In Company With Others: Commentaries as a Conversational Community Practice Towards Philosophical Thinking

by

Nicole Callahan

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ABSTRACT

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Nicole Callahan

In the interest of fostering deep student transactions with texts, the purpose of this research is to study a particular approach to teaching writing, and to observe and investigate the impact of a dramatic shift in the methods and frequency of assignment of writing in a college-level philosophy class, and the ways in which the students and instructor negotiate this new territory and these different demands over three cohort years, from Fall 2014 to Spring 2017.

This dissertation is a study of what happens when an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic writing (Blau 2011) is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college. This classroom research project seeks to undertake an examination of whether students can be successfully inducted into the academic community through a particular assignment in a Philosophy course. This writing assignment, the “commentary,” encourages students to focus on questions and therefore functions as an instance of writing-to-learn, which belongs to a long tradition across disciplines and cultures. This dissertation will also undertake an examination of the potential capacity of the commentary to create an academic discourse community of practice that supports critical reading and interpreting of literary and philosophical texts.

The strategy of this new method is to have the students write twice-weekly 300-500 word commentaries of exploratory and sometimes argumentative writing on assigned texts twice a week, posting the writing in an online discussion board. They receive responses immediately, from each other, and get credit for completing the assignment (on time, relevant, and of appropriate length). The instructor never replies to their postings and never grades their postings on a scale or for quality. Students simply earn credit for completing the full number of required commentaries.
The research is not experimental, but rather a qualitative observation of the effects of an approach established by the instructor in this class and in other similar classes as an adaptation of a model for learning academic writing through participation in an authentic academic discourse (Blau). The approach represents an enactment of situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger) in a college classroom and is constructed to advance academic learning while providing an opportunity for situated performative assessment indistinct from instruction.

The place of the commentary in this course is established in a literary and historical context as it is authorized, valorized, and illuminated by a tradition of writing-to-learn grounded in the ideas of Isocrates, Quintilian, Cicero, and Montaigne. It is also supported by current seminal research in writing instruction, including James Moffett’s theory of abstraction in writing (1983), Sheridan Blau’s pedagogical applications of apprenticeship systems (2011), James Gee’s theories of discourse analysis (2001), and John Dewey’s “How We Think” (1910). Where decorum permits, there will be deeper meditations and excursions into and elaborations on the auto-ethnographic metacognitive writing of Michel de Montaigne, exploring the history of the practice of writing to learn and its relationship to critical thinking and Dewey.

My analysis is situated in examining the culture of writing in this class and the markers of growth in thinking in student writing, using tools out of ethnography and the tradition of teacher research. Based on asking the initial question, “What happens when students write regular commentaries on their reading of difficult texts?” analysis of the collected student writing explores students’ attempts to channel curiosity into productive interpretive techniques, embrace uncertainty, make meaning and connections, and grow in the capacity to welcome and seek out productive confusion and doubt.

I will focus primarily on whether this assignment contributes to the construction of a class culture whose implicit and explicit rules, conventions, and patterns of interaction are consistent with those that characterize the knowledge-building communities of the kind that colleges and universities aspire to in their departments, organized research units, and professional
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Professor Roosevelt Montás hired this nervous doctoral student in English Education to teach Contemporary Civilization with a bunch of Classicists and Political Scientists and Philosophers. He made me feel welcome, eased my outsider fears, and has truly always had an open door for my many questions, concerns, and sometimes odd ideas. It is with excitement and pride that I show him research I did in a class he also believes in, loves, and teaches when his other duties allow.

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Professor Ruth Vinz, a teacher, a researcher, and a mentor, welcomed me into the doctoral program in 2010 with a class where I got to read novels as a student again. I couldn’t believe my luck. After that course, she gently coaxed and shaped me into a researcher who began to discover how to ask questions that might be possible to inquire into, how not to rely so heavily on the words of others, and to trust my own voice.

I first became familiar with the work of Professor David Hansen on March 9, 2011, when he gave a presentation to the English Education MA students in the Fieldwork course. I was
there as an organizer of the course as part of my duties as a new doctoral student. I watched as he, assisted by a few of his doctoral students in Philosophy and Education, took the students through a meditative and nuanced examination of Kafka’s “The Trial.” Through his careful facilitation, he showed us all the many ways into philosophical thought and discussion through literature, bridging the disciplinary gap between Teaching of English and Philosophy and Education.

Professor Eileen Gillooly has opened up a new world of teaching for me. In the summer of 2015, she trusted Roosevelt’s endorsement and welcomed me into the extraordinary community at the Heyman Center and the Center for Justice. There, working with the Justice in Education Initiative, I have done some of the most meaningful and exciting teaching and learning of my life. The work there has changed the direction of my teaching life, and I credit her with opening that door.

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Dedication

To Sheridan,

For bringing me to Teachers College, allowing me to teach, and being my most vocal and tireless advocate. Thank you for helping me find my place in the university, and my voice as a writer and researcher. You taught me to be comfortable with my own questions and my own vulnerabilities as a teacher, to be honest and to fight for students, to never let language get in the way, and to try to figure out how to bring learning into schools rather than allowing schools to turn all good ideas to garbage. So many of the risks I have taken here in this dissertation, and that I daily take in my classroom, are because you gave me the bravery to venture out.

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For teaching my parents to love Shakespeare and for inspiring them to teach it to me. For showing me that teaching means late nights, and endless cups of tea, and careful reading, and sometimes yelling and foot stomping on stage. Thank you for being a model of a life of teaching and learning, for showing me your new manuscripts even after your 95th birthday. Thank you for showing me, with Laura, what a partnership can endure and become. I’m so glad that you thought that your production of Shrew needed a 10 year old kid in double drag.

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For reading me Shakespeare as bedtime stories, for showing me that teaching seemed like the only worthwhile job to have, and for always making me feel like I could do anything. You told me you would buy me any book I ever needed or wanted, and there, in books, I found a whole world. And now, I have made deep meaning in my life by opening those worlds to my own students. You have taught me to be honest, ethical, kind, thoughtful, and to follow my dreams. I am a teacher because of you.
1. The Story of My Question

1.1 Background of the Problem

When I was a sophomore at Columbia University in the Fall of 2002, I enrolled in a course for all students called Contemporary Civilization\(^1\) (CC). It is a required year-long Core Curriculum class for all sophomores at Columbia University. It meets for two 2-hour sessions each week, with around 150 pages of very dense reading for each session. There is little flexibility in the syllabus for instructors to make changes, and they are required to assign at least 20 pages of writing each semester\(^2\).

Created in 1919 as a War and Peace Issues course, CC is now seen as introducing students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities – political, social, moral, and religious – that human beings construct for themselves and the values that inform and define such communities. Intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens, CC is also meant to instruct them in crafting well-constructed arguments in speech and writing alike. We encounter political, ethical, and religious visions of real and possible social communities that span different times and cultures. Many of the texts are deemed to be somehow foundational to our contemporary civilization. While they may help us understand aspects of the current “civilized” order, the texts also contain conceptual and imaginative resources that can be used to critically confront the present organization of society (Montás and Callahan 2015).

As a 19 year-old in CC in the Fall of 2002, I felt out of place. Although I had done very well in Literature Humanities, the year-long freshmen “great books” class at Columbia, coming into a Political Philosophy class the next year I felt poorly equipped to deal with these texts and these issues. I was stymied by seemingly intimidating in-class discussions that I was scared to

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1 One of the (MANY) historical and ongoing controversies around the content of the course is that there is a perceived absence of diversity in the texts chosen for the syllabus. The authors are mostly male, mostly Western, mostly white. The idea of the course as I have come to see it is that we have to look back to the beginning to be able to see where we came from: the debates are embedded within the chosen texts- selection and omission are, here as in many other places, significant and not accidental. We go chronologically and we see the changes in cultures and ideas and populations as we go; through the lens of the syllabus, we witness not just the construction of western society, but also the history of violence and oppression and subjugation upon which it was built: the absence of diverse voices is crucially important.

2 See Appendix for Course Syllabus and Reading Schedule
enter into and by texts that seemed impenetrable and didn’t feel relevant to me or to my experience or to my goals. I didn’t see the point of worrying about politics when I was an English major, and besides, my classmates seemed to get these texts much more than I did; they seemed to care about drawing the cave and defining an oligarchy and clarifying deontological ethics, and I didn’t.

Good student that I was, I did well in the class, carried on with my path as an English major, and graduated with a high GPA. After college, I taught high school English for five years, first in a public school and then in a private girls’ school, both in Southern California. I went directly from being a student in classrooms to being a teacher in classrooms, and mostly left behind Rousseau and Aristotle and Tocqueville for Shakespeare and Shelley and Milton.

I knew that I had found my proper role in life as a teacher, that I was moving towards Matthew Arnold's description of teaching: that we desire to help students cultivate the skills of “free speech, direct and sincere communication with our fellows, that swift and untrammeled exchange of opinion, feeling and experience, which is the working instrument of the social instinct and the motive power of civilization” (Scott 19, in Stock 11). I also felt as if there was a lot more I wanted to learn in order to deepen my classroom practice, so I decided, in about the Summer of 2009, that I needed to go to graduate school. I started at Teachers College in the Fall of 2010, working closely with Sheridan Blau, who had been powerfully influential in the teaching lives of both of my parents. My first teaching role at TC was in Teaching of Writing, a pedagogical course for preservice teachers in the theory and practice of teaching composition. I taught that course, and another inservice seminar to support practicing teachers, for the next three years, as well as running a full program for classroom teachers working on MAs in teaching English during the summers.

In November of 2013, having just returned from a vacation in Thailand, my fiancee sat me down on the floor of our bedroom and ended our relationship. That night, my ring sitting next to the bathroom sink, I sat in the office in my bathrobe while he slept and began thinking about
how to put my life back together. For our relationship I had moved, given up many professional opportunities, and started out on a new path, a path I was not sure I wanted. So, that night, I traced my steps back to where the road had forked and began to walk in a direction I wanted again.

