

Theme of Freedom, Responsibility, and Justice

1) Are there such things as Human Freedoms?

Human freedoms are enjoyed to the extent we recognize it and do what is necessary to preserve them. The degree of freedom we each enjoy is directly connected to the actions pursued by ourselves or others. As individuals we can often fail to recognize the extent human freedoms implies to us as American citizens. Often times this freedom is mischaracterized or overshadowed by our own perceptions or lack of courage. Goethe speaks to this point (Goeth pg 141) in Freedom Responsibility and Justice. "None are so hopelessly enslaved as those who falsely believe they are free". This thought may suggest many are held captive by their own misconception of freedom.

In contrast, we see others who go through great lengths to obtain freedom. The founding fathers of this nation put everything at stake including their very lives. The struggle for freedom eventually inspired the Declaration Of Independence drafted by Thomas Jefferson. This was endorsed by the 13 English colonies on July 4, 1776. This document set forth the human freedoms we enjoy today. Following is a statement from the pre-amble. (Declaration OF Independence Pg 144). "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". Were these freedoms extended to all citizens as set forth by our government?

Class film September 24, October 1 2012. "The Freedom Riders in 1961". These individual were willing to sacrifice their own lives to grant equal freedoms for Black African Americans. Concerned citizens and blacks alike riding on public buses through the deep South to make a point. The Freedom Riders may have questioned their human freedoms as they were beaten by a mad mob. Especially in light of the fact officers in uniform stood by and did nothing.

2) How are these associated with Rights?

In the case of Goethe “None are so hopelessly enslaved as those who falsely believe they are free”. Rights mean different things to each of us. Nationality, culture, religion and upbringing all impact our perception of our rights. All of these elements must be considered before drawing conclusions of one’s definition of rights. This thought should not be confused with one’s false sense of freedom due to ignorance or a blatant disrespect for truth as suggested by Goethe.

Each of the events above are associated with a number of our basic rights. (Pg 88 American Government and Politics Today) Civil Rights “Generally, all rights rooted in the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection under the law”. This law did not apply to Black African Americans as recent as 1961. (Pg 91 American Government and politics Today) In 1883 the US Supreme Court passed a ruling in Plessy vs. Ferguson creating the “ Separate-but-equal doctrine”. This was enforced from 1883 to 1954. The Supreme Court overturned the “Separate-but-equal doctrine in 1954. (Pg 92 American Government and Politics Today). “Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka”. As such several rights were withheld from African Americans by law for seventy-seven years. These rights were not automatically granted to Black Americans after the Brown case. Bold actions from citizens such as “The Freedom Riders” were implemented to garner the attention of the president before the South would allow these rights to be restored for all to enjoy.

3) How do such freedoms or rights manifest themselves in the political realm or the religious realm?

The political realm is constantly shaped and influenced by topics surrounding our freedoms and rights on a daily basis. Consider the painter John Trumbull (Class slide show September 24, 2012). John Trumbull was employed to recreate a painting depicting the moment when the signing of the Declaration of Independence occurred at Independence Hall in 1776. The leaders of our new formed government felt it important to capture this moment in the form of art. John Trumbull did not disappoint as this special moment was exacted in a splendid piece of art. From a political perspective, this painting has had a profound impact on our perception of early politics by conveying a stature of importance and grandeur in the public eye. Should we question if Mr. Trumbull’s painting captured this moment as it really was? How many versions were drafted before the final draft was released to the public? One thing we can be certain; politics played an important role in the outcome of this painting. Martin Luther King was instrumental in “ The Civil Rights Acts of 1865-1875”. His example of non-valiant protest changed the political landscape by bringing public awareness to many inequalities. (Pg 239 MLK Letter From Birmingham Jail). “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”. Statements coupled with action demanded justice. John F Kennedy as President of the United States had to do

something or he would have face negative political implications. On the other side of the spectrum, many hold the political beliefs we lose our freedoms to the extent we allow government influence or rule. (Pg 147 Henry Thoreau) “ That government is best which governs least”. It is up to the individual to depict the right amount of political influence we allow government to bring to bear and what that means to our freedoms.

