose? If we make a difference, is it only in hastening or delaying the foreordained or do we have something to say about the nature of our destiny?

The story of human history, as well as that of an individual's life, can be told in terms of the meanings we create, and the decisions we make accordingly, or in terms of forces that determine us. One of the questions we may bring to our studies is how much weight we should give to each of these ways of seeing. To what extent, that is, do we have a hand in charting our own collective destiny?

Summary: What systems of belief do you find historians using to interpret the past and how do differences in these beliefs result in conflicting interpretations? How does our sense of the past (or that of others) unite and/or divide us and affect our hopes and fears and plans concerning the future? What does history seem to you to indicate about the interplay between the collective decisions we make and the forces that determine us?

6. Nature: Ecology of the Planet

Of all the ambiguities of being human, none has proved more difficult for us than that of being part of nature and yet transcending it. As Boyer and our ecologists are reminding us, "All forms of life on planet earth are interlocked" and we need the study of science to bring home to us the full measure of this truth. We ignore this at our peril, especially in view both of the strain that burgeoning populations place on nature's resources and also the enormous power to bend nature to our desires that science and technology have joined to give us. We do indeed need to recognize our great dependence on the viability of the ecological system. We are at once, then, dependent and transcendent, and therein lies our opportunity and our peril. Questions of basic importance to liberal studies, then, will concern both our place in nature and our attitudes toward it.

6.1 Our Ambivalence About Nature

Being interlocked with nature poses yet another sort of problem, one that concerns our identity and our courage. It is our bodies that anchor us in nature and, for all of the delights they make possible, they leave unanswered the needs of the human spirit and they subject us to physical pain, debilitation and death. We are tempted, then, to distance ourselves from the indignities and death that come with nature.

One way of denying our vulnerability as creatures of nature is to identify ourselves solely with spirit. This finds expression in a long history of dualistic thought, such as that of Descartes, the seventeenth century originator of modern western philosophy, who conceived of mind as essentially separable from the body. In the twentieth century, however, dualistic thinking has come under intensive criticism and rejection by main-stream scholars, including those taking the quintessentially American perspective of pragmatism--a way of seeing that is found, for example, in the psychology of William James, the sociology of George Herbert Meade, and the educational theory of John Dewey.

Another way of gaining a sense of distance from the vulnerabilities of life is by focusing on experiences of power, not only our own but, especially, the power of something greater than ourselves that we feel part of. Unfortunately, denial of the ultimate precariousness of life appears to require a degree of power that is inordinate in going beyond healthy self-assertiveness to dominance over others. This may take the form of power over individual persons or, even better for a sense of over-riding superiority, of a subjugation of whole groups. Commonly these groups are identified racially, ethnically, religiously, morally, nationally, or in terms of gender. Consider how often demagogic leaders prey on human fears and promise some form of supremacy over an alleged enemy. A desire for inordinate power may also take the form of seeking to dominate nature. Think of how commonly we speak of "conquering" some aspect of the natural world, as, for example, conquering space. If dominance provides a means to transcend, or at least to cloud, our sense of finitude, then we readily can see why the power to impose our will has proved so seductive.

Concerning our stance toward nature, our European heritage seems not to have served us well. Native Americans, for example, have expressed a profound kinship with nature as have many in

the East and in Africa. But our most influential Western attitudes have been those of distance and dominance, as we find these expressed, for instance, in the biblical view that God has given humans "dominion" over the earth. It may even be that the vehemence of the ages-old Western repression of goddess and pagan religions has been fed, in part, by their close ties to nature.

There are, of course, other strains of Western heritage to draw on in dealing with our vulnerabilities and our place in nature. Concerning nature, the romantics and New England transcendentalists, for example, saw us as family members rather than rulers and demonstrated that there is a good bit of courage and largeness of heart to be derived from a sense of belonging and nurturance. Concerning power--our ability to carry out our intentions--the humanistic tradition has emphasized its creative forms as providing not an experience of distance from our vulnerabilities but the courage to cope with them. Courage, they have maintained, comes from the development and use of our distinctively human powers to love, create, take a hand in our own growth, and achieve insight concerning our human nature and how we may live in accord with it.

Perhaps the deepest question concerning our relationship with the rest of nature is a moral one. What moral claim do we feel the other animals, and perhaps even the ecosystem, to have on us? Our sense of the moral, if it is humanistic rather than authoritarian, is an expression of our convictions about what it finally means to be human. As Peter Wenz argues so persuasively, part of this is our belief about the significance of life per se and not just about life in the form in which we partake of it. What does it do to our feelings about human life if we care little for life in its other expressions? We might compare this question with that about the effect on our feelings about being human if we care little for humans other than those of our own ethnic, racial, religious, gender or other group.

These are controversial themes, but the basic point for our educational choices is that there are two sources for our understanding of nature and our place in it, one scientific and the other personal. Science has much to say about the inter-connectedness of all forms of life and about the dependence of life on the inanimate side of nature. But recognizing our dependencies still leaves open the question of our feelings for nature--our sense of its place in our lives. Our bodies are the gateway to understanding nature not from the distance of external observation but from the immediacy of inner experience. Sam Keen maintains that as we are in our bodies so we are in the world. Perhaps both our well-being and our survival depend equally on our knowledge of and our attitude toward the realm of growth and decay, vitality and enervation we call nature.

