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Dewey Meets The Buddha

by
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Abstract: From the Greeks we have inherited the notion that a profound awareness of suffering is essential for ethical maturity. In Buddhism, a fundamental aspect of ethical awareness is that *all life is suffering*. In a more contemporary context, a fundamental aspect of John Dewey's philosophy is that a meaningful education must bring *all of life* into the classroom learning experience. By combining these ideas, we confront the possibility that deep ethical transformations can occur by incorporating our students' suffering as a fundamental component of the classroom learning experience. But what are the strategies through which we and our students can utilize suffering in order to bring about ethical transformation? This paper will explore an integrative method of philosophy teaching that blends the East with the West.

I have been using a student-centered method in my critical thinking, ethics, and humanities courses. In these courses, students spend the semester working on issues about which they care deeply. They are also encouraged to confront the suffering of others as an integral part of the analysis of their issues.

It is easy to see why this in-depth, student-centered approach is neither the easiest nor the safest way of teaching. Asking, urging, demanding students to confront suffering puts more on their plates than they were expecting from a college course. Often, students are already emotionally overloaded by circumstances from their own lives, and they have become accustomed to using their class time as a sort of rest period—they feel comfortable in the passive, relatively non-emotional environment of a traditional classroom setting. For example, in a recent personality-conflicted humanities class, a student begged me to reconstruct my seminar class into a traditional study-the-book-and-take-the-final format; and for a moment, I was tempted. At the end of the class, another student came up and told me that he and other

students were grateful that they had the opportunity to be valued as human beings in the classroom. It was the first time many of them had been allowed to have serious, in-depth class discussions on issues that made a difference in their lives.

Despite the price that is paid in terms of discomfort, there are often deeply transformative benefits to an educational process that forces students into personal engagement on difficult issues. And at the center of the process is a requirement that students confront the suffering of others as part of their class projects (a paper and a group presentation on a complex social issue). In doing so, the students cannot avoid confronting their own suffering as a genuine empathetic response, a response which further deepens their sense of relationship to the rest of the human community.

But how does one bring suffering into the classroom as an intellectually legitimate aspect of academic endeavor, particularly as a *philosophical* activity? In this paper I will describe a couple of pedagogical models for the educational use of suffering. But first I will argue for the legitimacy of the incorporation of suffering into the study of philosophy. This argument will require a brief exploration of the relative impoverishment of contemporary academic philosophy in comparison to its generalist roots, an exploration I will launch via a description of my own personal struggle to find meaningful philosophical study. Then, by cutting a path from the writings of John Dewey through to the philosophy and practice of Buddhism, I will make the case that the deep contemplation of suffering is an *essential* component of generalist philosophical study.

The Search for Relevant Philosophy

When I entered the University of Chicago many years ago as an 18 year-old undergraduate, I had assumed that I was going to leave the university in four years as a dedicated and competent citizen, prepared to deal with the complex, confusing, and divisive socio-political questions over which we, the people, had ultimate control. In fact, this was my most important reason for going to college. Since the age of eleven, I had been haunted by the awesome power of our social institutions; I saw that these institutions could hurt people very badly—even kill people, if those in power were either evil or stupid. I remember reading one of my mother's *Reader's Digest* condensed books about the horrifying treatment received by political prisoners in a Soviet Siberian prison camp. I became very upset. It seemed that we absolutely had to do something to stop this terrible injustice. Worse, it seemed that *I* had to do something, but I did not know what to do.

I started reading about politics, watching TV news, and discussing politics with friends and relatives. But instead of understanding more, it seemed that I was becoming more and more confused (and more guilty). How can a relatively uninformed person know which "expert" is telling the truth? What if I picked the wrong side? That's why, despite my mother's protestations (she wanted me to go to a school with cheerleaders), I insisted that I had to go to the University of Chicago, one of the nation's most intellectually prestigious institutions.

In my senior year in high school, I had experienced one glimmer of light, one slight respite from my growing guilt and confusion over the state of the world. I had read two Platonic dialogues in an advanced-placement English class. Finally, it seemed that somebody was addressing evil and stupidity head-on. Plato had focused on the problem underlying what had so consumed me: we had to undercut the politics and address the ways that people think. It is our inability to think clearly that allows the wrong people to take control (at least in a democracy). So, in my first year at Chicago, I decided to major in philosophy.

I had had a wonderful time in my first philosophy class, which I took as an elective in my first year, as well as in my humanities class in my second year, where we read portions of Plato's *Republic*. The "cave of the shadows" allegory became my strategic model. Clearly, the most important function of the discipline of philosophy was to forward the notion that citizens must learn to think independently of those in power so that those who were evil and/or stupid would be blocked from attaining or maintaining power in society. I considered philosophy to be the most practical subject in the academy, extremely relevant to all aspects of our everyday lives. I couldn't wait until my third year, when I could finally begin to focus on my major.

By the time the first quarter of my third year ended, I was utterly devastated. The formal study of philosophy (as it was being taught at the time) seemed to have almost nothing to do with the practical, deeply ethical concerns in which I had been immersed. In an nutshell, the three courses I took wound up being dry, boring, nit-picky, and completely irrelevant to the ethical passion of Socrates as described by Plato. I became deeply disillusioned. If studying philosophy at one of the world's great universities couldn't help me become a competent citizen, what could?