Religious realms also shaped and influence topics surrounding our freedoms and rights on a daily basis. In early colonial days, many of our founding fathers were careful to establish separation of church and state. (Pg 65 American Government and Politics Today) “Establishment Clause was designed to create a wall of separation of Church and State”. In spite of this clear separation, religion continues to impact politics today. (Class discussion September 17, 2012) A Florida teacher loses his job by posting anti- gay comments on his Face Book account). As discussed in class, this teacher’s ideals and morels may have been influenced by his religion. Could we argue his actions were protected under the “Freedom of Free Speech”? Should the school (a public institution) have the right to fire this teacher for exercising his rights? Is it fair to state one’s views on this matter will vary depending on their own religious views?

Theme of Sacredness, Spirituality, and Morality

1) Buddhism- an Eastern Religion and how it defines humanity's relationship to the divine.

Buddhism ranks number five in the world top religious power players today. With over 360 million adherents (Buddhism / Hinduism slide show in class 10-8-2012) they are a force to be reckoned with. Topped by Hinduism and Christianity who net over 55% of today's adherents,(class discussion 10-15-2012) Buddhism has earned it's place as a religious contender.

What is humanity's divine relationship between Buddhism and it's 360 million plus followers? As stated by Albert Einstein, "Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future: it transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and the spiritual, and it is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful experience for all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity." (class slide show 10-8-2012). While Albert Einstein is not endorsing Buddhism his statement does suggest Buddhism is well equipped to define the human relationship to the divine.

Let's pause for a moment and think of "religion" as a vehicle. What influenced you to select the vehicle you did? Are you a soccer mom? Yes, ok then let's review your daily transportation needs in a given day. You are tasked with taking your three kids and two other neighborhood kids to school five days a week. You are also responsible for picking these kids up after school and then running them around to several extracurricular activities. In this case, a Dodge mini-van with built in DVD players and strait jackets would serve this need. Do you think an eighteen-wheeler dump truck would also serve this need? It may look sexier than a mini-van however it would not be practical for this soccer mom's needs. Like the vehicle analogy, you may want to consider Buddhism the next time you are shopping for a religion. Why? Buddhism is practical and provides the widest range of amenities for today's busy lifestyle. Let's assume your personal Buddhism divine connection to humanity unexpectedly breaks down. No problem, simply proceed to your nearest Buddha statue and get your fix. Since the Buddha network is global you always have local support wherever you are. This is more practical than many religions with a divine customer service center located on another planet light years away. And once you do make a perceived connection you get little to no help. Now one can argue the level of service is based on one's faith; that's another topic for another time since we need to draw a few conclusions from the sacred text of Buddhism.

Buddhism's god lives among it's adherents on this earth in the form of physical objects. This transcending of a personal god removes the magic / spin used by many other religions. Members have the freedom to ask "Why". This adds a practical element of democracy and allows it's members to make

educated decisions to adapt to an ever changing landscape of social and political pressures. The “why” authority by members serves as a check and balance to keeps the divine leadership authority in check. This relationship between Buddha and the congregation has a proven track record we can’t deny. (Class slide show Hinduism and Buddhism 10-15-2012) “Do not believe in doctrines because they have been handed down to you through generations, do not believe in anything because it is followed blindly by many; do not believe because some old sage makes a statement; do not believe in truths to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Have deliberations and analyze and when the results agrees with reason and conduces to the good of one and all, accept it and live up to it.” Wow...that statement resonates with power and truth as it cuts corruption to the quick. How many times do other religions use the cliché, if you don’t understand it then pray. If no answer comes then put it on the shelf until it can be answered at some future date. How many questions can you pile up on a shelf? Is this a health way to interact with your sacred divine relationship with self and god? Does this allow one to tap out at a shallow level of thinking knowing they can simply stack it on a shelf with all the other unresolved questions as needed? How many of us have overloaded that shelf of unanswered questions? How many of these shelves have ripped from the wall and spilled their unanswered questions into a black hole? These inefficiencies are shared by many religions of the day. However, Buddhism can address questions as they occur and provide answers in real time.