I had always wanted to teach in the Core at Columbia, to teach the classes I had taken as a student, so that night, late and lost, I went to see when the application deadline fell and whether I might be able to get in materials on time. The deadline was the next day, but I wrote and asked for an extension over the weekend and so, as I packed up my life, I put together the application materials and sent them off. I interviewed for both Literature Humanities (Lit Hum) and Contemporary Civilization (CC) in January, a freezing Friday night for the first, and a sunny cold Wednesday morning for the second.

1.2 Purpose of the Study, Statement of the Problem

When I came to set up my version of CC, I had some pretty concrete pedagogical goals for myself. I had spent about ten years in the classroom at that point, and although I would not claim any kind of expertise, I did have a lot of ideas about how I wanted to structure the course, based in my teaching on the secondary and graduate levels, and also based in my own experience as a student in CC. I wanted to find a way to structure the course so that I would make space for multiple interpretations and student voices; I wanted to provide entrances into discussions that were direct, pointed, inviting, and accessible; I wanted to create ways for me to see where the students really were in their readings of the texts.

Specifically, I wanted to structure a long-term writing assignment that could serve a number of pedagogical purposes. I wanted to help my students improve as readers who read deeply, who read for their questions. I wanted to help them improve as readers for each other, reading with generosity, empathy. I hoped to help them improve as interpreters, willing to believe and doubt, willing to make adjustments as they took into account new ideas. I wanted to
help them improve generally as writers whose prose was distinguished by its clarity, precision, and readability and help them become more thoughtful and more nuanced interpreters of and commentators on complex philosophical ideas. I wanted a routine in the class that could help them converse and discuss philosophical and ethical ideas with depth and precision and empathy. I wanted to build into the structure of the course an opportunity for them to write a lot without me having to “grade” all of it.

Lastly, I wanted this course to function as a site for inducting these students into the intellectual and academic community and culture: rather than seeing this course as a hurdle to overcome, a requirement to suffer through, I wanted them to see it as a place of transformation, where they began to see themselves as philosophers, academics, and writers.

I also had some anxieties about teaching this kind of a course. I hadn’t enjoyed the class as a student, hadn’t felt it was relevant or that I had a place in the material, so how could I teach it? How could I prevent what happened to me from happening to my students? I was also worried that I wasn’t as qualified or expert as my colleagues. Most of them were from the History department, or Philosophy, or Political Science. Most of them had recently read or taught or written about the texts on our syllabus. I was nervous that my lack of expertise might tempt me into teaching a kind of lecture-style class, because I wasn’t prepared for the questions my students might ask of me or of the text.

Out of my firm belief in the power of experiential learning, and inspired by Sheridan Blau’s example of doing the same thing, I ran my Teaching of Writing and Inservice Seminar courses at TC more like writing workshops for writers than abstract theoretical courses for teachers. Most classes were spent in a variety of writing activities, with all of us (including me as the instructor) writing together as a community. At the center of this practice was an assignment called the commentary, which is an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching writing developed by Sheridan Blau.
The commentary assignment is designed to assist students in producing pieces of writing that contribute to a discussion of a text and thereby advance the knowledge of the community. There are no restrictions on method, or form; as long as they seriously engage in the process of developing questions or ideas about the texts encountered, and are therefore involved in the project of advancing our collective knowledge about the texts, they earn full credit.

I thought the commentary might be an appropriate way to support the achievement of my purposes in my course, and that it might also serve to make my class a site for the dissertation research project I was still trying to develop as a PhD candidate in English Education. I was interested not only in the value of this assignment in my teaching, but also in using it as a site for research, for looking into how writing regularly in community with other writers, with lower stakes and deeper engagement, can change how a person writes, thinks, sees the world, and sees herself as a writer in a community of learners. I was now working with teachers on how to teach writing on Thursday nights at TC, and then in the mornings, I was working with undergraduates in a philosophy class to help them read like writers, think like writers, and write like writers.

1.3 Context of the Study

My sections of CC in 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 met twice a week in the morning from late August to early May. They are made up of engineers, computer science majors, pre-meds, and political science majors, with perhaps only a third of the class planning to major in the humanities: it is a class with large requirements in reading and writing for students who are not necessarily used to this kind of hermeneutic and theoretical work. The course is usually about 11 men and 11 women, and a mixture of a great variety of nationalities: perhaps as much as a third of the class is born outside of the US, and another 4 or 5 are first generation

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3 This assignment will be explained at much greater length in 1.5.
children of immigrant parents. Many of the students are multilingual, and perhaps 3 or 4 speak somewhat accented English.

When we first began our work together in CC, I asked my students to share hesitations they might have about embarking on a rigorous course in Philosophical texts. What I heard from them was that they felt illegitimate, unsure of their place in academe, unsure of how to reconcile STEM identities with those of philosophers and writers, and unsure how to interact with these complex texts. Most of them enter the class planning to write for me as teacher and evaluator in approximations of academic writing, or English (Macrorie); they struggle to write for themselves.

I had been spoiled, in a way, from years of teaching graduate students in English Education: even if they sometimes felt insecure, they were very willing to write and to think about writing, as it was at the core of their chosen career path. However, with these new undergraduates, I could not take a love of literature or skill in analytical and philosophical writing for granted. Of course I had a number of students who already saw themselves as apprenticed practitioners of the humanities in academe, as Art History majors and Drama majors, but many of them are also devoted applied math majors and biochem majors who take this course because they must, not because they want to.

This Contemporary Civilization course, and many of the other core requirements, are expressions of the college’s desire to induct students into the intellectual and academic culture of a highly selective liberal arts college – a culture that values learning and aims to produce students who can participate as contributors to knowledge and to the learning of their colleagues. What I learned in observing my experience of the class, my peers’ experiences of the class, and the general attitude of the undergraduate population toward the course, was that

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4 Please see 3.5.2 for a much more detailed breakdown of demographic information on students.

5 The homepage of the course, hosted on the College’s main website, describes the purpose of course as “to introduce students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities – political, social, moral, and religious – that human beings construct for themselves and the values that inform and define such communities; the course is intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens. While readings in this one-year course change from time to time, the factors that lead to adoption of a text always include historical influence, the presentation of ideas of enduring importance, and the demonstrated ability of a text to provoke productive discussion.” (http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/conciv)
this goal was largely unachieved. I wanted to use this assignment of the commentary as a site to investigate whether it might be possible to achieve the goal of creating a class of students who see themselves as legitimate members of an academic discourse community.

1.4 Research Questions

This work grew in two phases, first as a piece of research in practice as I watched my graduate students write in Teaching of Writing in the English Education program. Then, when I was asked to teach this undergraduate philosophy class (CC), I began to apply my developing theory to my work with them, making my practice and theory and research into a deeply recursive and symbiotic system. Inspired by the changes I noticed in the writing and thinking of my students, I decided to make this exploration into a larger research project. What I was so eager to discover is whether by participating in these activities, they come to identify themselves as budding philosophers, by which I mean students and thinkers who are able to produce thoughtful questions, able to communicate ideas, able to think through their lives and their work in words on the page in a way that comes with some measure of ease and produces work that they can be proud of.

As I see it, the goal of this course is not just to create future majors in philosophy, but also to enable students who are majors in engineering, chemistry, and mathematics to do careful philosophical thinking across disciplines, and experience what it means to be a contributing member of a learning community or of an intellectual community within and beyond the university, as engaged citizens in a flourishing democratic society. One of the main pedagogical questions for me in structuring the course was to ask: How do I teach critical thinking and argumentative writing in a philosophy class filled with non-philosophy majors? The challenge is to help them find their way into meaningful transactions with these really difficult philosophical texts, and then to help them find something to say, either aloud in class or in writing to each other and to me, that feels relevant.
My interest in this assignment as a site of research began with wondering whether it could function as a place for students to develop the skills to question their ideas, the ideas of the text, and the ideas of their peers. As John Dewey describes in “How We Think,” the spirit of inquiry is the inherent quality in children that teachers must direct and develop in the project of training thinkers for intellectual lives. The “natural capacities of inference [must be transformed] into habits of critical examination and inquiry” (Dewey 206) until students can live their intellectual lives motivated by a curious “interest in problems provoked by the observation of things and the accumulation of material” (Dewey 206). It may be uncomfortable at first to read and live this way, but, as Dewey insists, “Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance” (Dewey 191). I eventually clarified this larger observational research project into a few central questions, with subquestions:

1. What happens when an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing (Blau 2011) is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college?
   a. Does greater engagement in the practice of the commentaries connect to success in the course?
   b. Does the writing of the students show more evidence of complex, philosophical thought?\(^6\)?

2. Do students report experiencing or perceiving their participation in the assignment as leading them to be active contributors to the philosophical inquiries that are the focus of our class?
   a. How do the students describe and evaluate their roles in the class?

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\(^6\) This incredibly broad term will be defined more clearly in 1.7.1, 1.7.2, and 3.3.3.
b. Do students see themselves as having taken on intellectual roles in the class that they expected to take on or were accustomed to taking on?

c. Did they see themselves take on unusual or surprising roles?

To answer the first question and its sub questions, I will engage in an observational study of the work of students in the course to discover if my practice of teaching writing supports students in identifying and writing about the kinds of metacognitive and philosophical and critical questions Dewey sees as markers of deep and critical thinking. I will broadly study trends in the commentaries of all 57 students, and I will more closely study the writing of nine students to track specific changes in the craft and content of their writing over the course of the year. The analysis will explore their attempts to channel curiosity into productive interpretive techniques, their embracing of uncertainty, their making of meaning and connections, all of which reveal growth in their interpretive abilities, distinguishing, in the words of John Dewey, “thinking from thinking-well.”

For the second question and subquestions, I will use nine students as interview subjects to collect their perceptions of the purpose of the work of the commentary in our class and its effects on class culture, and individual thinking and writing. The analysis will explore their perceptions of their position in the community and their growth in the capacity to welcome and seek out productive confusion and doubt, and their perceptions of the lasting effects of this commentary on ways of thinking.