For several years I waffled between giving up altogether and looking for answers outside of academia. To make an extremely long story short, after spending many years working in the non-academic world and also studying various Eastern religions, I returned to school and earned a masters degree

in philosophy and a Ph.D. in philosophy and education. I now teach philosophy and humanities; and I have focused my research and teaching agenda on renewing the mission of philosophy as a practical discipline. I continue to have no doubt that the study of philosophy can and should be highly relevant to the needs of citizens who are trying to make decent decisions in an increasingly complex informational and ethical world.

Renewing Philosophy

Helping students (and ourselves) confront, understand, and make decisions about difficult socio-political issues is an activity for a generalist, not a specialist. Like many interdisciplinarians, I am aware that the fragmented study of disciplines does not provide an inclusive framework for dealing with the complexities of real life. In an attempt to find a way to deal with the ethical and intellectual complexities of real-world issues, I returned to the discipline of philosophy, once considered to be a holistic, all-encompassing subject in the academy. Granted, it no longer has that role. As Bruce Wilshire pointed out in *The Moral Collapse of the University* (1990), philosophy has now become just another academic specialty (99-128), and thus has deprived the university of a center for holistic examination of the world and the problems of the individual knower:

> Nobody remains in the university with the special obligation to trace and nourish connective tissue between departments and foster the education of human beings. The very meaning of the ultimate degree conferred—Doctor of Philosophy—is eroded, for it no longer makes sense that there is a conceptual matrix *inherent in concrete subject matters*—changing and incomplete though it might be—which is shared by all fields. (113)

But Wilshire argues, and I take up his argument here, that the "specialist" characterization of philosophy (propounded by professionalized academic philosophers themselves) is a mischaracterization of the real focus of the discipline.

Borrowing from the tradition that runs from Socrates to Dewey, Bruce Wilshire, myself, and others envision a renovation of the discipline of philosophy so that it once again focuses on the dynamic and genuinely gripping subject of how we should actually live in this world. In this tradition, the subject of "how we should live" cannot be properly understood if we do not acknowledge that our lives are taking place within the totality of human ex-

perience and natural phenomena: our philosophical inquiries must always take this proverbial "forest" into account as we discuss individual trees, leaves, nuts, and fungi. Thus, philosophical thinking must be ultimately holistic — "generalistic" in the broadest sense of the term. Although there is certainly legitimate academic scholarship connected with the discipline of philosophy, and although philosophers may specialize in different areas of interest, the fact that many contemporary academic philosophers *only* specialize has blurred and distorted the underlying generalist character of the subject of philosophy.

If we want to be able to take on our roles as citizens—to address the complex socio-political issues we face in our contemporary lives—then (like philosophers) we must look holistically at the world, using the sum total of our experience as part of our educations. But in order to look in a genuinely holistic manner at the world, we and our students are obligated to confront human suffering in its rawest form.

Dewey as Generalist Philosopher and Educator

In this section I will focus specifically on Dewey's characterization of the generalist philosophical tradition. But as the title of this paper promises, somewhere I will also have to have Dewey meet the Buddha. I will prepare for the latter by discussing Dewey's notion of "experience" in relation to philosophy and education.

In *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey examines the fundamental notion of education as a tool for improving society. Education is a social function with social results. As I mentioned above, the objective of my courses is to help students improve their abilities to make responsible decisions on socio-political issues. Although it is essential that they gather information and utilize theories from the social sciences, it is impossible to conduct such classes without them being ultimately philosophical in nature. In fact, education about social issues is indistinguishable from philosophical inquiry in these classes; and this is where John Dewey enters the scene.

Dewey is best known for his recommendations to merge experience with education and his criticisms of educational methods that focus just on the delivery of abstract intellectual concepts. He also points out that experience necessarily contains an individual perspective, the perspective of the experiencer:

> Experience itself primarily consists of the *active* relations subsisting between a human being and his natural and social surroundings…[T]he behavior of surrounding things and persons carries to a successful issue the active tendencies of the individual, so that in the end what the individual undergoes are consequences which he has himself tried to produce. (274)

Note that once we focus on the individual experiencer and the consequences of one's actions, we necessarily introduce an ethical component. Experiential education is also ethical education; thus, we are back to philosophy.

Dewey reminds us of the ancient tradition of connecting philosophy to ethical, practical life experience:

> Whenever philosophy has been taken seriously, it has always been assumed that it signified achieving a wisdom which would influence the conduct of life…This direct and intimate connection of philosophy with an outlook upon life obviously differentiates philosophy from science. (324)

He goes on to discuss how science may merge into philosophy when it addresses a general attitude toward a discovery— how a scientist may discuss considerations of *conduct* in relation to scientific facts. He points out that scientific knowledge *per se* cannot offer any sense of completeness or totality. Yes, the scientist can certify which generalizations are tenable about the world, but when the question arises as to how we should *act* with respect to knowledge, we have entered the realm of philosophy. In Dewey's view, this gives the philosopher a different conception of "totality."