Summary: In what ways are we dependent on a viable ecology, what moral obligations do we have toward other members of the natural order, and what does all this mean for how we choose to live and for the technologies we develop? How should we think of ourselves in relation to our bodies and thus to the world of nature? Why have some peoples adopted an attitude of dominance toward nature and others a feeling of kinship with it? What does this say about our sense of the moral and the meaning that power has for us?

6.2 Science and Our Knowledge of Persons

We have been emphasizing our attitude toward nature because that greatly determines the use to which we put our knowledge and the place we give to our bodies in our sense of ourselves. But notice that we have spoken of two sources of understanding and this means two forms of knowledge, one rational and one non-rational. "Non-rational" does not mean irrational but rather refers to a practical, or feeling, or existential way of being rational. We shall examine this in the section on "Art: the Esthetic Dimension." For now we reflect on rational or theoretical knowledge.

Basically, rational knowledge provides an understanding of how things function and so enables us to anticipate the future with some reliability and to carry out our intentions with some effectiveness. We depend on it especially to substitute for the instinctual guidance that is so much more effective for the other animals than for us. We gain much of this sort of knowledge in everyday life as we observe regularities in how people think, behave and develop, in how groups function, in the way gravity affects us, and so on. We form these observations into beliefs which we test against our on-going experience. Science provides us with knowledge of the broad, abstract patterns that underlie these common sense observations by utilizing more rigorous and reliable forms of testing. This greater reliability depends especially on spelling out more precisely just what we anticipate than we are in our everyday beliefs. We speak here of more than one form of testing, because scientific methods must be modified as our subject matter changes from the physical to the biological and then to the social and psychological.

The social sciences confront us with the deeply puzzling question of the place of scientific knowledge in our knowledge of ourselves--and here we are back to the ambiguities that stem from being aware of ourselves and, so, of being able to reflect on what we are about, determine our attitude toward nature, decide on our actions, and so on. Social sciences are possible because there are regularities in how our thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting are affected by various conditions--the social and natural sources of those regularities. What, then, do we make of surprises, of being creative, of departing from the expected? Do these experiences point to deeper regularities we have yet to discover? Is an expertise possible that will over-ride any beliefs that are based on our private experience? Or, is the scientific way of studying ourselves inherently limited, so that it is incapable of dealing with some of that which self-awareness brings into the picture? Does, in fact, our need to anticipate how others will be in our transactions with them require a non-rational as well as a rational form of knowing?

To put this in more detail, if we think of ourselves, in principle, as predictable in everything we do, then what happens to our ideas of freedom, responsibility, meaning, purpose, and being a person who is more than an object of experience and prediction--someone who also does the experiencing and predicting? These concepts are part of the everyday language in terms of which we become persons and become aware of being persons. Are they indispensable to being a person and, if so, what does this mean for the place of scientific ideas and findings in our self-knowledge--our sense of what it means to be human? Do these findings, and the language on which they depend, lead to a correction and enrichment of our everyday ways of thinking or somehow supercede them?

The implications of these questions are far reaching. They concern, for example, the role of scientific expertise in such matters as collective governance and individual therapy. Can we best improve life, or even save ourselves from catastrophe, by a program of social engineering based on scientific expertise such as that portrayed in B.F. Skinner's Walden Two? Is the promise of democracy ultimately vitiated because it places too much reliance on our everyday way of understanding and judging? Or, in the case of personal healing, what is the appropriate relation between the therapist's expertise and patient's self-understanding? Consider, for example, Carl Rogers' analysis of the famous case of Ellen West that ended in therapeutic failure:

The greatest weakness in her treatment was that no one involved seems to have related to her as a person--a person worthy of respect, a person capable of autonomous choice, a person whose inner experiencing is a precious resource to be drawn upon and trusted.

Rather, she seems to have been dealt with as an object. Her first analyst helps her to see her feelings but not to experience them. This only makes her more of an object to herself and still further estranges her from living in and drawing upon her experience. Wisely, she says that the "analyst can give me discernment but not healing." The analyst points out to her that she is an individual with such and such dynamics. She agrees with him, though surely not on the basis of experiencing these dynamic feelings. She is simply following the pattern which has already isolated her--distrusting her own experiencing and trying to believe and feel what she should feel, what the expert tells he she feels.

This passage is cited to illustrate the problem of how we can best relate the scientific and personal perspectives and not to discount the importance of the scientific side. Rogers himself studied with the greatest possible rigor the conditions that are necessary for personal growth and healing and was never able to reconcile in his own mind his sense of conditions that determine our growth with his belief in personal autonomy.

Underlying any assessment of rational knowledge is that part of our heritage that we have received from the Enlightenment, a way of thinking that has deeply shaped us and yet one we are increasingly uncertain about. The heart of this way of seeing is a faith that reason will give us a basic mastery of our human problems. Part of our sense of crisis today appears to be a wide-spread loss of this faith. So much seems to be spinning out of our control. Some conclude that reason is far more limited than we had thought, especially when it comes to understanding ourselves. To others, the defect seems to lie not in the power of reason but in our general lack of courage to open up to the truths with which social scientists confront us. Ernest Becker, for instance, has concluded that, although "Evil itself is now amenable to critical analysis and, conceivably, to the sway of reason", the large majority of us appear to find life bearable only by shielding ourselves from the full truth about this dark side of human life.