1.5 A New Kind of Assignment: The Commentary

The commentary assignment is designed to assist students in producing pieces of writing that contribute to a discussion of a text and thereby advance the knowledge of the community. There are no restrictions on method, or form; as long as they seriously engage in the process of developing questions or ideas about the texts encountered, and are therefore involved in the project of advancing our collective knowledge about the texts, they earn full
credit. In the spirit of Thoreau, this freedom and playfulness will ideally lead to inspired and deep learning: “Not by constraint or severity shall you have access to true wisdom, but by abandonment and childlike mirthfulness. If you would know aught, be gay before it” (Thoreau 1:140).

Based on the experiences of the students in using this assignment in my graduate-level classes, and then in my undergraduate philosophy class, I became interested not only in the value of this assignment in my teaching, but also in using it as a site for research, for looking into how writing regularly in community with other writers, with lower stakes and deeper engagement, can change how a person writes, thinks, sees the world, and sees herself as a writer in a community of learners.

Embedded in the design of the course (and standardized across the 60 or so sections) is a requirement that students read between 150 and 200 pages of a standard set of classical philosophical texts each week, and write approximately 20 pages each semester, which can be broken up by each instructor based on preference. When I took this course, in 2002-2003, the writing was broken up into two large papers, about seven weeks apart. All of the teaching and writing experience I had over the intervening 12 years told me that this was not a model I wanted to follow.

In my section, I have divided the 20 pages of writing into 3 main categories: weekly commentaries, 2 short argument paraphrases (1-2 pages each), and 2 long application papers (5 pages each). For the commentaries, twice a week, after every reading assignment, they must post to the discussion board either a commentary (initiating a thread of conversation) or a reply (responding to a thread of conversation). Half of the class is asked to write a commentary, and the other half of the class is required to respond to at least one classmate’s commentary. The groups alternate for each class session, with each student writing and then responding in every other session. What the students eventually discover is that commentaries and replies are very similar in length, in content, and in method: I emphasize this similarity by weighing them equally
in their grades, and, as a reflection of this similarity in practice and in theory, in the rest of the dissertation, I will use the term “commentary” to refer to both commentaries and replies. The major philosophical framing of the assignment is that if writing is like any other skill, it should be developed through daily practice, for, as Pliny and Aristotle would agree, “habit is the most effective teacher of all things” (Montaigne 77).

In our first class meeting, a warm Tuesday morning in early September, students come in, nervous, not knowing what to expect, having read the first four books of Plato’s Republic. They’ve seen the syllabus and the breakdown of assignments and they’ve been informed that they have to work consistently on something called the Commentary. Here is how they discover what it is, what it has been, and what it might be.

1.6 A First CC Class: A Socratic Dialogue

Teacher: So you likely have a lot of questions about the commentary, which I would describe as the largest and most important assignment of our work together. You will post either a commentary or a reply to someone else’s commentary before each class on the discussion board. Your commentary will be about some interesting or troubling element of the text. I don’t have a handout for the commentary assignment, but rather, we will define the assignment together in class today. I would like to offer the definition of a commentary as “A meaningful contribution to the discussion of a text.”

Student 1: Can you repeat that?

Teacher: Would you like me to write it on the board? (Writes) Does anyone have any questions about the commentary assignment?

Student 2: How long does it have to be?

Student 3: What should it be about?

Student 4: When is the deadline?

7 A dramatic representation and recreation of past first-day classroom interactions
Student 5: Can you use the first-person pronoun?

Student 2: Do I have to use and fully cite quotations?

Student 6: Does grammar count?

Student 1: How are these going to be graded?

Teacher: Those are all really good and useful questions. I think the best way to answer most of them is to actually do some commentaries right now. Ok. I think one of the best ways to start a commentary is to find a passage that stands out to you for some reason. My high school English teacher, David McEachen, used to tell us “If anything seems odd, inappropriate, confusing, or boring, it’s probably important” (Rex). I think that’s a great test for finding a passage to write about.\(^8\)

Student 1: Can you write that on the board?

Teacher: Of course. Mr. McEachen would be pleased. \((\textit{Writes})\). Ok. So I would suggest that you begin a commentary by choosing a passage from the reading that seems difficult, or contradictory, or worrisome, or confusing, or that catches your attention for any other reason, and then just write about it for about ten minutes. I would suggest that you try to write your thinking onto the page, your ideas, questions, provisional interpretations, and then offer that to our classmates as a commentary, as a place to begin a conversation.

Because this is our first one, and this is our first class, and it is possible that the reading is mostly a blur in your tired brains, I am going to give you a handout with a few passages I have selected as potentially good commentary material out of the reading you did from the \textit{Republic}. In the future, though, you will always be free to select any passage that interests you from the reading. This is just for this time\(^9\).

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\(^8\) Although this assignment is based on the work of Sheridan Blau ("What Is College Writing?" 2010), I have changed it over the years. One major difference, for example, is that I give far more instruction in this introduction than he does with graduate students.\(^9\) To emphasize what is an important point, this first class session is the only time in the whole year where I dictate or limit their choices as to what passage they might write on- this is simply for the sake of time in the first class, and to give them a little bit more guidance in this new assignment. However, all subsequent commentaries are totally open to student choice from the required reading. This handout is included in Appendix B.
Teacher: Okay. So we are all going to write for 10 minutes about any one of these passages, or any other passage from the reading that stood out to you. Let me encourage you write down your own questions, your own confusions. Don’t worry about beginning with a thesis-like claim of a correct interpretation or an answer. Just let your thinking come onto the page. We are going to share these in groups, but you won’t have to pass them in and I won’t grade them. Ok. I’m going to set a timer for 10 minutes. And I’ll be writing too. Ok. *(Everyone writes)*

Teacher: Ok. Thank you for trying this out with me, for being willing to write. Now we are going to get into groups of three. You have a couple of tasks with your group. I'll write these on the board. First, everyone shares aloud in the group. *(Writes “1. Read”)* Don’t preface with “I don’t think this is very good” or “I’m totally confused.” It’s the first day and we are all confused. Just read. Second, I want you to have a kind of theory-building conversation. *(Writes “2. Build Theory”)* What are the things that each of you did in the commentaries? What kinds of rhetorical or intellectual moves did you make? Are there things that you all did? Things that only one of you did? Are there things that you thought of doing that you didn’t do? And then we will share those around. Ok- let’s just do this casually. You three over there, three here, three here, those three, this group here, and this group, and these three. Ok. Just pull your chairs into a little huddle and share. I’ll give you about ten minutes again. *(Teacher circulates, listening to groups, occasionally making observations about what a commentary did).*

Teacher: Ok. So, what did you do? What did you notice?

Student 8: Um, she *(points)* wrote about the first passage, and how Pole… Polemarchus seems kind of like a bully. She wondered why he wants Socrates to stay so badly.

Student 9: I was confused about why the text would begin this way, with this strange conversation. And that Socrates doesn’t seem that bothered. He just offers persuasion.
Teacher: Great- so you’re asking questions about why characters say or do things, and why an author might have those characters do or say things. (Writes on board “Questions”)

Student 10: I wrote about number 4, and how it reminded me of the Giver, about how stories can be dangerous and sometimes are censored.

Teacher: Ok- so you made a connection to another text. Great. (Writes on board “Connections to other texts”). How many of you used the personal pronoun “I” in your commentary? (About 19 of the 21 students raise their hands) Ok. So that seems like a majority- so we can say it’s fine to use the personal pronoun in commentaries. What about casual language or slang? Yeah? Ok. So that's fine too. So let’s say that you will write in whatever language or dialect feels most familiar, most fluent, and most native so that the writing can be as unencumbered as possible, just freely thinking onto the page. But remember that the purpose of this is to communicate ideas to each other, and that if grammar or language or spelling is hindering efficacy of communication, then it is a problem, but as long as the community can understand the ideas, that is all that matters.

Teacher: Another question… How many of you brought cultural references or personal references into the commentary? (6 hands go up). Ok. So feel free to do that too. I’ll use Game of Thrones or the Bachelor once in awhile to illustrate a point in class, and if it’s effective, do it! What about length? How much did you write?

Student 2: About a page?

Student 3: Yeah, like 3 paragraphs?

Teacher: Ok. So let’s say that most commentaries are about 3 paragraphs. They can be shorter or longer, but let’s say for now that’s about the average length. Of course you all referenced a particular passage because I gave it to you, but how many of you actually quoted specific parts of the passage in your commentary? (7 hands go up). Ok. So let’s say that it’s good to reference a specific passage, and you want to cite it so that your
readers can know where you are, and that it also is useful to quote specific bits sometimes. (Writes “Cited quotations”).

Teacher: Did anyone have anything like a thesis? (A few hands up) How did you get there? Will you share?

Student 10: (Reads) Maybe it's simply because I haven't been brainwashed by growing up in a Socrates-run kallipolis, but personally I would find little desire to live simply to serve my city and never be able to do any other task than the one my nature allows for.

Teacher: Thank you. So yeah, I hear you making a kind of a claim there, that it sounds horrible to live in such a city with little freedom to choose your profession.

Student 10: Yeah, but then I had a lot more questions after. Because I can see a lot of reasons why that might make sense, to be forced to do what you are best at.

Teacher: Great. So maybe it is useful to sometimes make claims, and to frame that claim with how you got to it and also with your questions about it. I would like to caution you against a certain kind of commentary, though. We are all here at Columbia, we all deserve to be here, and we are all smart. I hope you don't feel the need to use the commentary as a place to prove your smartness. as a place to demonstrate (or show off) understanding or ideas. I would like to suggest that often, the smartest people and the best thinkers are the ones who are aware of their own confusions. Let me tell you a story about Socrates to perhaps illustrate this point. I think this is in the Crito or the Apology. I can't quite remember. One of Socrates' friends goes to the Oracle at Delphi. You remember what an Oracle is, right? From Oedipus? She sits there, over a crack in the earth, on a tripod stool, and makes predictions and tells riddles. So this friend of Socrates', Chaerephon, asks the Oracle who the wisest man in the world is. And the Oracle says it is Socrates. So Chaerephon comes back and tells Socrates and he can't believe it. He says, how is that possible? I have so many questions about so many things! But let me test it. So Socrates goes out into Athens, into the Agora, which is the central marketplace, kind of
like College Walk, and asks everyone he can find, who is the wisest man you know? And everyone tells him, you Socrates. So eventually he believes maybe being wise involves having a lot of questions and asking a lot of questions. So, framed by our study of the *Republic*, the first text of our year together, I would like to invite you to participate in a kind of Socratic dialogue with each other, making suggestions, admitting and focusing in on your own questions, and clarifying your thinking and that of your classmates through a written conversation online. To constantly challenge your ideas and your assumptions with questions.