> From this point of view, "totality" does not mean the hopeless task of quantitative summation. It means rather *consistency* of mode of response in reference to the plurality of events which occur…Instead of signifying a ready-made complete scheme of action, it means keeping the balance in a multitude of diverse actions, so that each borrows and gives significance to every other. Any person who is open-minded and sensitive to new perceptions, and who has a concentration and responsibility in connecting them has…a philosophic disposition. (325)

Here is a concrete foundation for the "integrative philosopher," a teacher who helps students put their experiences and ideas together in a disciplined, coordinated effort. More generally, Dewey's distinction is between knowledge and philosophical inquiry, or thinking:

> Knowledge, grounded knowledge, is science; it represents objects which have been settled, ordered, disposed of rationally. Thinking, on the other hand, is prospective in reference. It is occasioned by an *un*settlement and it aims at overcoming a disturbance. (326)

Dewey makes an interesting observation about the psychological necessity of philosophical thinking. He asserts and describes the human need for coherence amid the variety of intellectual and ethical conflicts that arise in ordinary life:

> More specifically, the demand for a "total" attitude arises because there is the need of integration in action of the conflicting various interests in life…[W]hen the scientific interest conflicts with, say, the religious, or the economic with the scientific or aesthetic, or when the conservative concern for order is at odds with the progressive interest in freedom, …there is a stimulus to discover some more comprehensive point of view from which the divergencies may be brought together, and consistency or continuity of experience recovered. (326)

In sum, there is a ready made need for the experiencer to integrate his or her experience philosophically. But in order to stimulate that need, the student must be present in the educational process as the ultimate experiencer. Or, to put it another way, as educators we must start with the individual subject (the student, the experiencer, the ethical actor) before us, not with a pile of abstract knowledge. Towards this end, Dewey explicitly connects the disciplines of philosophy and education:

> Philosophic thinking has for its differentia the fact that the uncertainties with which it deals are found in widespread social conditions and aims, consisting in a conflict of organized interests and institutional claims. Since the only way of bringing about a harmonious readjustment of the opposed tendencies is through a modification of emotional and intellectual dispositions, philosophy is at once an explicit formation of the various interests of life and a propounding of points of view and methods through which a better balance of interests may be effected. Since education is the process through which the needed transformation may be accomplished and not remain a mere hypothesis as to what is desirable, we reach a justification of the statement that *philosophy is the theory of education as a deliberately conducted practice*. (emphasis added, 331-332)

Dewey presents to us a vision of philosophical education as a *transformative* practice whereby each student learns to manage a life-long balancing process. Implied as a part of this practice is assisting students (and ourselves) in clearly seeing the components that must be balanced, including our emotional dispositions.

In summary, when we examine the knowledge-related problems of individual knowers (which necessarily includes ourselves), we are "doing" philosophy. And when we examine how we can assist individual knowers (which, again, necessarily includes ourselves) in dealing with knowledge-related problems, we are still doing philosophy, but at the same time we are also doing education.

Elsewhere I have described in depth a subdiscipline of philosophy I have named "integrative philosophy," which embodies the practical realization of the junction of the subjects of philosophy and education. In *The Knowledge Fragmentation Crisis in Higher Education: Can Philosophy Help?* (1995), I delineate a scholarly literature that explores where these subject matters overlap. I also describe an actual practice where students act simultaneously as philosophers of knowledge and self-educators, where they recognize that at crucial life decision-points *there is no difference between themselves as learners and themselves as epistemologists*.

The most essential ingredient of integrative philosophy is that it provides a home for students to PRACTICE working through the different integrative challenges with which they are confronted within a philosophical, ethical framework. It is also essential that the acquisition of any specific content knowledge be determined by the needs of the particular challenges each student has chosen to confront.

Generally speaking, students have no *stable* place within their formal academic experience to deal with the knowledge-related and ethical integrative problems. Their informal attempts, although passionate and interesting, may not be disciplined enough to provide much more than emotional release. Although there are some senior "capstone" courses or senior theses opportunities, they may not necessarily address students' integrative needs. Critical thinking courses may provide a setting for this type of work depending on the instructor; often, however, these courses focus on the micro levels of analytic skill development and ignore the larger integrative challenges presented in real-world experience. Of course, there have been several innovative and challenging interdisciplinary efforts that have encouraged integrative educational experiences for students, but often, these efforts are not stable. Thus, we still have a great deal of work ahead of us, if we are to provide

formal academic space for students to do their "soul-searching" as an integral part of their formal academic experience.

Dewey Meets the Buddha

Now it is time for the Buddha to enter the discussion. One of the traditional goals of a Buddhist aspirant is to become a "Bodhisattva." A Bodhisattva focuses not just on attaining his or her own Enlightenment, but also the Enlightenment of all people. The Buddhist scholar Sangharakshita defines a Bodhisattva as follows: "A Bodhisattva is one bent on attaining Supreme Enlightenment... not merely for his own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings" (Sangharakshita, 1980, 202). The Bodhisattva ideal corresponds closely to our traditional Western concept of ethical altruism and is also pragmatic in nature. The Bodhisattva puts his money where his mouth is by taking action to help others no matter the cost. It is an ethical orientation that I hope will prove transformative for my students.