Summary: To what extent is the obstacle to greater human well-being one of ignorance and to what extent is it one of ego-centricity and/or failure of courage? What do you see to be the effect of our social sciences on our everyday sense of what it means to be a person, including our everyday ideas of purpose, meaning, freedom, and responsibility? Should we continue to take our everyday sense of being a person seriously and use scientific findings to modify and enrich it, or should we regard our sense of self and the ideas on which this rests as a kind of illusion,

although one we cannot do without? Is human life ultimately a game of pretence that is best played--and perhaps most compassionately played--by not taking it very seriously?

7. Language: The Crucial Connection

We have proposed, as the starting point for your agenda, that you concentrate on the kinds of questions that are fundamental to personal development, namely, questions about self-knowledge, connectedness, and meaning. The idea is that they underlie all of the other areas of your liberal studies and they can be answered more fully through your work in these fields. No other area takes us quite so deeply into these questions about the fundamentals of being a person as does language. This is because we become persons by interacting in certain ways with other persons and language is the basis of this interaction.

Consider, then, that language varies from culture to culture, group to group, and academic discipline to academic discipline. Since language is basic to being a person, different languages result in different forms of being human. Further, since language determines the kinds of thoughts and feelings we can have, each discipline requires us to think and experience in terms that both focus and limit our attention. Questions that are basic to the language section of you educational agenda, then, will ask about how language affects both the person we become and the course work we engage in. What sorts of values are embedded in the language of a culture or of other social groups, and what sorts of questions and answers does the language of a particular field of study--and its social group--enable us to work with?

To see the fundamental significance of these questions we need to reflect further on the key role of language in functioning as a human being. It gives us self-awareness and the possibility of self-knowledge because it enables us to represent ourselves to ourselves. We can be creative because language empowers us to imagine beyond the here and now. We can shape our lives into an identity-providing story because we can think about our past and our future. Language connects us to others because it enables us to understand one another and to relate in ways that make us persons.

This last point is the one we need most to understand if we are to frame our questions about language most effectively. Few ideas have so powerfully illumined the nature of being human than that of George Herbert Meade and sociologists generally that we become a person only as we learn to see ourselves through the eyes of others. It is from them that we learn what it means, in our culture, to be a person--to think, feel, and act in this particular way. Little by little, as we develop the language by which this meaning can be communicated and as we learn to behave accordingly, we understand that the other regards us as a person--gives us that special meaning in his or her world and treats us accordingly. The meaning of being a person with other persons is essentially moral in nature because morality comes down to a cultural understanding of what makes human life possible. The moral principle that we should never treat persons purely as objects, and thus as something less than human, is a good example. We grasp the ultimate significance of language, then, when we realize that, as persons, we are conceived in the minds of others and born in dialogue with them. Symbols are the stuff out of which we are made.

7.1 Kinds of Language and Kinds of Persons

Against this background, we can understand well that different languages result in different forms of being human--different thoughts, feelings, values, expectations, and ways of relating.

Think, for example, of Japanese in which the term for the key emotion in Japanese life has no close equivalent in English. About the nearest we can come is dependency. Further, since a number of other feelings are closely tied to this one, they too cannot be translated very accurately into our language. Think, too, of values connected with face and, particularly, saving face. These, to be sure, are important to us but not in just the way or with the same degree of concern that they are in Japan. We cannot understand the Japanese way of life very well without close attention to these and other features of their language, nor can we understand their language without grasping how it is interwoven with their form of life.

Understanding how other languages and forms of life contrast and compare with our own gives us a deeper self-understanding. We can see this rather pointedly in the account given by Dorothy Lee of the greater freedom expressed in the language of the Wintu Indian of Southern California than in English. The Wintus, she notes, have no word for permit since they do not impose the kinds of restrictions that make permission necessary. Along these lines, she points out that Wintus say not that the chief rules his people but that he stands with his people, not that the mother takes her baby someplace but that she goes with the baby, and not that the boy has a sister but that he lives with his sister. Learning to relate in terms of ruling, taking, and having will result in a less free and respectful quality of living, Lee helps us to see, than thinking and acting in terms of standing with, going with, and living with.

Just as the language differences that determine different human possibilities are found between cultures so they also occur between groups. Here we may recall Carol Gilligan's account of the tendency among men to mean by "right" and "wrong" a fairness between essentially separate individuals, and a tendency among women to think of morality in terms of care between essentially connected persons. Gilligan's is one of a growing number of accounts of the tendency of the sexes to learn different languages. We also can relate her work to our earlier discussion of individualism as a way of seeing and the fact that we find this embedded in much of the language of our culture generally and especially in our capitalism and our work organizations.

Summary: What values and ideas about being human are embodied in the language of our culture? How do these differ from those of some other language you have studied? What differences do you find in the languages of sub-groups within our culture? What differences between those of genders?

7.2 Wholeness and Living By Conflicting Languages

Because language differs from group to group, we find ourselves functioning as rather different persons or in different ego-states, as it is sometimes expressed. Most of us will find this especially apparent, and perhaps troubling, in moving between organizational life and that of our family or church or circle of close friends. It is commonly noted that work organizations tend to communicate in moral terms that are quite different from, and often at odds with, those we use in private life.

