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Education: Torn Between Practical and Ultimate Value

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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The Philosopher's Stone

The Newsletter of The Philosophical Debate

Education: Torn between practical and ultimate value

Some Things to Consider. . .

How do we learn? Why is one student motivated to learn while another is apathetic toward learning? Why is each one of us here, as individuals, and why are we here collectively? How is education viewed culturally? How does the job market view a college education; is it looking for educated people, people who have deepened their character and sense of purpose in the subordinate process of completing a degree, or does education just serve to help sort through the amassment of applications for jobs and promotions? Education is generally viewed as a means; is there a way to still make education an enriching experience? What will education become in the future? How is our educational system doing from a global perspective; are we graduating people who can compete with other countries in knowledge? As technicians? As human beings?

Highlights from the last meeting. . .

At the last meeting, we discussed the value of education. A long time ago, only the wealthy were able to go to universities. The idea of going there was for Theology and law and for social status. Today, things have changed; rather than becoming educated, our goal has been shifted to developing a skill. To get a job seems to be the most important reason to go to school. We tell our children that they need to go to college to get a good job. Where does this mentality come from and why is it so instilled in us? A piece of paper gives you an "edge" in the job market. Why? Is it really because of the quality of person that they are looking for, or is it just a "weeding out" process?

It is getting to the point now where we need a Masters or a Ph.D. because the market is so flooded with those who have acquired their Bachelor's degrees. No matter what we tell the children, it is ultimately their decision; they can choose not to pass the entrance exams. Also, a degree seems to mean more to those who do not have one. But is getting a job the only reason that we go to school?

Diane Copage gave a very touching speech about her view of education. She said that after having a career for 25 years, going to school was always a dream. She could not go to college and take care of her children while she worked. Now that she is able to be in school, she is here to immerse herself in what she loves; to "read and study what I love." She may teach one day, but the professional goal is secondary; her primary concern is learning.

Has the whole experience of education changed? No one on campus seems to have time to discuss intellectual matters. The cultural idea of being in school in a fast-paced life-- rushing to class, out of class, to work, to other things--has detracted from the time spent enjoying and taking advantage of other opportunities that the institution may offer, whether this means taking classes which seem interesting but are not required or attending functions on campus such as informal discussion groups.

The value of education is eternal, but the culture does not see the inherent/intrinsic value in it.

A note from the editor. . .

One of the things discussed at the meeting, but not fully enough expounded upon, was the notion of internal value of education as an enriching experience; that something can have value for us without cash return or pragmatic application. Internal value both subsists and subsumes material value. What we get out of our education, and how we allow it to affect our lives, can be largely up to us if we can simply step back and allow ourselves to view it from the perspective of internal value.

Recently i was speaking with a friend about the implications surrounding the possibility of making a formula or technique to get through school without really learning. That formula is: memorize and regurgitate. But in doing so we learn only memorized, forgettable facts, rather than expanding ourselves with a deeper and broader sense of understanding and meaning. The question about which should be primary- internal or return value--is not as simple as we would like it to be, as our circumstances demand that we make practical decisions and therefore the idealistic notion of education having value in itself seems incomprehensible to most students.

But perhaps there can be a compromise, and somehow in our endeavors to achieve practical goals we can also make the effort to to develop ourselves as human beings. For me, there is more value in a thing valued for itself than in something for which the worth is predicated on some other supposed consequent which may or may not follow.

Does what we value externally reveal a bit about what we value in ourselves, and in others? Choices, such as whether to cheat on a test, re-use a paper for a class, or "cut" a class, represent larger choices such as what we believe in, what we value, and how we define ourselves by our actions. Are we making inadvertent and irrevocable determinations about our own character in those particular choices? In our previous discussion of Self, we explored definitions of Self and theories about its constituent parts; we said very little, however, about how we perceive its value. Is our own Self only a means to acquiring a better paying job, a sports car, or a 4th television set? This is not a question which deals only with education, but with our attitudes and values.

Everything has a price.

We are scared to run out of money, time, and friends, but in the rush to secure these things, we forget to be afraid of losing ourselves. And that is, perhaps, the scariest thing of all.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, February 5

8:30 pm

Lane Library, room 206

Our Topic: What is value? Is there value that is inherent in things or ideas, or is it all superimposed by us? Where value is imposed by us, why is it given to certain things? Is it socially determined? Do we value things solely for what they give to us, such as education for the opportunities it may open up? Or do we value things for the pleasure they give us? Do we place more value on the things that we find more familiar to us? Why?

The Essence of Art

*By: Micheal Torrance,
AASU Alumnus*

What is art? This question has baffled scholars for thousands of years. Why, because there is no set answer to the question. Art is such a wide and diverse area, that one's definition of the word could fit one type and feel quite holistic, but unintentionally leave out a whole art form. A basic definition of the word art is that it is an activity of using the imagination and skill to create beautiful things. I question whether this definition is all inclusive and if it really does tell us what art is. My answer to this is no, it does not. It may give a little insight into the creation of a work of art, but it does not explain what a work of art is; this definition does not explain "why".

As I have already stated above, this is an age old question, so the chances of me explaining and answering it in this article are needless to say slim. Art is a very subjective topic, that is to say, what is art to me may or may not be art to someone else. For example, I find Frank Miller's Batman.- the Dark Knight Returns to be a great work of art, but I know a lot of people who would disagree with me. I am not very fond of Picasso's works and do not think he was a great artist, but I seem to be a minority in this feeling. These examples show the subjectivity of art and raise the question, is there a standard by which a society can judge art?

Schopenhauer placed art on a hierarchy scale based solely on its cognitive value. To him, music was the highest form of art, but can we put art on a scale that places one form of art over another? According to Schopenhauer, a person who listens to a piece of music and can not understand it or attain anything from it is not smart enough to understand it. Yet this same person may look at a painting and almost immediately find the meaning within the piece. Could their understanding be attributed to the fact that, as Schopenhauer suggests, painting is lower on the scale in cognitive value, or could it be because the person is more accustomed to visual arts than music?

Whatever the reason, does this still not make art subjective? Does perceiving more meaning from a work of art mean it is a higher, greater art form? Personally, I find Schopenhauer's hierarchy both ignorant and ingenious. He set out to answer an age old question and came up with a very thought provoking solution, but unfortunately based it on his own personal, subjective opinion.

Hegel called all art a stage or step of liberation out of the mundane and not the highest liberation itself, if it were the highest liberation it would be permanent and not temporary. Art to me is something that can take us away to places far from the chaos of everyday life and gives us a glimpse of the way we would like things to be. When asked why I became an artist, the answer is simple: because it is fun.

Special Announcement

The Philosophical Essay Contest

*Essays must focus on a philosopher or some philosophical topic

*Each essay must be a minimum of 1,000 words and include name and phone number to be eligible

*Awards will be given for First, Second, and Third place winners

Deadline: March 27th, 1997

Drop off your submissions in "The Thought Box" in the Writing Center, Gamble Hall