Student 2: So, instead of those “what would Jesus do” bracelets, we should have “what would Socrates ask?” *(Class laughs)*

Teacher: Exactly. And unlike what happened to Socrates, I promise the questions you ask in this class won’t be punished with hemlock. *(A few students laugh).* You all know what happened to him, right? He was put on trial and eventually executed on the charge of corrupting the youth and not recognizing the gods of the state. Now, corrupting the youth, sometimes that’s taken to mean the kind of relationships in the *Symposium*, you read that last year, remember? But that’s not what it meant. He was always going around asking questions, and encouraging his students to question things, and that doesn’t make for very obedient citizens, and so he was seen as a real problem, as a person that might create rebellion, or anarchy. But questions are really important. And that’s how I want to frame the work of this class, of CC. The point is to read these texts and ask what values and ideas they seem to be supporting and whether we agree with those values.

Student 8: So it’s okay if we think some of the ideas in The *Republic* are crazy?

Teacher: Yes- I would hope that you might not want to live in Socrates’ Kallipolis, or if you do, I want to know why! We aren’t reading these texts just to accept them and agree with them. We also need to question them.
Teacher: Ok. Let me say a couple more general things. I will not reply to your commentaries in writing in the discussion board, and I will never correct them, in terms of fixing grammar or typos or even disagreeing with ideas. I have found that if I reply to commentaries, if I enter into the discussion, I mess it up. Because whatever one I reply to, then everyone replies to that one. So I stay out. These don’t have to be perfectly polished prose, but please try to write clearly enough- the point of these is to have a conversation, and if no one can figure out what you are saying, that doesn’t help the conversation.

Student 2: How do we know if we are doing it wrong?

Teacher: Look at each other’s commentaries - what do your classmates do that is interesting, invites reply, starts good conversations? Sometimes we’ll use particularly strong ones in class to start off our discussions. And I’ll often put you in groups based on who you responded to. But to answer your question, I’m not ever going to correct them or grade them or respond to them with a red pen like you are perhaps used to. However, if I think one of you really is not completing the assignment as you should be, I will write to you individually and offer assistance or guidance, and you are certainly welcome to come and talk to me about your commentaries in office hours. So you simply get credit for completing each one, on time. Either you do it, and you engage in it fully, or you don’t. And if you complete all of them, usually around 26 in a semester, you get full credit for that 20% of your final grade.

Teacher: And a note about deadlines: the commentaries have to be posted in time for me to read them all before the class, and for you all to read for each other. So for a Tuesday class, commentaries have to be posted by Sunday night, and replies by Monday night. Or really early Tuesday morning. Because then, every Tuesday or Thursday before class, usually very early in the morning with my first cup of tea, I sit down at my computer and read all of the commentaries and replies for that reading. I read through them looking for shared ideas, looking for common questions, for places that a number
of students seem to struggle, for a new interpretation that they are building together. And then I build my plan for our class around that, forming groups from existing conversation threads, choosing to focus on a section that is causing confusion, or as Socrates would describe it, a moment when the conversation has reached aporia, or an impasse. I try to summarize the issues at hand, as I’ve seen them in the commentaries, and provide some moments in the text that we can examine together as a class to try to clarify and continue our investigation.

Rather than the traditional process whereby an instructor periodically evaluates and assesses large pieces of high-stakes student work, students begin the course with this practice of the commentary, writing for and responding to each other twice each week. They continue this practice for the full semester, at the same time moving also into writing small papers for response by the professor and their peers, to much larger and more involved analytical and argumentative writing for response and evaluation by the professor. This process invites students to begin by writing for familiar audiences, reflecting and responding to questions and provocations about their thinking, and systematically moving up in increasing levels of abstraction in both subject and audience as the year progresses.

What seems to happen is that the commentaries help the class to become, as Sheridan Blau has written ("Writing Your Way In"), a kind of highly-functioning apprenticeship system, where students experience what is possible and what is effective through the mentorship of their colleagues and their colleague’s texts as they view and respond to the work of their classmates. I do provide some guidance in referencing effective commentaries in class, asking students to paraphrase their commentary as a way of starting off a discussion, or observing that a particularly rich conversation was begun by an insightful observation. Despite this intervention, the genre of the commentaries is mostly shaped by the innovations and ideas of the students.

10 The use of theories of apprenticeship systems for this dissertation will be explained at length in 2.3.5.
themselves. Rather than a teacher telling them what is good and what is not, what is strong and what is weak, they see it for themselves in the work of their peers. One week a student asks a probing question, gets responses or gets a mention in class: the next week, inspired by what they see their colleagues doing, many students ask probing questions. One week a student connects a text to another text, gets responses or gets a mention in class: the next week, inspired by what they see their colleagues doing, many students make intertextual connections. In this apprenticeship system, they learn through observing each other and participating in a functioning community of practice of readers and thinkers and writers. The commentaries shape the class and their voices come off the discussion board and into the room, in various and varied ways. They quickly see that participating in this assignment in an authentic and engaged way has a cascade of benefits for them as readers and as students, and that failure to take the assignment seriously makes for shallow readings and a boring class session. A large part of the theory and method for this practice is in the construction of the assignment itself, as a genre constructed by the class that has only as much potential to enrich their understandings as the energy they put into it.

For my students, this assignment has become, among so many other things, a place for play in writing, for wondering and for wandering. It has freed their thoughts and their voices, and what they have written is more real, more valuable, and more interesting, both in my own judgment and in the judgment of our class as a community. Like Erasmus’ great teacher, Alexander Hegius, I have found a way to encourage them to write “as if... playing a game, rather than doing something serious. And yet these writings, so written, are of the sort which the learned world votes worthy of immortality” (Erasmus 77). Rather than thinking of themselves as taking on the serious project of philosophy in each commentary, I aim to shape this assignment in line with Michel de Montaigne’s conception of “doing philosophy” as an intellectual and meditative inquiry that develops naturally out of the questions we ask ourselves about the occurrences in our daily lives. Rather than trying to make a firm claim about the meaning of a
text, I am encouraging them to encounter a text from a position of inquiry and openness and curiosity, and then engaging in a dialogue with other readers that begins with a student’s wonderings, confusions, and interpretive inclinations, and then perhaps eventually develops into claims and arguments.

My hope is for them to see that engaging with these texts is the real practice of philosophy, and that doing philosophy, according to founders of the discipline as we know it, Socrates, Aristotle, Isocrates, and others, is a metacognitive and recursive process of reading, thinking, questioning, thinking about your own thinking, and conversing, in order to construct useful interpretations. In this philosophy class, I try to find ways to encourage them to make meaning out of these ancient texts for themselves, finding ways to make them relevant to their own lives: “for who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? And what so much good doth that teaching bring forth… as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach?” (Sidney 22).

Years before I started teaching CC, when I was teaching Teaching of Writing to graduate students and first refining my use of the commentary, a student wrote a reflection that inspired this whole project, and I think her sense of what the commentary did for her captures what I see it as capable of doing for all students:

"But even as I compromised, even when I never did find the courage to branch out of my writer’s comfort zone, to experiment with form, to speak candidly on troubling issues in education, I somehow managed to make my academic writing freer… For the first time in my academic writing, I posed more questions than answers. I proudly lacked a thesis. My writing began to sound more like meditations, than policy. I wandered, bumped into non sequiturs, interrupted deep thoughts with brief asides, rambled on…. But what I soon realized was that the events, people, and themes closest to me we’re [sic] often the most difficult to commit onto paper… Perhaps, at the end of it all, I can say with much conviction, that my Commentary has
been an experiment in honest self-discovery and self-fulfillment. Come to think of it, that is one of the goals of writing, isn't it?” (BL, F '11 MA)

1.7 Definition of Terms: Thinking, Philosophy, and Academic Writing

At this point in my introduction I will provide an initial clarification of my use of these terms. However, the much deeper nuances of the stages in the process of thinking, and in particular the move from random to reflective thought, will be clarified in my Review of the Literature (2.3.1-2.3.5) where I examine the histories of these disciplines, and in my Research Methodology (3.3.1-3.3.3), as I begin to clarify these categories in order to analyze my data.

1.7.1 What is Thinking?

John Dewey, in his 1910 work “How We Think,” attempted to define the concept of thinking and then to classify it into stages and levels. He explains the scope and importance of his project, using John Stuart Mill, to argue that the practice of drawing inferences is “the great business of life. Everyone has daily, hourly, and momentary need of ascertaining facts which he has not directly observed… it is the only occupation in which the mind never ceases to be engaged” (Dewey 195).

Dewey begins by separating belief from thought, defining belief as an idea “accepted with slight or almost no attempt to state the grounds that support it” (Dewey 182), and thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought… a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons” (Dewey 183). At the end of part I, “The Problem of Training Thought,” he defines thinking, or the operation of forming thoughts, as a process of “maintain[ing] the state of doubt and carry[ing] on systematic and protracted inquiry” (Dewey 191) in an “operation in which present facts suggest other facts (or truths) in such a way as to induce belief in the latter upon
the ground or warrant of the former. We do not put beliefs that rest simply on inference on the surest level of assurance. To say “I think so” implies that I do not as yet know so. The inferential belief may later be confirmed and come to stand as sure, but in itself it always has a certain element of supposition” (Dewey 188).