It takes us deeper, still, into this tension between the languages, or perspectives, of organizational and private life to consider our socialization into the organization and, especially, into its particular language. Only through socialization can we function effectively in the organization

and enlarge our sense of self beyond our separateness. But socialization may go to the extreme of crowding out our individual point of view. We may come to perceive problems solely from the organizational perspective and make decisions purely in terms of organizational concerns and beliefs. This, as Chester Barnard contends, is the most powerful form of organizational control available.

Many theorists such as Tompkins and Cheney or John Kenneth Galbraith see this form of control as a grave threat to individual autonomy and dignity. They note that it is "unobtrusive" because it generally operates "behind our backs", to borrow Erich Fromm's phrase, and so tends to leave us unaware of how thoroughly our thinking and perceiving are permeated by the organizational view of things. To function as whole persons, we need to find a place for our individual point of view in our work life or, in other words, to balance our participant and individual identities.

We can illustrate this problem in terms of whistle blowing, in which an employee makes public the fact of an unsafe product or some other form of dangerous organizational practice. Consider the language used, some years ago, by James M. Roche, then Chairman of the Board of General Motors, in characterizing whistle blowing:

Some of the enemies of business now encourage an employee to be disloyal to the enterprise. They want to create suspicion and disharmony and pry into the proprietary interests of the business. However this is labeled--industrial espionage, whistle blowing or professional responsibility--it is another tactic for spreading disunity and creating conflict.

From the perspective embodied in this language, the employees' obligation is solely to the organization. Any personal sense of responsibility to society and to the ideals which employees hold as individuals is to be set aside in organizational life. If we think solely in terms of concepts that reflect a very narrow view of organizational responsibility, then we lose the ability to distinguish the moral difference between whistle blowing and industrial espionage in which information is stolen and sold to a competing company. Each is understood only in terms of damage to the organization.

We can avoid splitting our lives into separate worlds only by coordinating the use of languages that represent different dimensions of who we are. To retain some semblance of wholeness as a person we need to learn to function effectively in the group while yet remaining someone who is also more than a group member.

Summary: In what ways do work organizations or other groups use language-perspectives that accommodate or that override the personal ways of looking at things of their members? How, especially, is this true of the ethics involved? What is the effect on persons of living by language-perspectives that deeply conflict with one another?

7.3 Academic Language and Its Paradigms

Some of our questions about language, then, may focus on how it affects the person we and others become. But we may also find it profitable to ask how it affects some of the course work we engage in. Every academic discipline utilizes a language that embodies certain assumptions and tends to support certain theories as orthodox--theories, one frequently finds mainstream academicians maintaining, that any competent, right-minded practitioner cannot but agree to. Often, to be sure, there are dissenting groups within a discipline, especially as evidence begins to mount against the mainstream view or when there are ideologies to be served, but what they offer us are alternative assumptions and, quite often, competing orthodoxies. Newtonian physics, for example, rested on assumptions that time and space are absolute. Or consider that orthodox geography of the 30's regarded ideas about continental drift as beneath notice and orthodox economic thought early in the same period was thoroughly wedded to supply side conceptions.

A powerful way of examining this role of language in your studies is to ask about the paradigms that are being used. A paradigm is the defining instance of what we mean by a concept or belief or way of seeing. Think, for example, about the key experiences from which you draw your idea of what love is or what another person is really like or what America stands for. Think, too, of how Christianity relies on the events of the Exodus and the life of Jesus to symbolize the nature of God.

Just as our everyday thinking and judgment are guided by paradigms, so, too, is the thinking in academic disciplines. Thus, in behavioristic psychology of B. F. Skinner, the key to understanding why persons develop as they do is the example of repeating a behavior because it has previously led rewards from the environment, say, working hard on a paper because this previously has resulted in praise and high grades. This contrasts with the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers for whose thought the paradigm is occasions when persons are related to with care, empathy, and honest and draw on an inner motivation to develop their powers to care, create, take responsibility for their lives, and the like.

By understanding the paradigms at work, we discern the strengths and weaknesses, the scope and limitation of a point of view. The strength of any view is in dealing with events that are most like its paradigm, the weakness is in dealing with those most different from it. Thus Skinner appears much better able to deal with changes in habitual behavior than with those in a person's system of meaning. Rogers, in turn, throws a brighter light on learning to act in accord with one's nature than on learning from others what it means, in our culture, to be human. Concerning science, generally, it is an often noted fact that some experimental results are anomalous in the sense of just not fitting the theory in question. Despite this area of weakness, if the theory is well established it will be retained because of what it does predict well. Over time, the discrepancies may build up to the point that theory is changed and a new paradigm put in place.

An understanding of the governing paradigms in an area of study also reveals the kinds of answers it will and will not provide. Thus, if we use the language of behaviorism to ask about the nature of being a self, the answer will come in terms of behaviors that become habitual. If we ask how one becomes a self, the answer will speak of how behaviors get reinforced. The paradigm in

use is one about conditioning and behavior and the answer must follow suit. There are no concepts in this language by which to discuss things that may take us beyond conditioning.

Some answers will prove more helpful than others, some paradigms will furnish a more apt point of reference than other standard instances, but each may well have something to contribute. If our understanding is always relative to the language-perspective from which we achieve it, we can none-the-less come to see something from a chorus of perspectives and thus experience it more richly, with greater wholeness, and with less reliance on clichés. Moreover, our greatest advances come from the application of paradigms to subjects for which they initially seem ill-suited but which they lead us to see in new ways. Thus the behavioristic paradigm of behavioral change, when applied to questions about the self, has contributed to the idea that we are what we do and that even our knowledge of ourselves is deeply dependent on how we find ourselves behaving.