Sangharakshita points out that for the Bodhisattva, wisdom and compassion must be cultivated simultaneously:

> Out of Compassion the Bodhisattva aspires to emancipate all beings; by means of Wisdom he realizes that in truth no beings exist. Far from stultifying each other, these seemingly contradictory attitudes are interdependent, and must be cultivated simultaneously; for the Bodhisattva courses in a realm transcending logic. (393)

For Buddhists, wisdom involves detachment from both pleasurable and painful states of mind. Ultimately, the division of the world into separate entities and individuals is illusory. Thus, in the light of Buddhist wisdom, the Bodhisattva can see the apparent suffering of others yet remain in a state of total peace of mind. Unlike only apparent peaceful states of mind such as those induced by chemicals or numbness, however, the Bodhisattva does not hesitate to involve him or herself in activities to relieve the suffering of others.

Sangharakshita cites an article by Lama Anagarika Govinda (Govinda, 1952) in which he discusses the *Jatakas*, one of the basic scriptures of the Bodhisattva Ideal (Sangharakshita, 394-397). In one of the Jatakas is a story about a Bodhisattva who sacrifices his own body to a tigress who had been too weak to feed her cubs. Govinda's quoted explanation of this story is as follows:

> To the modern man such a story may appear unreasonable and exaggerated…because he judges from a purely intellectual…point of view, according to which the sacrifice appears to be out of proportion to its cause. The preservation…of the life of some wild beasts does not seem to be worth the sacrifice of a human life.
>
> [To the Buddhist, however,] it is not the factual or objective reality that matters, but the motive, the power of compassion, which caused the Bodhisattva to act in this way…That the lives of the tigress and her cubs are saved, is not of such fundamental importance as that the Bodhisattva experiences within himself their suffering and despair in all its terrible reality, and that he proves by his deed that there is no more difference for him between his own suffering and the suffering of others. (Govinda, 1952, 243-244)

This example can be seen as an ultimate expression of the merger of personal experience and ethics in education. It also can be seen as an ideal expression of the "integrative" philosophy described above.

No one in Western academia would object to including the search for wisdom as a stated goal of educational practice (among many goals). Even though scholars are rightly dubious about whether the quality of wisdom can be "delivered" to students in any systematic fashion, discussions of the nature of wisdom are considered acceptable in introductory philosophy and humanities courses. But the introduction of compassion, especially at the level described above, might appear overtly religious or psychotherapeutic. Many academics may be uncomfortable with bringing this concept into academic life. Yet the development of compassion is an essential aspect of a genuinely transformative ethical education experience. It is through powerful compassion that people will be moved to action.

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, a Tibetan Buddhist monk and scholar, describes the development of "great compassion" as one of the final steps in attaining an enlightened mind.

> Great compassion is the state of mind that wishes each being to be separated from all suffering. If we have already developed affectionate, heart-warming love, and have extended it towards all living beings, then when we meditate deeply on the suffering that others are now experiencing, a feeling of great compassion will arise easily. (Gyatso, 1980, 30)

He then describes the next higher step, "superior intention."

> Upon the full realization of great compassion the thought will arise: "I myself shall undertake the task of liberating all beings from suffering: this is solely my duty and responsibility." Assuming personal responsibility for the release of all sentient beings in this way is called the superior intention. This can be explained further by an example. If a child is drowning in a river, the onlookers will have the heartfelt wish that he be rescued. If the child's father sees this danger, however, he will not be satisfied with merely *wishing* him to be saved…He will think, "I myself will rescue him." The mind of the onlookers is like great compassion while the mind of the father is like the superior intention. (31)

The model of superior intention and the tiger story above illustrate what I have come to see as the ending of a complete cycle of transformative education. I view the cycle as follows: 1) traditional disciplinary educators give students facts and accepted disciplinary knowledge and methodologies; 2) integrative scholars help students learn how to explore relationships in a systematic manner, and encourage them to ask fundamental epistemological and ethical questions and to develop creative and pragmatic syntheses; and finally, 3) transformative educators provide opportunities for students to open their hearts to the suffering of others and ultimately to be moved to action.

If we ask our students to confront and understand difficult social issues, and if we as citizens do indeed bear at least some responsibility for the state of society, it seems that we are obligated to go all the way to the end of the cycle when we educate them. We cannot stop with giving them information and having theoretical discussions, nor can we stop with vague implications that it is ethical to make the world a better place. My concern is that we only frustrate students (and ourselves) when we stop short of what we have to do. And what we have to do is put them in touch with the powerful energy that transforms them from passive, confused, and hesitant individuals into fully engaged, passionate, and clear-minded actors.

The Bodhisattva Ideal in the Classroom

I have been experimenting with working on the "great compassion" step in my classes, but I confess that the classes have rarely reached the "superior intention" step (although I think some students have gotten a glimmer of this). Nevertheless, I am proud of my work on the lower state. My students

learn to feel the suffering of others as they work through their projects. They also learn that an integral aspect of their educations is the sincere feeling of the pain of other beings. I also work with them to develop their strength, so that they are not overwhelmed or discouraged by the pain they feel.