Thinking is a process that cannot be static. It was this fear of fixity that caused Socrates to distrust writing: once an idea was written, how can other thinkers continue to interrogate the validity of those claims? In agreement with this Socratic and Montaigneian idea of thinking as mobile and plastic, Dewey suggests that concentrated thinking actually “means variety and change of ideas combined into a single steady trend moving toward a unified conclusion. Thoughts are concentrated not by being kept still and quiescent, but by being kept moving toward an object… Holding the mind to a subject is like holding a ship to its course; it implies constant change of place combined with unity of direction” (Dewey 212). Rather than seeing the messy process of inquiry as contrary to the idea of concentration, Dewey argues that concentrated thinking has to make space for “All kinds of varied and incompatible suggestions may sprout and be followed in their growth, and yet thinking be consistent and orderly, provided each one of the suggestions is viewed in relation to the main topic” (Dewey 212).

At this point in his essay, Dewey pauses to ask a larger question about the use of thinking: why is this clearly complicated, difficult, and sometimes uncomfortable process worth doing? Why might it be worthwhile to live a thinking life and what does that mean? He answers his own question with an argument made by both Plato and Aristotle, which was then taken up by thinkers such as Aquinas, Montaigne, and Shakespeare: we must think, and live thoughtful lives, so that we are not the slaves of our immediate and momentary passions and whims: “a thinking being can, accordingly, act on the basis of the absent and the future” (Dewey 192). A thoughtful life is one lived through decisions rather than reflexes, made with understandings of consequences. Thinking is the foundation of the processes through which we remember,
record, and learn, and it allows us to distinguish, through abstraction, objects from representations, and to imagine and wonder about things that do not yet exist.

Dewey’s kind of independent and critical thinking requires a lot of freedom, which can be dangerous. Just because a person thinks carefully or well about one thing, doesn’t mean she can always replicate that ability: “logical attainment in one direction is no bar to extravagant conclusions in another” (Dewey 197). Additionally, natural curiosity does not protect against “the propagation of error, nor large but untrained experience to the accumulation of fixed false beliefs” (Dewey 197). Dewey uses Bacon and then Locke to clarify the different types of error that can be dangerous for or to thinking. First, there is the temptation to simply follow the thinking of others to save the “pains and troubles of thinking and examining” (Locke in Dewey, 199). Secondly, there is the danger of simply following passions rather than following reason, and allowing passions to govern arguments and adjudications. Lastly, there is the danger of following reason too narrowly, failing to consider the breadth and depth of differing provisional answers to a particular questions. John Stuart Mill frames this as the importance of debate in preventing the emergence of “dead dogma,” his term for the inherited and unexamined ideas Locke identifies in his first category of error. Teaching must not only “transform natural tendencies into trained habits of thought, but must also fortify the mind against irrational tendencies current in the social environment, and help displace erroneous habits already produced” (Dewey 201).

To connect this question of thinking back to the larger project of educational research in which I am engaged, Dewey defines the main job of education as that of “supply[ing] of conditions that make for cultivation [of habits of mental discipline]” (Dewey 203). Dewey argues that teachers must take up this project of shaping thinkers, and that, while we cannot prove every statement, address every question, correct every mistake, or create experts in every area, we can work to “cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded
preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to engrain into the individual working habits of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves” (Dewey 202).

1.7.2 What is Philosophical Education?

These same questions about the uses of thinking that bother Dewey are, perhaps, the oldest questions of the discipline of Philosophy as we know it. Aristotle and Plato use this question of how to live a thoughtful life as the motivation for their major works. In the Republic, through the character of Socrates, Plato argues that education and thinking and philosophy are not about making assertions or performing lectures and set argumentative techniques, as the Sophist Thrasymachus does, but rather education is the techne, or craft, of engaging in offering hypotheses and seeking precision through clarifying questions, constructing knowledge carefully and with a spirit of inquiry. Training in thinking, through education, is what enables us to live an independent and free life.

In the Republic, in Plato’s ideal city, the Kallipolis, everyone has access to basic education, to systematic training. As the topics become more difficult, students who are less capable move into more vocational training, and in the end, the most educated citizens, the students who are trained in mathematics and philosophy, are the guardians, the Philosopher Kings, who are entrusted with preserving the systems that keep order in the city. The idea of education in philosophy, then, is as a kind of training for life and for thinking and for citizenship that continues for the whole lifetime of any capable member of the polis. “Education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes… the power to learn is present in everyone’s soul… education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around… it isn’t the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn’t turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and tries to redirect it” (Plato VII.518d).
For Aristotle, education was also not just about subjects such as poetry and music and mathematics; it was the way virtues of character were shaped within each citizen. It is a sharpening of the judgment, such that “the mark of an educated man [is] to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits” (Aristotle 1094b). Aristotle views eudaimonia, or human flourishing, as the product of a virtuous soul trained through ethos, or habit, to bear “all the changes of life becomingly and always [make] the best of circumstances, as a good general makes the best military use of the army at his command, and a good shoemaker makes the best shoes out of the hides that are given him; and so with all other craftsmen” (Aristotle 1101a).

Isocrates, like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, also believed that a philosophical education was not about learning certain specific tasks or skills, but rather that it was about shaping a critical and questioning mind through apprenticeship to a selected library of master texts. In his educational treatise Against the Sophists, where he argues against formulaic education and puts forward his own teaching techniques, which he names philosophia, Isocrates clarifies: “Let no man imagine that I hold justice can be taught. On the contrary I am convinced that there is no art capable of implanting justice and temperance in the hearts of those who are not naturally inclined to virtue. But I do believe that nothing helps so much towards the practice of virtue as the study of political wisdom and eloquence” (Gwynn 47).

It is this union of thought and action, this concept of deliberate choice that defines the philosophical life. Aristotle would call this praxis, or the careful action of a rational being. He argues that living a just or virtuous or free life cannot be accidental, but has to be the result of choices made from a deep internal theory of what that just or virtuous or free life would look like. He uses the example of a musician or a grammarian working at their craft, understanding that “for a man to produce a grammatical or a musical result, he must already be a grammarian or a musician… is it not possible, for example, to spell a word correctly by chance, or from dictation? Whereas then, and then only, can a man be said to be a grammarian when he has produced a
grammatical result, and produces it grammatically, that is to say in virtue of a knowledge of
grammar which he himself possesses” (Aristotle 2.5.28). That is to say, a man can speak
grammatically by accident or by luck, just as a novice may fortunately strike a musical chord on
an instrument he has not studied.

In this same way as musicians or grammarians, a citizen must consciously work at the
craft of being a citizen. The use of philosophy, then is to help us to live lives of action founded
on deep and careful deliberation. Our habits are formed by decisions made intentionally and
informed by a deep knowledge of music or grammar or virtue or systems of power. This process
of thinking as careful inquiry leads, then, to a life defined by praxis, using reason and our
deliberate faculties to the fullest teleological effect.

To leap over 2000 years of history\(^\text{11}\), including (but certainly not limited to) Martin
Luther’s belief in the importance of individual interaction with the scriptures; Kant's powerful idea
that all beings are responsible to think, courageously, for themselves; Rousseau’s assertion of
the possibility of human perfectibility; Adam Smith’s concerns about the stunting effects on
cognition of the division of labor; and Wollstonecraft, Douglass, Du Bois, and King’s powerful
arguments about the liberating abilities of education and critical thinking, I turn to the 1940s in
Brazil. There, Paulo Freire began to inquire into causes that seemed to contribute to cycles of
poverty and illiteracy and disenfranchisement in the favelas. In his Pedagogy of the Oppressed,
he coined the term “banking… education” to describe the process that “turns [students] into
‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (Freire 72). In sharp contrast to this
passive model is what he termed “‘problem-posing’ education” (Freire 79).

The achievement of freedom, therefore, is an Aristotelian “praxis,” which cannot consist
of action alone; it must be, instead, action combined with “serious reflection” (Freire 79, 65).
This reflection or “reflective participation” takes place in dialogue with others who are in the
same position of realization and action. The work put in by students in schools has to be based

\(^{11}\) Millenia whose epistemology I will more deeply (although necessarily limitedly) discuss in my Literature Review.
in inquiry and critical thinking, rather than just retaining information, because “the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (Freire 73).

1.7.3 What is Academic Writing? Mis-Inventing the University’s Discourse: Mimesis v. Mathesis

Academic writing is a term that is used frequently, and broadly, to refer to the kinds of writing that is done in schools by students, by professors in books, by researchers in journals. Ideally, for professionals and students alike, academic writing has a real exigency, an authentic goal of communication, of contributing an idea to a conversation about a problem that is seen as worth working on. Academic writing, as I hope to define it, is a place of careful, imaginative, curious, and intellectual conversation where people contribute to each other's knowledge and learning.

To move back in time and root this definition in epistemological history, modern academic writing has a kind of ancestor in the way oratory was taught in the schools of Rome. At first, writing for students began in studying the arguments of famous orators, first copying and performing these orations, and then moving on to use the form of those ideal orations to house their own ideas and arguments, in a kind of apprenticeship system.

Once a student had been released to freely compose and perform his own orations, Cicero explains that, much like a written argument in an academic paper today, the creation of an oration should proceed in stages: “he must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument; next go on to array them in the adornments of style” (Cicero 1.137-45). This discriminating eye has great importance: where a student will begin using the

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12 2.3.5 includes a deeper examination into the educational powers of apprenticeship systems and communities of practice.
official form\textsuperscript{13}, a skilled orator would modify any rules or traditions of form and structure to fit his unique context. Isocrates explains that "what has been said by one speaker is not equally useful for the speaker who comes after him; on the contrary, he is accounted most skilled in this art who speaks in a manner worthy of his subject and yet is able to discover in it topics which are nowise the same as those of others . . . oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment" (Isocrates 171).

In Cicero’s \textit{De Oratore}, he suggests that the guiding maxim for oratorical judgment should be context: “In an oration, as in life, nothing is harder to determine what is appropriate. The Greeks call it [prepon]; let us call it \textit{decorum}. Much brilliant work has been done in laying down rules about this: the subject is in fact worth mastering. From ignorance of this mistakes are made not only in life but frequently in writing, both in poetry and in prose. Moreover the orator must have an eye to propriety not only in thought but in language. For the same style and the same thoughts must not be used in portraying every condition in life, or every rank, position, or age, and in fact a similar distinction must be made in respect of place, time and audience. The universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to consider propriety. This depends on the subject under discussion, and on the character of both the speaker and the audience” (Cicero 70-72).

