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Religion Seminar Reflection

Performing a Socratic seminar at exhibition was a truly interesting and, I feel, successful experience. As this had never been done before, there was a large amount of pressure concerning the quality of discussion that would have to be performed in order to make it exhibition worthy. Overall, I believe that the seminar was done very well. We were eloquent and insightful, and were careful about thinking before speaking. As far as my participation, I feel that I did a good job of not monopolizing the conversation and moving the discussion forward with new ideas and opinions. It was stressful to be wary of not offending anyone’s personal beliefs, particularly those of our audience members whose opinions we did not know. I wish that our audience members had taken a more active role in the conversation. During the first seminar, there were very few people who chose to sit in the circle with us and become involved in the discussion, and there was only one member of the audience who chose to offer up any perspective at all. I think it would have been an amazing experience, both for us and for those in the audience, if we had been able to openly discuss religion with people that we had never met.

One of my favorite parts of my seminar was when the conversation turned to the topic of enlightenment and whether this idea was something that should be actively strived for. While we were discussing specifically what enlightenment is, Ranier said, “Enlightenment is existing from a different angle.” As soon as this was said, it immediately changed my perspective of what it means to be enlightened. Before, I thought of the state of enlightenment as finding a balance between all aspects of life, be it knowledge, love, or otherwise. In other words, I thought of enlightenment as a state of harmony. Now, I think of it as a new life perspective, brought on by some sort of deep emotion. Enlightenment is achieved when the individual is forced to transcend him or herself and approach life in a new way.

This particular seminar only changed my way of thinking in a couple ways. It altered my opinion on enlightenment, which I already discussed, and it also affected the way that I view the acceptance of belief systems. Will brought up the idea of forced religion, particularly the conquistadors and South America, and a member of the audience stated that she did not believe that any belief could be forced onto a person. After the seminar, I thought a lot about this concept. I came to the conclusion that religion itself can be forced, but complete and total spiritual acceptance cannot. For instance, religion can be forced onto a people in the way that has been done many times in history, where the option was either conform or be killed. The doctrines and practices of a religion can be unwanted and yet accepted in order to appear non-threatening. However, emotional and spiritual connection cannot be forced upon an individual. A child can be raised into Catholicism, and adopt the practices and doctrine, and still not connect to the beliefs in their heart. I only started thinking about the concept of forced religion after I participated in the seminar.

One of the ideas that was discussed in the seminar was that of religion vs. spirituality, and whether they were mutually exclusive. After the seminar, my mother expressed her disappointment that the idea of faith and spirituality was not talked about. When I spoke with her, she said that she believes herself to be faithful, but not religious. My mother identifies as a Christian, and she finds a lot of her spirituality through prayer and belief in God. One of the things that she always tells me is, “My belief has nothing to do a religious system. I believe in God because I have faith in him, not because a religious group has told me that he is real.” Our guest speaker on Christianity also discussed the idea of faith, and where it exists in our lives. According to him, every person has faith, regardless of his or her beliefs. It simply depends on where they choose to place their faith that determines who they are. For example, when we sit on a chair, we have faith that the chair will support us. Some people place their faith in what they can see, like science, or the fact that the sun rises each morning and sets each night. Other people place their faith in things that cannot be seen, like the existence of God and the transcendence to Heaven after death.

Overall, this project has helped me on my journey to discover my own spirituality and faith. I was raised into Christianity, but I never personally connected to anything that I was being taught. As I grew up, I participated even less in the belief system, choosing not to identify myself as a part of the Christian religion. This project, particularly the study of several different religions, has given me a kick-start to begin searching for where I will place my faith. I don’t feel obligated to become devoted to any particular religion, but instead I feel drawn to several different beliefs from several different religions, such as the ideas of karma and fate alongside the existence of a higher being. This project has given me the necessary information to make an informed decision on my religious path, and continue on my spiritual journey in my life. Not only this, but this project helped me to personally shed the negative stereotypes that exist around certain religions, especially Islam, and be much more tolerant of all types of people in my own life.