My specific strategies are guided by a "Buddhist warrior" model, as described by Chogyam Trungpa in *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior* (1984). Trungpa points out that in the Tibetan tradition, warriorship has nothing to do with making war. Rather, it means "one who is brave" (30). He states that "the essence of warriorship is refusing to give up on anyone or anything" (33). He discusses two essential supporting concepts: 1) we must have faith in our own ultimate goodness; and 2) we must cultivate what he calls "the genuine heart of sadness," where we develop genuine sympathy toward ourselves and the human condition. He describes how to awaken one's heart in meditation:

> If you search for awakened heart, if you put your hand through your rib cage and feel for it, there is nothing there except for tenderness. You feel sore and soft, and if you open your eyes to the rest of the world, you feel tremendous sadness. This kind of sadness doesn't come from being mistreated…Rather, this experience of sadness is unconditioned. It occurs because your heart is completely exposed…
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> For the warrior, this experience of sad and tender heart is what gives birth to fearlessness…[W]e are not talking about that street-fighter level of fearlessness. Real fearlessness is the product of tenderness. It comes from letting the world tickle your heart, your raw and beautiful heart. You are willing to open up, without resistance or shyness, and face the world. (46)

This sharing happens in my classes. It is essential that the sharing of openheartedness be undertaken as a service to understanding the issues being addressed in class. The trick is not to allow the sharing to turn into self-indulgence or group therapy. Rather, the students must see it as part of a serious transformative practice. Trungpa's description of the role of renunciation for the warrior is helpful here:

> What the warrior renounces is anything in his experience that is a barrier between himself and others. In other words, renunciation is making yourself more available, more gentle and open to others. Any

> hesitation about opening yourself to others is removed. For the sake of others, you renounce your privacy. (66)

To this end, I work to develop a very strong sense of community in my classes. The class must become a very safe space in which students feel that they can express themselves without fear of attack or ridicule. But above and beyond that, students are encouraged to develop genuine affection and respect towards each other, despite any differences in views they might have. It is acceptable, even desirable, to talk in class about relevant personal experiences, particularly personal struggles, as long as they are attempts to shed light upon the issues at hand. In fact, one person recounting a personal struggle can often act as a crucial ice-breaker in helping other students give up their defenses against change and growth.

Since students are required to work on issues about which they care deeply, it is not uncommon for them to have powerful stories behind their choice of issues. I have had students discuss their own personal experiences with drug and alcohol addiction, family sexual abuse, imprisonment, AIDS, rape, family members' euthanasia, and brutal racism—all as related to the issues they were studying. My promise of confidentiality limits me from relating any of the specifics of these stories; however, the power of these stories are indelibly imprinted on my mind as well as on the minds of the students who heard them.

In concluding this section, it will help to summarize the meeting place between Dewey and the Buddha. Dewey offers a powerful model for incorporating experience into education. He also articulates the inherent connection between experiential education and philosophy: education involves the philosophical practice of integrating the various conflicts presented by life experience. The Buddha describes suffering as an essential component of experience, not to be wallowed in but to be respected and transformed into action. Suffering represents, perhaps, the most fundamental of our life conflicts: the conflict between the comforting identification with our own egos and the initially discomforting awareness of the pain of others. This fundamental conflict also must be integrated as a part of our philosophical practice.

Two Models for Incorporating Suffering into the Philosophy Classroom

How can suffering be incorporated into a philosophy class without it turning into emotional blathering or group therapy? Although it should be acknowledged that sharing an experience of suffering is genuinely therapeutic, no matter where it occurs, it is important for the transformative educator to maintain the class's focus on the educational and intellectual goals of the process. The following are two models I have been using in my college teaching. The first is for a lower-division critical thinking class, and the second is for an upper-division humanities class.

Critical Thinking Class

In my critical thinking class, students spend the entire semester analyzing complex social issues of their own choosing (e.g., welfare, affirmative action, NAFTA, drug legalization, euthanasia). By the end of the semester they each will have written a 10-12 page paper ending in a statement of an ethical decision they have made about their issue (see Appendix #A, "What Your Paper Needs to Be").

As described above, each student must pick an issue that he or she *cares about*. I explain that one of the most fundamental critical thinking skills is to be able to do analytic work *in spite of* strong emotional reactions; thus, the more emotionally invested they are in their issues, the more they will learn about critical thinking. My students, ranging in age from 18 to 50, seem to have no trouble finding issues of deep importance to them (only two students out of hundreds claimed there are no issues whatsoever they care about). Picking an appropriate issue is such an important step that I also ask students to begin their papers with a paragraph describing why the issue is so important to them and also why we as citizens should *all* care about their issue.

Students must also choose controversial issues with at least two clear sides that are being publicly debated. Most students have already taken a side on their issues, and some are quite heavily invested emotionally on that side. As they become engaged with their paper projects, they are forced to spend most of their time researching and analyzing their opponents' arguments. They are required to state their opponents' arguments with genuine respect and appreciation. I refer to this as the "Zen" part of the course— students must loosen their emotional attachments to their own side as they examine the value of what their opponents are trying to say.