Although young students were first introduced only to the seemingly rigid structure of classical oration, masters used it to fit their needs, adapting and changing the form based on context.

Moving forward through history\textsuperscript{14} to another important moment in defining the genres and uses of formal academic writing, The Royal Society was founded in England as an early professional organization for the advancement of knowledge in science on the 28th of November 1660. The founders, Christopher Wren, Robert Boyle, and John Wilkins, formed the society out of a group of natural philosophers and physicians who were working independently.

\textsuperscript{13} Cicero was highly concerned with form, dividing the stages of an oration into six sections: exordium, naratio, partitio, confirmatio, refutatio, peroratio, with the option of digresio (which he considered risky and optional); however, these stages were for a particular kind of oration (forensic) and only used when the purpose and audience and topic had been determined to be fitting for this genre of rhetoric (Cicero, 1948).

\textsuperscript{14} Again, I will spend more time on these intervening millennia in 2.3.
and wanted a community in which to exchange and further knowledge, particularly through the communication and publication of scientific works, such as Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* and the experiments of Benjamin Franklin. To emphasize this spirit of rational inquiry, they situated the Society classically, taking a motto from Horace of nullius in verba, or, “on the word of no one” (“History” The Royal Society). In addition to emphasizing inquiry in their motto, rooting themselves in a tradition of verification through experimentation, founding member Thomas Sprat argued for a standardized style, suitable for reporting scientific findings, using plain, natural, and accurate description (Harmon 35).

This idea of suitability of style in connection with audience and purpose, was grounded in the Renaissance rediscovery of Horatian and Ciceronian ideas of decorum in art and oratory. Horace, who had studied at the Athenian Academy with Cicero’s son Marcus, made the famous claim, in his *Ars Poetica*, that poetry is like painting, *ut pictura poesis*. “Some attracts you more if you stand near, some if you’re further off. One picture likes a dark place, one will need to be seen in the light because it’s not afraid of the critic’s sharp judgment… It is not enough for poetry to be beautiful; it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer’s mind wherever it will” (Horace 361-65, 99-103). Different kinds of poesis (meaning not just poetry, but, more broadly, all acts of creation) demand different styles according to the goals of the creator, the context of publication, and the audience. And the best writing is, as Thomas More would phrase it, *utile et dulce*: useful and sweet, in that it both instructs and delights.

So then, what is this kind of “academic writing” that we talk about trying to teach in schools? How do we hope to use it to show growth in philosophical thinking? Just as in the teaching of classical oratory, students begin writing in schools apprenticed to master texts, which they imitate in form with original content, and move, with a gradual release of responsibility, into independent innovation and creation. We do this with our youngest writers telling stories of their summer vacations, with students using the sonnet form to write their own love poems, and with the form of the five-paragraph argumentative theme. For many secondary
and post-secondary students today, academic writing is most familiar as the kind of writing sought by teachers in AP classes, on exams such as the SAT and the ACT, and on college applications. This modern argumentative academic writing done in schools by students, like classical oratory and the scientific writing published by the Royal Society, takes on a problem or an issue in a text, and makes claims, taking an audience into consideration. It is often understood to be part of a dialogue, that it may be a response to another text, and that it will likely be responded to in turn. It often uses a dialect particular to the aims of the text and the community from which it comes and to which it is directed.

One of the common difficulties in this academic writing as it is used in schools arises from the fact that students are not yet expert enough with the topics on which they write to use an authentically authoritative voice. In David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University,” he discusses this pervasive academic problem of students attempting to move artificially into a discourse by simply mimicking the codes they think will give them power and membership, rather than innovating and actually contributing to knowledge. He describes the origin of the problem as when “a student assumes privilege by locating themselves within the discourse of a particular community- within a set of specifically acceptable gestures and commonplaces- learning, at least as it is defined in the liberal arts curriculum, becomes more a matter of imitation or parody than a matter of invention and discovery” (Bartholomae 143). Rather than mathesis (GR the action of learning), they are still stuck at mimesis. This problem is then compounded, sometimes, by the fact that any interesting ideas a student may have become obscured in this parody of the language they think the academy would want them to use. The writing, rather than succeeding or failing because of the strength of the ideas, is overtaken by

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15 According to the College Board’s website, the SAT writing exam is intended to measure “how well you understand the passage and use it as the basis for a well-written, thought-out discussion… A successful essay shows that you understood the passage, including the interplay of central ideas and important details. It also shows an effective use of textual evidence… A successful essay shows your understanding of how the author builds an argument by: Examining the author’s use of evidence, reasoning, and other stylistic and persuasive techniques; Supporting and developing claims with well-chosen evidence from the passage… A successful essay is focused, organized, and precise, with an appropriate style and tone that varies sentence structure and follows the conventions of standard written English.
the language, which is then what unmakes the writer and the writing (Bartholomae 148). Caught up in how they are saying things, they lose sight of what they wanted to say and become “a writer who has lost himself in the discourse” (Bartholomae 138).

Academic writing, as I would like to define it, is just a new label for an old form of dialogue and inquiry and investigation that takes place in real time, of course, but also across time and across languages, from the Renaissance, to today, and back to the Ancients, in our minds and on pages. We should use it as a place to “simmer over our incalculable cauldron, our enthralling confusion, our hotch-potch of impulses, our perpetual miracle—for the soul throws up wonders every second—... rigidity is death; conformity is death: let us say what comes into our heads, repeat ourselves, contradict ourselves, fling out the wildest nonsense, and follow the most fantastic fancies” (Woolf 3).

I am seeking a way to help students enter into a relationship with academic writing based on conversation, on the ideas of Ciceronian decorum, and the rigor and communicative efficacy of the Royal Society. I would hope to help students see academic writing as genuinely flexible and useful. They can apprentice themselves to the master texts and arguments they read in school, but then when they move to create their own, they should adjust to suit the particularities of audience and purpose in a kind of apian imitation (to use Petrarch’s description, borrowed from Cicero): “We must write as the bees make honey, not gathering flowers but turning them into honeycombs, thereby blending them into a oneness that is unlike them all, and better” (Petrarch 23.19). It is a way that students can enter into the academy, by both “maintaining [and] modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it” (Foucault 227).
1.8 Essays, Excursions, and Explorations in the Montaigne Tradition:

1.8.1 On Being Resistant to Writing: A Meditation After Montaigne

On a Friday afternoon a few years ago, I sit, curled up by the window in my apartment, and read an essay by Ann Berthoff. As I read, I make various markings and scribblings in the margins, nodding and smiling as I read, and thinking of how I might use it in a small research project I've been working on. I read it a few times, making notes in another color. I decide I like it, I like her, but I am not sure that I have enough of a grasp on it yet, so I think I'll write about it to understand it better. I type up some passages I like. I sit, looking at the blinking cursor, trying to figure out what to say. I decide I'll get to figuring out what I want to say about it later.

I spend Friday night at dinner telling my then-partner all about this great article I've just read, after he finishes telling me about the sinusitis patient who died when the infection created a brain abscess, the young shooting victim who didn't make it even to the trauma surgery floor, and the older gentleman patient who was angry at being treated for an STI when he had all the classic symptoms but claimed "no recent human contact." We get home late, but I do not worry about my work. I know that I like the article, that it interests me, that it speaks to me, but I still do not know what I want to say about it. I think I will figure that out before I sit down to write about it on Saturday.

Saturday morning, at an unexpected brunch with my mother and her then-partner, who flew in last minute from Hawaii for the weekend, I tell them all about the really cool article I just read. I tell them how I want to use it for my project, how I plan to write about it later that day. The conversation moves on, as we eat and talk and laugh. Noon comes on too quickly and we run out the door to a Mets game. In traffic on the BQE, during the game, in traffic coming home on the BQE, I think about Berthoff's piece again, but do not have pen or paper to write, so my thinking stays vague, stays amorphous; I suppose I still do not quite know what I think or what I want to write. We get home, make a sort of picnic dinner out of leftovers, and suddenly it is time
for bed. I have not written. I think about writing in bed; my iPad is beside me, next to a glass of water and some lip balm. I am not sure what I want to say, though, so I roll over and go to sleep.

Then, suddenly, it is Sunday. A gorgeous day. A morning for tea and mangos and homemade sourdough outside. An afternoon for a reiki workshop and an early dinner at a vegan restaurant on the Lower East Side in the vanishing sunshine. Berthoff's article weighs on my mind and on my shoulder, the book taking up valuable real estate in my handbag. Perhaps I think by carrying it around I will be more likely to find out what I want to say. We pick up some sorbet on the way home. We put on classical music. He goes to work reading up on infections of the frontal sinus and their ability to create, through vascular connections, abscesses in the frontal cortex. I get in bed. I prop myself up on pillows, the heavy book on my knees. Nope. Not comfortable. I roll over, the book on a pillow, the iPad in front of me. I open yesterday’s document, the quotations stare back at me. I wonder, confronted with the blinking cursor: What do I have to say?

Sitting there in bed, trying to think my way into an answer, I begin to write. Fragments and questions become sentences and ideas and I realize Berthoff is right: language, particularly written language, “itself is the great heuristic” (Berthoff 648). I have no idea what my thesis is or what I want to write because I have not yet written anything, I have not really engaged in the thinking process, I have not given my thoughts form through concrete language, I have not made meaning out of chaos, I have not engaged in dialogue with myself or with an audience.

Because "language and thought do not bear one another a sequential relationship but are simultaneous and correlative" (Berthoff 648), I needed to use language (solidified in writing) to concretize my thought: I have been stuck on the near end of the process, waiting for words and meaning to come to me, rather than writing to pursue my ideas. I realized that my failure to figure out what I thought, what I wanted to say, my hesitation to write until I knew what I wanted to say, was exactly Berthoff's point: "Language is an exchange... We come to know what we mean when we hear what we say" (Berthoff 650) and when we see what we write, and maybe
even more when we read aloud what we have written, when we imagine sending this writing to a reader, imagine what they might think or write in response: when we write in this open and curious and excavatory way, we are in a kind of dialogue with the self or with others.