Change in language, then, gives us power to see things in new ways. Thus, there are two levels of creativity in all academic disciplines. Whether the area is psychology, physics, literature, or art, it is one thing to use the language available in creative ways but quite another to change the forms of expression of the language itself. Compare, for example, the great work done by utilizing the expressionist style of painting with the creation of this style itself. Our study of psychology, literature and the rest will be a bit superficial if we do not ask about the nature and origin of the language each employs.

Summary: What paradigms are at work in the disciplines you have studied? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Are these paradigms being challenged? If so, on what basis?

7.4 Dealing with Issues and Embracing a Language

We have been talking about the power of language in making possible our humanity and in determining the particular sorts of meaning by which we live. Let's now consider how very difficult it is to take the full measure of this power because, like the glasses through which we see, language is largely transparent. Its effect on us is hard to take notice of. We experience, think, and feel by means of language. Even to think about it we must use it. It shapes whatever awareness we have of it. It is precisely in being ever-present that its presence is nearly beyond our attention.

The point is that many of life's important issues involve questions of language and this easily escapes our notice. Think, for example, of the question whether there are absolutes and, if so, what they are. Beliefs are regarded as absolute when their truth is taken to be beyond question, beyond differences in cultures or in centuries, and beyond any limitations in the perspective of those who hold them. Absolute truth, of course, also implies that the falsity of opposing beliefs is beyond question. How, then, should we assess the many claims to absolute truth by a wide range of individuals and groups around the world today, including, for example, Muslim, Christian, and other fundamentalists, or still others who hold that homosexuality is evil or that women should be obedient to their husbands. We can answer this only by adopting a particular language, one which has the concept "absolute" or one which lacks this concept. In some languages, people can, and do, think in terms of absolutes, in others, they cannot. Then, too, people who think in

terms of absolutes will disagree about what they are, depending on that to which their language gives this status. Does life lend itself to black and white judgments? Some languages assume that it does, others that it does not.

The basic question, then, is what reasons there are for using one language rather than another. Those rejecting the idea of absolutes, for example, commonly cite what they see as the inhumane treatment of non-believers that is often justified in these terms. Those embracing this concept in some form usually argue about the moral degeneracy they associate either with relativism or with the absolutes of other believers. The question of divine revelation often enters into these discussions but this, too, is a concept available in some languages but not others. We can scarcely understand our world today without careful attention to what languages people use and why.

Issues surrounding abortion also involve questions of what language we choose to live by. In this case, the basic question is not whether to use a particular concept but what to apply it to. If we ask, say, whether an embryo is a person, we cannot answer by studying the embryo. The issue is, given the nature of the embryo, should we apply the concept "person" to it. Reasons, again, concern the consequences of using language in one way or in another. They include the effects of these languages on our feelings of reverence for life, on our sense of a woman's ownership of her own body, and on our belief about women's proper roles in society and marriage.

This is similar to the situation in a court of law in which the facts of a case are agreed to but there is disagreement about whether, given these facts, the legal concept involved should be extended to cover them. Such decisions give further definition to the concept in question and are referred to a precedents. Thus someone may be tried for reckless driving and there may be agreement about their personal condition at the time, the condition of the road, the speed at which they were traveling, and so on and yet it may be unclear about whether this should be judged to be recklessness. The prosecuting attorney will argue the similarity of the case to previous instances of reckless driving, the defense will bring out the differences. The defense will also point to similarities to cases in which the person was found not guilty, the prosecution replying in terms of the differences.

We see in this an example of language as a system of classification and of how these classifications affect our judgment and experience. Thus, if we classify the embryo as a person we draw attention to its similarities to those we all recognize as persons and to the dissimilarities to things we think of as non-persons. If we think of the embryo as a non-person we direct attention to its dissimilarities to persons and its similarities to non-persons. Either way, we are apt to wonder why others do not see what we see.

The importance of dialogue is to remove this blindness to another way of seeing and, while disagreement will doubtless remain, the terms of disagreement may become more respectful. In deciding how to respond to perspectives different from our own, we are deciding on our sense of what it means to be human--again a question of the concepts by which we choose to live.

Summary: What differences in language-perspective do you find in issues you have studied? What reasons can be given for and against adopting the language employed on each side of the issue in question?

8. Art: The Esthetic Dimension

The quality of our lives depends on being able not only to think effectively but also to feel effectively. Effective feeling is the esthetic dimension of our mental activity. It requires competence in a language of feeling just as thinking depends on our ability to use conceptual language. The arts give us some of our languages of feeling. Literature and poetry provide others. What these esthetic forms of expression offer us, fundamentally, is not an escape from life into vivid feelings but an ability to live more adequately and rewardingly.

The arts can be used for escape, as can poetry, literature, drugs, sex, religion, and a whole range of feeling-related activities, and all of us need this from time to time. But, far more, we need to renew and enrich our lives and this is a matter not simply of feeling but of feeling effectively. To make this a part of our educational goal we need to formulate questions about educating our feelings to help us deal realistically with our own nature and with our environment. Some of these questions concern transcendence, some wholeness, and some immediacy of awareness. We turn first to consider transcendence.