After about two months of solid research and analytical work, the students are forced to deal with the ethical dilemmas presented by their issues. I always start the orientation to this section of their work with the "Winston Churchill Story" — the story of how the British broke the German code and found out that an English city (Coventry) was going to be bombed. If Churchill evacuated the city, the Germans would know the code had been cracked, and they would change it; allied losses would increase dramatically. If he did not evacuate, the inhabitants of the city, predominantly innocent women and children, would be killed. Either way, Churchill knew that whatever decision he made, he would be responsible for thousands of deaths.

The students then brainstorm the ethical dilemmas inherent in their own issues. I have them make a chart listing the positive and negative consequences if their opponents' side wins as well as the positive and negative consequences if their own side wins. I emphasize the importance of recognizing the negative consequences; this ensures that students will confront the real human suffering that may occur as a result of implementing any decision they make. Of course, it is easier for them to see the negative consequences of their opponent's position. Often, they will need help in seeing the negative consequences of their own positions. For example, somebody in favor of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) may have trouble confronting the tragedy of the hard-working Americans that really are losing their jobs as a result of NAFTA. On the other hand, somebody opposed to NAFTA may have trouble recognizing the potential it has for alleviating the terrible life-threatening poverty that now exists in many areas of Mexico.

My goal as a transformative educator here is to open up the students' empathetic response— they must feel an actual emotional connection to their fellow human beings. It is after this process that they begin to see clearly the ethical dimensions of their issue.

Sometimes students actually change their minds on their issue. Most of them become more open to the authentic concerns of their opponents. All of them become more aware of their responsibilities as thinking citizens. They realize that their socio-political decisions can have a direct effect on the lives of others. This also empowers the students, who begin to sense their potential positive power in the civic community. They also recognize that ethical decision making is a messy business—if we are truly engaged in the process, we will most likely not be able to avoid hurting somebody somewhere.

In 1993 I wrote a paper in which I described this emotionally-charged, student-centered pedagogy I use in the critical thinking course (Handelman, 1993). I felt it was very important to present an alternative to critical think-

ing methods in which objective, abstract, and dispassionate thinking is seen as the *final* goal (although I do consider it to be worthy and important sub-goal). An excerpt seems appropriate here:

> A word must be said regarding the potential intensity of student involvement in the challenges they face as critical thinkers. The course utilizes the principles of constructivist pedagogy where students are seen as partners in the creation of meaningful knowledge. The students are allowed a great deal of input with regard to the life issues and problems that are most important to them, and the teaching activities are designed to emphasize the authenticity and urgency of the serious ethical issues being addressed.
>
> When we are teaching college-age or adult students we must keep in mind that how they are *thinking* is how they are *living*. Most all are of age to drive, serve in the military, have jobs, vote; and all have achieved enough autonomy to be in positions where they are quite capable of causing harm to others. Thus for adults, the "authentically social manner" in which teacher and student interact must rest on the sobering consideration of the awesome ethical power (both positive and negative) extant in each individual student. When we teach adult- and college-level classes in thinking, the students must become equal intellectual partners with the teacher because they, too, recognize their potential power to hurt or help others. In this way the college-level class becomes grippingly alive with the feelings which arise upon confronting human suffering; and with the frustration of dealing with situations where even the best ethical decision may still cause harm to others. And after that, the student must then discover where to find the strength to remain engaged in life no matter how much it hurts, and thus go on to be able to help people. That's the challenge I have tried to meet in the creation of this critical thinking course. (Handelman, 1993, 18)

Upper-Division Humanities Capstone Course

I use a different method to incorporate suffering in an upper-division humanities course. In this course students also choose their own topics, but they are not limited to two-sided issues. Rather, they are required to choose

very broad topics which necessitate an integrative, holistic approach; somehow, they have to incorporate a vision of "the whole mess" of the world into their projects. In order to do this, they cannot rely solely on the methods of scientific articulation they have learned in their social science courses. Instead, they have to rely on the methods of expression used in the humanities, where the proverbial agonies and ecstacies of the human condition are captured through high-level emotion and artistry. This approach allows students to undertake the difficult task of experiencing and exploring profound feelings about their relationship to the rest of the world.

The integrative project also involves a great deal of creativity. Although my humanities students are mostly seniors, and although they choose their topics by the second week of the semester, they tend to be very uncomfortable in working so broadly and in reaching for the depth of feeling required to express the magnitude of the problems they confront. They have been well trained to write narrow research papers, where they keep their personal feelings in check and where they find few surprises. A large part of my work is to "seduce" the students into the adventure of using deep feeling to launch a creative attack upon their subjects.

One method I use is the "concept web," where students graphically note the various related areas of their topics and try to draw the interrelationships among areas. This is a method that is not unfamiliar to many students. For the purposes of this class, however, they are encouraged to make their webs as full, as complex, literally as "messy" as possible. Some students wind up adding several sheets of paper as they expand their webs.