My failure to make meaning was directly because of my reluctance to write, and it became a negative and static version of the simultaneous and correlative creative relationship of language and thinking that Berthoff writes about; I couldn’t see the playing out of her point in myself until I wrote it. It wasn’t so much that I didn’t understand what I had read; it was more that I had no ability to think critically about it, to put it into conversation with other things I had read, because I was handicapping myself by refusing to step into the higher order thinking of writing. “Lev Vygotsky, A. R. Luria, and Jerome Bruner, for example, have all pointed out that higher cognitive functions, such as analysis and synthesis, seem to develop most fully only with the support system of verbal language—particularly, it seems, of written language” (Emig 122), and so, of course, as soon as I began to write, I felt like I had a better grasp on what Berthoff was trying to communicate, which was exactly her point.

More importantly, after I finally started to write, I felt like I could get a hold on what I wanted to say about Berthoff. Writing about her helped me to clarify and condense my ideas, to figure out what I think: writing is thinking, writing is sorting, writing is a way of putting thinking into words and sentences, so that the entropy can be ordered and reordered. But for the children of the five paragraph, we have to come up with interventions and practices to reteach what writing can be; we have to take it out of its place on the borders, and re-weave it back into the tapestry of intellectual work, threading in and out of every row.

I am, here in this dissertation, attempting to use a writerly approach to research (Perl, 306). What I mean by that is I am trying to find a balance between showing and telling, between narrating and theorizing, how much of my teacher-researcher authorial presence to reveal or when to attempt to simply report. This is one of the larger questions of teacher-research, which I will take up in 3.3.1, but briefly, my goal is to balance these writerly decisions with researcher
ones, so that, in places where it seems valuable to the study, “a story [can] be accepted as research... [as] reliable and valuable records of experience” (Perl, Counihan, McCormack, and Schnee 306).

1.8.2 Why Don’t I See Most Academic Writing As Thinking?

I went to high school in the late 1990’s, and I am a child of the five paragraph essay. We were taught to come up with a thesis statement, make an outline, compose topic sentences, gather evidence, and then write. In that order, most often all done the night before such a heavily-weighted quarterly paper was due. We were taught to think of writing as an occasional and dreaded high-stakes and potentially GPA-damaging event, a place for answering and arguing rather than a place for questioning and wondering. Writing was the end of the thinking, rather than the beginning. I have worked hard to unlearn this dogma, I have come up with practices and exercises to try to undo these writing knots, this problem is the site of my dissertation research, and yet my reflex is often to wait until an answer emerges out of the ether to write, rather than writing to dig into myself and my thinking and uncover an idea worth polishing.

I had a Facebook conversation recently with a good friend. He’s pursuing his PhD in Philosophy at Harvard and we met in a required writing class called Logic and Rhetoric in our first undergraduate year at Columbia. He’s currently teaching undergraduate philosophy classes and trying to finish in the next year or two. His postings on Facebook are usually about metal bands (a passion of his), politics or philosophers, and sometimes connections between all three. Sometimes he posts school frustrations. Friday he posted a status: “The easiest essays to grade are the ones that are really good or really bad.” I saw it, laughed, liked it, and then commented “True. It is hard to define what makes a mediocre paper so mediocre.” He liked my comment, and then replied (so much more precisely than I’ve ever been able to define it for myself): “For the undergraduate philosophy major, it’s a lack of logical precision and/or creativity
combined with competence in presenting someone else’s view and a mostly clear writing style.”
A minute later, he added: “(it’s sobering to think that my professors likely think the same about
my work.)”. I liked that comment too.

The phrase that lingered was “someone else’s view.” Of course they are not competent
in presenting the views of someone else because they haven’t tried to fully understand this
view, haven’t read clearly enough and thought clearly enough to understand or agree or
disagree with this view. My conversation with him made me return to Goen and Gillotte-Tropp’s
discussion of student writing, and the particular struggles they see. They seem to have identified
a similar problem: “Students commonly write essays that basically summarize a reading with
some personal observations thrown in; the two activities they typically find most difficult are
‘integrating one’s own ideas and knowledge into the written conversation with one’s sources’
and ‘interpreting source texts for a purpose of one’s own’” (McCormick in Goen and Gillotte-
Tropp 95).

What struck me about both James’ (my friend) and Goen and Gillotte-Tropp’s
assessment of the biggest weaknesses in student writing, common from Harvard to San
Francisco State, is that these problems seem to stem mostly from the kinds of writing we ask
students to do. Aren’t most academic writing exercises merely requests for presenting a
summary of the views of some other reader, usually more expert than the writer, with some
analysis or personal response (if you are lucky enough to be a student of a professor who thinks
you have a right to opine about Kant) shaded in occasionally?

The kind of writing and thinking that might help students to produce great writing and
thinking is not what we generally assign. And, as so many of these articles have helped me to
do, I am now newly more deeply connecting this to a deficit in the way we are asking students to
read. Goen and Gillotte-Tropp write: “students’ difficulty constructing meaning from texts may be
a significant source of their difficulty constructing meaning in texts” (91, emphasis in original).

Most of the undergraduate-level literature classes I took were an exercise in summary and light
analysis. We were asked to read a novel, or a play, or a bunch of poems, and then maybe answer a few very leading questions about what happened, or who said what to whom, or what something meant, in the midst of a long lecture. What students are not often asked to do, at least in my experience, is “introspective reading, or reading as ‘an analogue for thinking about one’s own and other’s thinking, about how one’s thinking is ignited by the thoughts of other,’ has a stimulative and generative effect on students’ writing” (Salvatori, in Goen and Gillotte-Tropp, 95).

Since Goen and Gillotte-Tropp have led me to Salvatori, I suppose she wouldn’t be a bad dinner guest to invite to the party next. I look again more closely at her article, finding this kind of deep reading, transactional stuff all over. I realize that most times, I can substitute the word “writing” for the word “reading” and it still makes sense- or perhaps makes even more. Take this passage, where I’ve played with filling in the Iser-ian gaps with []. “The reading [and writing] process, then, is an extremely complicated activity in which the mind is at one and the same time relaxed and alert, expanding meanings as it selects and modifies them, confronting the blanks and filling them with constantly modifiable projections produced by inter-textual and intra-textual connections. Because of the nature of the reading [and writing] process, each reading [and writing] remains as ‘indeterminate’ as the text that it is a response to [in the process of creating]” (Salvatori 661).

1.8.3 What Makes a “Good” Text or Reader: Is Literature Just Quiet Conversation?

In the previous meditation, I began to connect the problems in writing to problems in reading. So, perhaps the next question I have to ask is: What is a “good” reader? Is it someone who can read and handle informational texts on a standardized test, and then get a 91 from the Accuplacer? Is it a graduate student who can pleasurelessly slog through piles of theory, analyzing ideas and thinking along with the writer, and then turn out a fellowship-winning dissertation that is then read by only three specialists in her sub-field? Is it an elementary school
student who loves fantasy books, writes fan fiction, but fails to ever do her assigned reading homework? Is it a mother who, caught up in the craze of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, reads the novels voraciously, loves them, recommends them to friends and family, and then names her new son (his conception inspired and catalyzed by her reading) Christian?

I am a reader. I feel that I can confidently claim that. But what does that mean? I’m the child of two readers. I came from houses that had walls of books. Both parents had jobs that required lots of reading, but they also both read for pleasure and I saw that as a child. I remember, somewhere between the ages of 7 and 10, loving this one series of classic novels (*Black Beauty* was my favorite), in particular because their hard binding and margin size allowed them to be perfectly propped up around a plate or bowl, so mealtime never had to stop my reading. Now I read all kinds of things— I love Faulkner and Hemingway and Oates and Unsworth and Plath and Donne and Whyte and Stafford and Milton and Nye and *Slate* and *The New Yorker* and *Gothamist* and the *New York* and *Paris* and *London Reviews of Books*. The *Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* series entertained me perfectly on planes, busses, and ferries one Spring, between America and Italy and Greece: I remember gasping as the bus drove up to the Theater of Epidaurus, not because I suddenly spied the ancient amphitheater, but because the main character seemed to have been killed off (she wasn’t). When I taught high school, I gladly read all the *Twilight* books so that I’d know what my students were reading and loving, and we used them in class, comparing Darcy and Byron to Edward as we journeyed our way between Regency England and the rainy forests of the modern-day Pacific Northwest.

I would also say I am a good reader. What does that mean? I think I mean that I enjoy it, I practice it a lot, across many genres, I interact with many texts in ways that help me make new meanings, I see reading as therapeutic, as an escape, as work and as play. I read for pleasure all the time (I have to budget the fun reading to complete the work reading, sometimes); I read with ease and speed, relative to many of my peers (in my anecdotal and non-official studies); I
do well on reading-based standardized tests; I can write and respond (both personally and analytically) to the college-level (or graduate-level) texts I am asked to read.

Which of those skills are most important in making good readers (and writers)? Because while reading Iser and Rosenblat and responding to them is what makes me a professionally “good” reader, is that actually a commonly-needed skill? Should our aim as educators be in replicating that skill in all students, through “preparatory” classes, or “how to study” classes, or “remedial” classes, or “developmental” classes, or “Basic Writing,” or “Introduction to Expository Writing”? Should we start by adding reading classes to this list of writing classes?

In college I had to take “Logic and Rhetoric” (which has been since renamed “University Writing” in a strange and meaningless semantic shift) along with every other freshmen. This is the class where I met my friend James (from 1.8.2). There was no placement test, and you couldn’t test out of it. It was very firmly required. I hated the class. It was designed to be a writing course without any set texts to respond to, so we wrote papers about CD cover art and Mother Jones articles chosen by our graduate-student instructor Monica, a PhD student in History. It was boring and empty and seemingly-useless; looking back, I think it felt that way because none of the things we wrote about were things I cared about and seemed randomly chosen. That said, I applied my student-skills and got an A. James (who I thought was a fabulous writer at the time- that’s part of how we became friends) got a C. He’s now working on his PhD in Philosophy at Harvard. Obviously, according to someone, he’s now a more-than-fine reader and writer.