True to Buddha ideology, earthly objects such as art, architecture, and dress make this religion very attractive to all of humanity. (class slide show depicting Buddha image at Wat Lung Poh Tho, Northern Thailand on October 8, 2012. A work of art known as “Laughing or Smiling Buddha.” Bohdi Temple in India). The Wat Lung Poh Tho Buddha meditating is an inspiring work of art yielding an element of heavenly importance. This may serve well for the more benevolent minded seeking a deeper meaning of his or her divine relationship to the universe. On the other hand, the “Laughing or Smiling Buddha” provides a much lighter side of life. This depiction of Buddha will resonate with a very different group of members. As you can see, Buddhism provides a wide variety of art, architecture and ideology for it’s members. They are truly a one stop shop reality check for other floundering religions to consider.

Let’s consider “The Buddha’s Path To Enlightenment” (page 855-863 in the text) . This is an account of a wealthy high society individual who made a conscious decision to leave his wealth and comforts of live in search of a spiritual awaking. This individual became known as “Master Gotama” who had a profound impact on Buddhism in his time. After stripping himself of all earthly wealth he began experimenting with his own body. Using the principle of self-purification he set out to conquer all mortal desires of the flesh. Depriving himself of food to the point of starvation. Restricting his breathing to the point of passing out. He used meditation to overcoming the desire of lust. At each stage of Gotama purification experiment he would find an “Awaking” with each achievement over mortal and earthly desires. Once he had mastered all temporal and mortal bodily desires he became a Master teacher to other monks. True to Buddhism tradition Gotoma did not pray to a supreme being or heavenly god to find his awaking. Everything was recognized as earth based and tangible to physical objects.

Gotoma used physical objects and earthly powers to address all aspects of his life. Let’s consider the elephant account he used to make a point to his fellow monks. (Page 862-863 from the text). Other

monks started speaking untruths about Gotoma's teachings. When approached by his fellow monks he proposed a solution. He gathered up all the blind individuals living in a region and took them before the king. He proposed the King conduct the following experiment to prove Gotoma's point: The king asked the crowd of blind citizens if they wanted to see an elephant. Upon agreeing, he divided the group up into several independent groups. He then had an elephant led in for show and tell. However, he only showed specific parts of the elephant to each group. As you can imagine each group gave a very different picture of the elephant. Gotoma then drew the connection between the elephant experiment and the other monks who were misrepresenting his teachings. Why do you think Gotoma had the king oversee this exercise? Why did he use a tangible object; the elephant? In keeping with Hinduism this suggest we can resolve anything using earthly power and objects without seeking help from a greater power we can't- see feel or hear.

Following is a great quote from Gotoma (page 862 of the text) in closing. "When the wheels of Truth had thus been set ruling by the Blessed One the earth gods raised the cry: At Benares, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the matchless Wheel of truth has been set rolling by the Blessed One, not to be stopped by monk or divine or god or death-angel or high divinity or anyone in the world." You have to admit, that is a classy way of rebuking an adversary while maintaining dignity of self. In many respect, Gotoma's earthly ideology perpetuated his philosophy of mortality transcending as a higher power that prevails over supreme beings.

Theme of Identity, Privilege and Inequalities

2) How do we gain a better understanding of ourselves in and through the understanding of others? How do racism and prejudice hinder equality in terms of race, ethnicity and gender?

They who view only themselves as the focus of the universe soon feel the crushing weight of the world cascading down on their shoulders. Darkness surrounds such individuals precluding sunbeams of opportunity to light the way and warm the sole. Left unattended, one will surly succumb to the shackles of racism, prejudice, inequality, gender and ethnicity unrest. Courage, persistence, and dedication must be adopted as part of our moral core to break free from the natural clutches of human behavior. The sunshine of hope, prosperity, and success welcome those who master and employ these traits consistently.

Is prejudice natural; is it part of our hereditary DNA; is it taught through nature or nurture? The discussion in class on November 5, 2012 suggest the answers to each of the questions above are shaped by our personal "filters" of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, religion, nationality or disability's. The "Skin-Tone and Race IAT" on line test is a good example of the effect of "filters" play in each of our personal views of human identity. I view my outward beliefs, actions, and commitments as diversified and open to all humans. However, my sub-conscious mind holds a different belief than my outward conscious mind. This exposes the inner demons we all must conquer before "true" equality is achieved. Fredrick Nietzsche stated on page 298 of our text. "Each of us is given one life. The impossibility of forecasting human potential and of estimating the enormous value of each human being makes it all the more important for us to consider the injustices caused by inequalities which are created by human constructs, ideas, and structures. Race, gender, disability, and ethnic identity, all treated here in this textbook, are just a few of these." Fredrick's observation may hold the answer to many solutions as we unlock the issues that perpetuate human inequality.