I also have students read about and discuss issues and problems in dealing with complexity. For example, they read an excerpt from Whitehead's *Modes of Thought* (1938/1958), where he suggests that confusion is just as necessary a component of knowledge creation as is order:

> There is no reason to hold that confusion is less fundamental than is order…My suggestion is that we start from the notion of two aspects of the universe. It includes a factor of unity, involving in its essence the connexity of things, unity of purpose, and unity of enjoyment. The whole notion of importance is referent to thus ultimate unity. There is also equally fundamental in the universe, a factor of multiplicity. There are many actualities, each with its own experience, enjoying individuality, and yet requiring each other.

> Any description of the unity will require the many actualities; and any description of the many will require the notion of the unity from which importance and purpose are described. By reason of the essential individuality of the many things, there are conflicts of finite realizations. Thus the summation of the many into the one, and the derivation of importance from the one into the many, involves the notion of disorder, of conflict, of frustration. (50-51)

Through the contemplation of this and other readings, along with the concept webs, I hope to help students develop a tolerance for confusion as they work on their projects. Developing a tolerance for confusion should not be seen as implying it is acceptable to remain forever in a state of confusion. Rather, it should be recognized that confusion is a normal and desirable part of any creative learning cycle. By the time they are finished with their papers, the students have brought order back into their topics and they are usually happy with their work.

Two Essential Methodological Components

When "toleration of confusion" is added to "depth of feeling," it must be acknowledged that a great deal is being asked of our students. I have found two essential methodological components to be very helpful.

1) In both the lower-division and upper-division courses, students are forced to *start on their projects very early in the semester*. Most students think of writing papers as an activity to which they will devote 80-90 percent of their effort during the last two weeks of a semester. I assign various pieces of the paper project to be completed and handed in at regular intervals during the semester. In the humanities course, for example, they develop learning contracts, the first draft of which is due at the third week of class. These contracts require a preliminary thesis statement, bibliography, and brief descriptions of how they are going to meet the required elements for the paper. The contracts also ask students to list the results they hope to attain along with a statement of how they are going to evaluate their own work. See Appendix B for a "Sample Learning Contract."

2) The second essential methodological component is to *use a significant portion of class time to work on student projects*. In the humanities class, I use from one-third to one-half the class time on "workshops" and various peer review activities where students focus on developing specific components of their projects. For example, at a certain point, students will have to

write a rough draft of a "humanities" component of their papers. The week prior to the due date, we will have a workshop on the humanities component, where students will brainstorm in class about meeting the challenges of expressing their deeply felt concerns with strength and artistry. Then, in the next class meeting, they might peer-review each other's drafts and make suggestions.

The point here is that students need a lot of assistance in working so broadly and so deeply. We cannot expect most of them to do this type of work without a great deal of support from the faculty member and their fellow students. Needless to say, this type of teaching cannot be done in large lecture sections. I have been able to work this way in a class as large as 40 students, but a class size of 20-30 is ideal. This method is also extremely important for adult and other commuter students, who may not find it possible to work in study groups outside of regular class meetings.

One additional methodology I am exploring is to use meditation to help students confront their issues. I have begun to try it in some of my classes, and the students find it interesting. I am not yet ready, however, to report on it without first using it on a more regular basis. I think it has excellent potential if it is used as a tool to help students contemplate the more overwhelming aspects of their issues.

Conclusion

As I reflect upon my personal and professional history, I see that I have vacillated between being intensely consumed by the same anxiety and guilt I felt as an eleven year old over my role as a citizen, and avoiding these intense feelings altogether by distracting my own attention. I am far from the Bodhisattva ideal I so respect. How can I justify having a television set when I know there are children who are starving to death? How can I justify sitting here, surrounded by things that make me comfortable, when I know that right now there are good people being tortured, maimed, and killed, when innocent animals are dying horrible deaths?

The teaching helps. I hope I am doing something that will make the world better. Reading existential philosophy helps. For the existentialists, anxiety and other uncomfortable emotions are considered a sign of a responsible, ethical being. Yet the Buddhist ideal demands we move beyond the experience of anxiety while at the same time merging more completely with the suffering of others. I do not yet seem to be able to do this. Perhaps in such a complicated society as ours, it is not so easy. Buddhism was not born within

the shores of the world's most powerful democratic republic, nor was it born within the vast communicative and technological networks in which we are now deeply immersed. Perhaps it will take more than one lifetime to merge the Bodhisattva ideal with the awesome responsibility borne by the contemporary American citizen.

In closing, I acknowledge that this self-constructed meeting between Dewey and the Buddha continues to make me more than a little miserable as I confront my role as citizen. My "genetic" Jewish guilt doesn't help either — oy! Nevertheless, the Dewey-Buddha combination appears to be helping my students examine their potential roles as citizens in a disciplined and productive manner. Therefore, despite my discomfort, I persevere.

Biographical Note: Linda Handelman did her undergraduate work at the University of Chicago, where she had the opportunity to experience the benefits of the Hutchins integrated general education program. She received her M.A. in philosophy and her Ph.D. in higher education from the Claremont Graduate School. Her doctoral dissertation, *The Knowledge Fragmentation Crisis in Higher Education: Can Philosophy Help?*, combines both fields, and focuses on the concept of ethically-based integrative study. She also has a background in Eastern philosophy. Meanwhile, she has been teaching philosophy courses and a humanities seminar at local colleges (including Chaffey College, Mount San Antonio College and California State University, San Bernardino) where she has been developing and piloting courses in ethically-based integrative study.