8.1 Effectiveness as Creative Transcendence

Developing our esthetic sensibility deepens our appreciation of wholeness, authenticity, and beauty. But it also increases our ability to transform life accordingly. We can transform life because we can transcend the present. We can step back from it, appraise it, imagine it changed, determine how that change can be accomplished, and act accordingly. It is imagination, then, that lifts us out of confinement to the present and gives us some say about our individual and collective lives. Transforming life effectively in terms of deepened awareness and appreciation of wholeness is imagination become creative.

It is the power and importance of creative imagination that makes the esthetic dimension so vital to our lives. The understanding and development of this creativity can be done through art but it also has a place in virtually everything that marks us as human. Esthetic sensibility is at work in the whole range of creative activity that extends from science and math to creating our personal identities and empathically touching the lives of others. To focus on this wider significance, we shall consider more than the artistic aspects of esthetics.

Our education will develop our creative awareness insofar as we learn to bring feeling and reason into a cooperative relationship. To get at this, let's consider three ways that we process things mentally, which we shall term our rational-individuating mind, our emotional-connecting mind, and our existential-creating mind. We can think of these mentalities roughly as grounded in our brain's left-hemisphere, right-hemisphere, and combined-hemispheres, respectively. As we proceed, however, let's bear in mind that this is at best a useful system of classification, one among a number of systems we might use, and that the world does not come in such neat divisions.

Our rational-individuating mind deals with order, predictability, logic, rules, sequential reasoning, means, facts, and, above all, conventional language-use. This way of experiencing and processing tends to be dominant in our society and especially in our work organizations. Indeed,

throughout history we can see a protest against the excesses of this tendency by romantics, existentialists, mystics, surrealists, and others who attend more fully and seriously to our feelings.

When we use this rational mentality, we orient ourselves outwardly and attend to our separateness from others. We ask how things work--what rules are followed--in nature and in society. In knowing how things work, we are able to determine the likely results of our actions and thus not to act on sheer impulse. By discerning what makes sense in the social game we guard our sanity. Our rational mind, then, makes possible both self-control and the power to carry out our intentions. The liberal studies category of "tools" aims at strengthening the skills of the rational mind.

Our emotional-connecting mind is concerned with feelings, values, sexuality, meanings, ends, network, synergy, and, above all, expressive language-use. When we use this mentality, we orient ourselves inwardly, seeking what is pleasurable, accessing messages from our genetic endowment, and also attending to our connectedness with others. Through this mind, we relate to nature as something pulsing in our bodies whose rhythms we can join rather than as something we can observe and control. We become responsive to the cycles of nature rather than to the linearities of a social-life deeply shaped by technology. We locate ourselves not in the real or objective world but in a surreal or subjective one, a world that we construct in terms of our concerns and desires.

We may think of our rational and emotional minds as concerned with form and vitality, respectively. Sometimes we appropriately by-pass the emotional as does a surgeon while operating or a manager when analyzing data. At other times, we rightly dismiss the rational, as in moments of reverie, fantasy, or acting in freedom from enduring consequence. But, fundamentally, we need to function as whole persons, uniting pleasure and reality, genetic needs and social expectations. Form without energetic aliveness is empty. Vitality without effective form is irresponsible and chaotic.

It is the existential-creative mind that bonds the rational and the feeling mentalities. This mentality is existential in enabling us to function as whole persons. It is creative in uniting form and vitality.

In creativity, both the rational and emotional minds bring to the creative process what has been learned from earlier collaborations. On the rational side, we must achieve not only skilled technique but a deftness in matching form to meaning. On the emotional side, in working with the requirements of reason, the imagination takes on a sense of what it means to be effective in real life. As Henri Poincare has put it, "To create consists precisely in not making useless combinations [but] in making those which are useful and which are only a small minority. Invention is discernment, choice." We become more creative, then, as we develop this sensibility, this power to discern in which direction our imaginings are likely to enhance our understanding, power, and awareness.

Such educated discernment is a tacit recognition that the patterns formed by some of our fruitful combinations in the past appear applicable to the present. A few of these function as what we

have earlier termed paradigms. We may think of our repertoire of these remembered patterns as our creative guidance system or our heuristic, as it is sometimes called after the Greek term for "discover." Becoming an effective practitioner of any discipline--say art, history, or physics--or, indeed, any other socially defined activity of inherent value and standards of excellence--such as friendship, parenting, basketball, or chess--is not so much a matter of gaining knowledge as of learning the heuristic involved.

Jerome Bruner discusses three kinds of guidance system we develop depending on the basic area of creativity--or achievement of "effective surprise"--in which we work. The first is the "formal effectiveness" of mathematics, logic, and, possibly, music. The discernment operative here is described by Poincare as "the feeling of mathematical beauty, of the harmony of numbers and forms, of geometric elegance."

Second is the "predictive effectiveness" of the sciences. Here Bruner speaks of "a kind of 'intuitive familiarity' . . . that gives [the creating scientist] a sense of what combinations are likely to have predictive effectiveness and which are absurd." "Intuitive", as we have suggested, may be thought of as a recognition in the present of a previously experienced pattern of pragmatic combination.