Let's consider African American and how they are perceived here in America. Have American citizens as a whole offer the same privileges to this race as others? Langston Hughes on page 419 of the text depicts this view in a poem. " I, too, sing America. I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes, but I laugh, and eat well, and grow strong. Tomorrow, I'll be at the table when company comes. Nobody will dare say to me, eat in the kitchen, then. Besides, they will see how beautiful I am and be ashamed...I, too, am America." Langston's pome has undoubtedly exposed one of many common practices imposed on African Americans. This kind of behavior is perpetrated by citizens belonging to the most advanced free nation in the world. Why? Are we jealous others my crowed our lifestyle of threaten the privileges we enjoy? Dudley Randall stated in the text page 429. "There is a magic melting pot where any girl or man can step in Czech or Greek or Scot, step out American. Sam, watching, said, Why, I was here even before they came, and stepped in too, but was tossed out before he passed the brim. And every time Sam trie3d that pot they threw him out again. Keep out. This is our private pot. We don't want your black stain." Stop for a moment and put yourself in Sam's position. Would you view this as the American way? Is this the equality of freedom justice and happiness our forefathers fought and died for? My grandfather Carl Fischer who emigrated from Denmark often shared this analogy. "An open hand is always open to give and receives. A closed hand can't give or receive." A closed hand form a fist. This is a symbol of inequality and will only deliver pain and suffering to one's self and the victims who suffer from this hand. By opening up would breakdown the inequality's that exist between our fellow humans. This would yield true prosperity for all. November 5, 2012 slide show in class offered a good glimpse into the lives of African American's struggling to succeed in America. Aaron Douglas, The Song of the Towers 1934. The hues, colors, shades and depth of this painting captures African American culture. Cast in the middle of a modern city with building towering skyward one can see a cast down shadow on the bottom left hand corner of the painting. Arm rose to touch the crown of head as responsibility, aguish, and despair attempt to smother and repress. Yet another figure is working separately to run up the economic gear of life as flames nip at the heels. One who has rose to the top of the economic gear and now enjoys a finer way of live. This art illustrates all aspects of African Americans working to become equal here in America and serves as a reminder. The pathway to equality and prosperity is a struggle.

Gender based inequality is notably the number one force suppressing human civilization as a whole. Why? Gender is a common factor in all races and effects close to fifty-percent of any given group. Women have sunk to a subservient level to men. Virginia Woolf page 318 of the text. "She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it-in short she was so constituted that she never had a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the mind and wished of others." Women at large have come to accept this plight in life as part of their gender culture. Women must recognize this culture as a damaging attribute regardless of what gender it is applied. More women need to shake off the cultural female perception of self. Virginia Woolf states it best. Page 318 of the text. " I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defense. Had I not killed her she would have killed me." This is true in reality for left unchecked; women will take this perception of self to their graves unless they stand up and take back their lives. On line reading " Our Racist, Sexist Selves" Alice Eagly said "In general, gender trumps race... Race may be easier to overcome. The challenge for women competing in politics or business is less misogyny than unconscious sexism. Americans don't hate women, but they do frequently stereotype them as warm and friendly, creating a mismatch with the stereotype we hold of leaders as tough and strong." Why are women stereotyped as such? Given the opportunity, women outperform men in many positions typically dominated by men in America and abroad. Nicholas D Kristof on line reading "Women now hold fifty percent of top jobs at American foundations but are still vastly underrepresented among political and corporate leaders-and one factor may be that those are seen as jobs requiring particular toughness." This would suggest, women are equal to men and society and coulter teach and reward women different than men performing the same task.

Women in art are not perceived as equals to men. Class slide show Nov.19, 2012. Marie-Elisabeth Boulanger Cave "Women must confine herself to those subjects which are allied to her spare...children, animals, fruit, flowers, etc. But when a woman desires to paint large sized pictures, she is lost" Class slide show Nov. 19, 2012. " Less than 5% of the artists whose work appears in the Metropolitan Museum are women." Is this troubling given the fact women are born with an entrusted talent for art where men have to learn it.