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APPENDIX A

WHAT YOUR PAPER NEEDS TO BE

THE TOPIC:

Must be something you CARE DEEPLY about;

Must be something that can be ARGUED about — that has two clear alternatives that REASONABLE people could support (ideally, YOU could support each side);

Must involve a REAL WORLD PROBLEM where a DECISION needs to be made.

THINGS YOU MUST INCLUDE IN THE BODY OF YOUR PAPER

THE BRIEF TOPIC STATEMENT: (ONE PARAGRAPH LONG)

Must state why you care about the issue;
Must draw the rest of us into your issue, so that we care, too.

Example: DILEMMA: IS IT ETHICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO TAKE THE LIFE OF AN ANIMAL IF IT WILL SAVE A HUMAN LIFE? **STATEMENT:** I have always cared deeply about animals. They seem to have the same kinds of "souls" as humans do, and they seem to be capable of the same feelings as people. I try not to hurt them or eat them. But if I were to look in the eyes of a terminally ill human who could absolutely be saved by taking an animal's life, I don't know what I would do. If I refused to take the animal's life, would that be the same thing as killing the human?

EXPANDED TOPIC STATEMENT: Two well-balanced paragraphs, each defending one side of the issue (we should not be able to tell what side you're on from your expanded topic statement). After the expanded topic statement, have a small paragraph that tells your **RESEARCH PLAN**, emphasizing the sources you are using and describing the general flow of your paper. (Example: "First, I will discuss the arguments for and against animal research being applicable to human physiology. Then I will look at the issue of animal "rights." Finally, I will look at the question of whether there is

any way we can balance out human and animal life. I will draw on xxxx sources.”). Then **BIBLIOGRAPHY**, emphasizing news reports, interest group information and interviews.

DEFINING WORDS & TERMS — (“What exactly are ‘animal rights’?”) Start with relevant dictionary definitions and build on them. How could alternate definitions of the same word make a big difference in how people think about the issue? (3-4 WORDS, INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE GOOD PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION)

ARGUMENTS: Make clearly-labeled subsections out of 3-4 of your opponent’s best ARGUMENTS (they must be stated respectfully!!). Within each section have a back and forth “rebuttal session” until you run out of things to say (either you or your opponent will have the last word). Then make subsections out of your 1-2 strongest arguments (which have not been used up in rebuttals to your opponent), and again, include “rebuttal sessions.”

ETHICAL EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES: Discuss practical, real world solutions or recommendations: Let us in on HOW you are weighing the alternatives. Show WHICH alternatives help and/or hurt WHOM or WHAT. Be specific about possible solutions & trade-offs. Specifically state the NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES of both sides and weigh those.

CONCLUSION: Make a decision and state it. (“On balance, I must support alternative X...”). It can also include a statement about what more you need to learn about your topic — what you haven’t thought about yet, where you’re still uncertain. OR make a powerful statement to persuade people to accept your view. Use poetic or other artistic devices.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE LEARNING CONTRACT

Name:

Title that Describes Project:

Personal Separation of Church and State — Is it Possible?

Questions to be Addressed:

Why do people get so emotional about this subject? Why can't we do a better job of discussing religion together? When can't religion be a school subject? What's the difference between religious education and brainwashing? What's the difference between prayer and religious education? What are the benefits of keeping religion out of school? What are the disadvantages? Why have so many wars been fought over religion? Why so many deaths? Is there such a thing as a true religion? Is there such a thing as a false religion? How can we tell the difference? If I have very strong faith, why should I keep it out of school?

Results to be Achieved by Doing Project:

-Develop an overall perspective of issue of Church-State separation in U.S.
-Become familiar with some major court cases and philosophical arguments.
-Explore the human conflicts and pain present in the subject.
-Examine issues in interpretation and values of church-state problems.
-Integrate my own feelings/life experiences into the subject.
-Increase my awareness of the struggles involved in ethical decision-making.

Humanities Component:

Our human need for religion. Our need for freedom. Why religion is so difficult to talk about. Why this subject is hard for me to write about.

Integrative Component:

The problems of integrating religion & politics in the U.S. Description of all that is related to church/state/education issue. The "mess" of questions that need to be addressed. Questions of tolerance vs. relativism.

Interpretation & Values Component:

Interpretation and religion. Interpretation and the state. Multiple meanings of "religion," "God," "truth," "prayer," "education." Underlying similarities? Why there are different religions.

Readings and Other Learning Experiences to be Used:

-Read the following: (List bibliography here)
-Interview political science professor, Joe Blow.
-Interview the Reverend Jerry Blow.

Learning Evaluation:

I know I will have done a good paper if I see the following in my work: (YOU FILL IN THE REST)

STUDENT SIGNATURE: **DATE:**

INSTRUCTOR SIGNATURE: **DATE:**