Finally, and more closely related to our concern in this discussion with the personal quality of our lives, there is the "metaphoric effectiveness" of the playright, the poet and the artist. In this mode of creativity, Bruner contends,

The artist must speak to the human condition of the beholder if there is to be effective surprise. . . . [He] must be close enough to these conditions in himself so that they may guide his choice among combinations, provide him with the genuine and protect him from the paste.

The existential conditions that the artist is called to address, Bruner believes, are the eternal tensions between good and evil. It is only in facing what is life-negating that we are able to create a life-affirming response to it. Think, for example, of that quintessentially American music, the blues. In giving creative expression to our human troubles, the musician says yes to life in spite of its dark side.

Because art and literature deal with the antinomies of good and evil, life and death, affirmation and negation, our study of them can tell us much about the society in which they are created and, as Boyer says, they can be a "means by which the quality of a civilization can be measured." Ultimately artists must make use of whatever ways of seeing make social life possible in the culture that nurtures them.

That we must learn to use our emotional-connective powers effectively--learn to use them in ways that coordinate with the requirements of rational understanding--applies to two other forms of creativity, namely, our capacities for dialogue and for holistic self-awareness. Dialogic effectiveness depends upon our ability to listen to the other in terms of her way of experiencing life, especially her sense of the human condition and the mythology or vision of things by which she articulates a meaning for her life. We must use reason and feeling together to construct a sense of how she engages life.

Our capacity for dialogue depends, in turn, upon the quality of our own self-understanding, especially, echoing Bruner's basic criterion for metaphoric effectiveness, how close we are to the human condition as we ourselves live it and how attuned we are to the role of metaphoric vision in making sense of life.

Effective self-awareness is the counterpart of dialogic effectiveness. It is through the way we experience ourselves in dialogue, or genuine, caring encounter, that we gain our deepest understanding of what it means to be a person. These conditions enable us to look openly at our immediate experience of life's problems and fulfillments and to explore, with the other, the soundness of our judgments of what we should fear and turn away from, on the one hand, and what we may hope for and profitably embrace, on the other. Self-awareness becomes sound and effective as we learn to distinguish the mature from the infantile, the natural from the conditioned, and the universal from the idiosyncratic.

We learn to use our rational and emotional minds cooperatively, and so to develop each in relation to the other, by learning to use the esthetic languages. We can see this most clearly in the case of metaphoric and symbolic language. Metaphors or symbols can be employed by both minds and, so, can be media of communication between them, enabling us to act as whole persons. To take one example, if we say, with the jungle fighter, "life is war", the rational mind can point to many actions that clearly have to do with conflict, aggression, dominance, and the like and can make a logical case that other actions are similar in their underlying motivation. At the same time, the emotional mind can bring out the personal meanings of these conflicts and antagonisms in terms of fear, anger, rage, jealousy, resentment, envy, contempt, and the like. The emotional mind supplies the metaphors while the rational mind judges how realistically they can be applied--whether the meanings they suggest can be made real in social and natural transactions.

For a second example, we might consider our dreams. They provide us with metaphorical material but their application to everyday life requires interpretation. Such interpretation brings the left brain into play, another instance of the two spheres working cooperatively.

Summary: What learnings have made your capacity of self-awareness, empathic understanding, and creative activity more effective? To what extent does this involve your understanding of the human condition? In what areas of life, including your course work, do you see each of the three mentalities dominant and how do you appraise this dominance? Does it vary among social groups including those of gender?

8.2 Effectiveness as Achieving Wholeness

The quality of our lives ultimately rests on the wholeness we achieve. Wholeness is life-enhancing connection. We discern and express this relatedness, whether actual or potential, through effective feeling. The feeling of life, beauty, and belongingness is our sense of connection or harmony, while that of death, ugliness, and alienation is our perception of disconnection or discord. Compare, for example, our response to a living tree and our reaction to a pile of brush. Thus, the esthetic experience enlivens, the anesthetic (as in anesthesia) deadens.

It is, let's recall, our sensitivity to and appreciation of wholeness or vital aliveness that is basic to our creative imagination.

The study and practice of art and of literature, then, can tutor our feelings so that we better understand the wholeness we need and are more deeply motivated to achieve it. Concerning the first point, James Ogilvy has contended that

Esthetic education not only educates the student to man-made products of his cultural tradition; it also quickens his sensitivity to his own felt need for a balanced and whole human existence. Wholeness is an elusive standard when the parts of human existence keep changing with the flux of history. . . . We need an esthetic sensibility to tell us whether man's most recent creations of himself cohere in a healthy pattern of wholeness or fall apart into schizoid decadence.

What it means to be whole, then, will vary according to the conditions which must be accommodated and the vision of the human that is being served. This means that each culture, and each period of time within that culture, will have its own esthetics. Thus in the West, since the Renaissance, wholeness has been conceived in terms of the uniqueness of each individual. This is especially striking, for example, in the portraits painted by Rembrandt. Contrast this with Buddhist cultures in which wholeness is understood as a quality of the whole system of nature and not of individual persons. Human beings occupy inconspicuous places in their representations of the vastness of nature. Consider, too, the contrast of the three dimensional art of the Renaissance with the two dimensional art of the Middle Ages in which individuals were seen as transparent to, and thus utterly dependant on, the one true reality, namely, their divine ground.

At the same time that esthetic experience sensitizes us to the question of wholeness in our time, it can illuminate our desire for life so that we feel more compellingly our need for that wholeness. Consider, for instance, a turning point in the life of the great Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The occasion was an encounter in which Michangelo's sculpture "David" said to him "change your life."

There is reason to believe that the quest for personal wholeness is tied to achieving greater wholeness in our world--a world of greater justice and union. The idea here is that self and world are intimately connected. We must define ourselves in terms of our world and our world in terms of ourselves; wholeness in ourselves and wholeness in our world are deeply interrelated. Thus, Colleen Triplett speaks of "the intersection between art and social change" and also of that between art of personal healing.

Our feelings are the bridge between body and mind, our way of responding as whole persons. They combine bodily sensations with evaluations of an event or situation in terms of our well being as persons. Thus anger involves a state of bodily arousal but it is also more than that. It includes a judgment that an action is both detrimental to ourselves or to those about whom we care and also is wrong. Esthetics educates us to the kind of emotional judgments that are rational in the sense of enhancing life. It enables us to discern the irrationality of those emotions, such as envy or resentment, that are generated by a sense of a lack of personal worth and connectedness,

and the effectiveness of those feelings, such as joy or friendship, that find fulfillment in our creative powers and their drive toward wholeness.

Summary: In what ways does life today support and in what ways does it undercut "a healthy pattern of wholeness"? Why are some of our emotions life-enhancing and others self-defeating? What does this say about "the human condition"? What is the role of society in this?

8.3 Effectiveness as Experiential Openness

Wholeness in ourselves and our society depends on openness to experience or, more precisely, responsiveness to a full range of sensation and feeling. If we routinely shut off awareness of certain aspects of life, whether genetic or environmental, then the identities we construct cannot represent them and so lack wholeness. At the same time, the actions we engage in are then motivated without regard to part of our nature and/or to some of the social meanings of being human and so lack freedom. They are carried out in the face of an inner resistance from our excluded side and so are deprived of spontaneity and authenticity. The opposite end of freedom and spontaneity is compulsion and is represented by actions serving a single drive or impulse. Thus, acting with a sole concern for success we will compromise all competing interests such as those of family, fairness to others, and health. Most of us act sometimes with relative freedom, sometimes with a degree of compulsion, and sometimes, perhaps most commonly, with a half-hearted, compromised freedom.

The orientation of esthetics toward wholeness, then, goes hand in hand with its invitation to an immediate awareness of sensation and feeling or to a "cleansing" of perception, to borrow from Aldous Huxley. But, awareness asks for understanding and, as a result, the esthetic dimension commonly generates controversy and resistance. One of the reasons for this is that awareness carries a price. It not only heightens our appreciation and transcendence but also sensitizes us to the dark side of life and to our inadequacies and vulnerabilities as persons. Consequently, we both welcome awareness and resist it. We may educate our feelings in some areas of life but turn away from them in others. Only with courage can we live with reasonable openness.

It is this function of inviting fuller awareness that makes the esthetic dimension the prime target of control in repressive societies. In Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, and Maoist China, art was even less free than religion. Expressionistic painters were especially singled out for harsh suppression as degenerate because they drew attention to the inhumanities of their time.

Those who oppose freedom deeply fear the tutoring of our feelings not only because this develops our capacity for transcendence and wholeness but, even more fundamentally, because it puts us in touch with our human nature. Some of what we feel is largely the result of social conditioning but some, while not free of social influence, is expressive of our genetic endowment. If we are to distinguish true from false needs--needs which are compatible with our basic nature from those which are not--we must become sensitized to the difference in these feelings. Ultimately, we must assess feelings in terms of the consequences of living by them. The history of western humanism is the history of this determination of which feelings point the way to an enhancement of life and which lead to its impoverishment.

An important question, then, in our study of those who have highly developed their existential-creative minds is how they discern the relative difference between the natural and the artificial, the genetic and the conditioned. Whatever their errors and points of blindness, we can find important insights of this sort in the humanistic side of such visionaries and myth-makers as Isaiah, Jesus, Socrates, Mohammed, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Spinoza, Hawthorne, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Dickenson, Tillich, Van Gogh, Ghandi, Ellington, Levi-Strauss, Rachael Carson, and Simone de Beauvoir.

We may think of our study of these prophetic geniuses as a kind of dialogue in which we seek to apply their insights to our own world and to our unique individuality within that world. Few thinkers today conceive of the natural as something entirely unconditioned and unchanging. As Ogilvy has put it, "Wholeness is an elusive standard when the parts of human existence keep changing with the flux of history." This puts a deep burden on our own capacity for esthetic judgment. Our humanistic heritage can educate this judgment but cannot substitute for it by giving us absolute beliefs.

We began this exploration of liberal studies with Boyer's view that "Ultimately, the aim of common learning is the understanding of oneself and a capacity for sound judgment [that] brings purpose and meaning to human life." We have now come full circle in presenting effective feeling, tied as it is to effective thinking, as the essence of such judgment. It is only in developing our capacity for effective feeling that education meets real needs and arms us against whatever in ourselves or in our society--forces of cowardice, greed, oppression and the like--induces those which are false.

Summary: Which of the thinkers/creators you have studied have you found most insightful about wholeness and authentic feeling? In what ways have you found societies promoting, and in what ways obstructing, their peoples' "capacity for sound judgment [that] brings purpose and meaning to human life"?