How about which of those reading skills (in my incomplete list above) are most important for most people? That is, people whose jobs aren’t entirely based on reading difficult texts and analyzing them, which, the more I think about is more and more people: doctors read patients like difficult texts, lawyers and judges read briefs and make important decisions from them, teachers and professors read, scientists read, anyone who operates any difficult or dangerous technology or machinery had to read some sort of instructions and also have to read the
machine, predicting problems and working to remove them before they happen. So the argument (that I’ve often encountered) about not all students needing to be good readers doesn’t seem to me, at least on this pass, to hold much weight.

I give most of my credit as a reader to my parents and to the environment in which I was raised. I’d guess that the same is true for many of my colleagues. However, because we can’t force every expectant couple to become voracious and passionate readers, I can’t see much way into a solution other than making changes in schools and the way we are teaching these things, but I hesitate to suggest such an institutional shift for many reasons, one of which is Sheridan Blau’s sometimes-sarcastic assertion (which I mostly believe) that everything gets ruined by being taught in schools. In a culture where there is often complaint that there isn’t much extended reading (a statement totally disproved by the popularity of E. L. James’ books, which I don’t love but also don’t revile- people are reading something, which is better than nothing), how do we help parents and schools to create and nurture happy and skillful readers?

This then makes me wonder- what makes a text good? Or in the context of education, maybe the question is what makes a text “literary.” It seems that we (and here I think I mean academe by “we”), perhaps, define a good reader as someone who can make good sense of (or good meaning out of) a literary text. This is complicated by “good” readers of literary criticism and theory, I suppose, because I’m not sure how those will fit into my working definition, but let me just try this out for a bit.

Iser seems to define a literary text as one that requires a lot of imaginative work from the reader, a text that leaves many gaps, many spaces. Through this gap-filling, reading is a kind of awakening of both text and reader: a “literary text… is something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination. If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field; the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us. A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the
reader’s imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative” (Iser 435). This kind of reading requires a lot of work from the reader, in terms of predicting and remembering, imagining and re-imagining, illusioning and disillusioning and re-illusioning, and creating.

As I read Iser, I began to take up an example in the margins of my thinking, trying to apply these ideas to reading events in my past. The first reading that came to mind was an example from my previous writing: The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo. One of my major complaints with those works was that they left no room for me to imagine\textsuperscript{16}. The author had taken such pains to describe every tiny detail of every moment, from technology to street corners, that I found myself chained and restricted in my ability to imagine into the work- there were no gaps. But then I thought again- Iser ends by identifying works lacking gaps as boring. I had many complaints about Dragon Tattoo, but boring was not one of them. I survived a very long and uncomfortable ferry ride from Bari to Patras thanks to those books. I kept reading, despite frustration with style, because I wanted to know what happened next. I was so caught up in predicting that my need to imagine became secondary, maybe? Where is the place for really exciting plot in Iser? Or perhaps, although there were no gaps to fill, the work had been so set in motion by my awakened responses of prediction and curiosity, that my “reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character” (Iser 435), and so the in-many-ways-non-literary work became literary?

It seems to me that Iser also accounts for taste, in a way, with this work. In the casual and long-distance book club that I have with my parents, we recently all read Richard Ford’s Canada. My mom hated it. This is surprising- she rarely hates anything other than nuts in chocolate, much less a book. She complained that it went on too long, that the event described in the first sentence took much too long to actually happen, and then even once it did, everything else took too long as well. When I started reading it, one of the things I most fell in

\textsuperscript{16}This quality was very effectively \textit{parodied} by Nora Ephron in \textit{The New Yorker}. 

41
love with was that I saw a lot of my father in the narrator (if you have read Canada, my father is not the child of bank robbers. It was more subtle than that). For that reason, as the novel went on, I felt so connected to the character, so curious to see what happened, to predict, to imagine, to re-imagine, that the slowness of the plot didn’t bother me. My father, too, liked the book. I think he also saw a lot of himself in the main character, and he, like me, liked the solitude of the life of this boy. So perhaps Canada is a truly literary text, because “completely different readers can be differently affected by the ‘reality’ of a particular text… [this] is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative ability is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, but it is the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination” (Iser 439).

At the same time, I’m feeling another question begin to grow, and Rosenblatt wants in to this discussion- can a work that might have been non-literary in the reading transaction become more literary if I’m writing about it in a literary way? That is, if my reading-transaction was efferent (I just wanted to know what happened next), can my writing-transaction be more aesthetic, in that I’m now exploring so much more of the emotional and evocative elements? But then again, I think I did read aesthetically the first time, because my reason for wanting to know what happened next was that my heart was beating with excitement and nervousness, and I really did care what happened to Lisbeth Salander. So I guess it was an aesthetic reading to begin with. Does that make this a literary text?

Let me try another example that just came to me. My sister is a doctor. She reads charts all day long. Charts that are usually efferent- she needs to take away information. A chart is a text that “[s]omeone else can read… efferently for [her], and acceptably paraphrase it. No one else can read aesthetically, that is, experience the evocation of, a literary work of art for us“
My sister needs to know what the history is, what the medications are, what has been done. If she feels a lot when she reads the chart, if it is too evocative (either in the writing or in her reading and interpretation of it), that gets in the way. If she tries to imagine or predict or fill in the gaps too much, that could be dangerous.

But sometimes she reads a chart in a way that produces an incredibly evocative emotional response. Let’s say a patient comes in, not doing well at all. She decides on a course of treatment, begins that course, and then her shift ends. She signs the patient off to the next doctor, and the authoring of the chart-text becomes the work of another, but she thinks about the patient for the next day or two, predicting or imagining into the gaps that her shift ending created in that text (that she was a shared-author of). So when she comes into work next, she finds that chart, and reads it, anticipating, predicting, and then experiencing relief or sadness. But then, I think, perhaps that’s still not aesthetic, because she could ask a colleague for a summary or paraphrase of the information and she’d have the same response. So maybe it is her response to the content that is aesthetic, not the text of the chart itself. Or her stance? “As the transaction with the printed text stirs up elements of the linguistic/experiential reservoir, the reader adopts a selective attitude, bringing certain aspects into the center of attention and pushing others into the fringes. A stance reflects the reader’s purpose. The reading-event must fall somewhere in a continuum, determined by whether the reader adopts what I term ‘the predominantly aesthetic’ stance or ‘the predominantly efferent’ stance” (Rosenblatt 7). Maybe this is just the importance of context, the importance of the world around: “Since each reading is an event in particular circumstances, the same text may be read either efferently or aesthetically” (Rosenblatt 8).

Then I am tempted to try out another definition of what makes a text literary- perhaps it is just a matter of the amount of thinking required of the reader: “[Georges Poulet] says that books only take on their full existence in the reader. It is true that they consist of ideas thought out by someone else, but in reading the reader becomes the subject that does the thinking. Thus there
disappears the subject-object division that otherwise is a prerequisite for all knowledge and all observation, and the removal of this division puts reading in an apparently unique position as regards the possible absorption of new experiences” (Iser 453). This makes me think that real thinking-reading is almost as good as experiential learning, or maybe is almost-experiential because of the work and action required in the transaction? More thinking and reading and writing is certainly required here.
2: The Story of Writing to Think and to Learn

2.1 Search Description

After four years of teaching graduate students in the Program in English Education at Teachers College, and using the commentary in those classes, I began to plan my undergraduate Philosophy class around the same assignment and with the same principles. At the same time, I was taking a class on Renaissance Literature from Professor Kathy Eden. About a month into the class, we began reading Montaigne, and as we read, it seemed to me that Montaigne’s philosophy of writing would help me epistemologically ground the idea and practice of the commentary: this idea of writing to figure out what you think, writing about yourself and your experiences, writing to record rather than writing to abstractly prescribe, turns out to be not very new at all. So I looked back to Petrarch and Montaigne, and eventually much further back to Quintilian and Cicero, and I began to investigate the intellectual roots of this kind of auto-ethnography\(^\text{17}\), by which I mean using writing to explore and record a personal reading or thinking experience, which is then shared within an intellectual community for refinement, questioning, further investigation, and metacognition\(^\text{18}\).

2.2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

I see my work as situated in a liminal space between humanities research and social science research. The theoretical frames through which I am examining the data for this project are historical and literary, but this work is also informed by studies of apprenticeship systems and communities of practice. This section will function as a kind of summary of the ideas I see as relevant to the research question of what happens when an inquiry-based apprenticeship

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\(^\text{18}\) 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 will cover the more recent history of what we know about researching one’s own classroom, in order to contextualize how this study fits into, enhances, responds to, and advances current research.
approach to teaching academic reading and writing is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college.

In seeking to answer whether this assignment can help students become active participants in an academic community that encapsulates the ultimate goal of undergraduate education in the humanities, I have begun this Review of the Literature with some collected voices in the tradition of writing to learn and writing to think. In the interest of looking at a long intellectual tradition relevant to an understanding of the history of this question as it guides my dissertation, I will move from the Greek and Roman origins of philosophical and rhetorical learning to Renaissance ideas of writing to learn.

Next, in order to examine today’s educational challenges, I will step into a brief history of the modern debates on composition in English Education. The debates that have troubled American writing instruction have a clear and profound parallel in the classical tradition, where, significantly, the philosophers and rhetoricians who survive as the canonical figures of the classic tradition are those who unanimously support the “growth” school represented by Moffett and others like Peter Elbow. I will end with a frame of situated learning, apprenticeship systems, and communities of practice as a way of looking at the phenomenon of students working together in these ways.

2.3 Review of Literature: The Story of Writing to Think and to Learn

2.3.1 Learning to Think Through the Rhetorical Arts: The Greeks, The Romans

In Athens and Rome in the 5th century BCE, one of the explicit goals of education was to prepare men for lives of reason and virtue that would benefit the individual as well as shaping him to be a productive and contributing citizen for the benefit of the community. Plato suggests that if we “ask in general what great benefit the state derives from the training by which it educates its citizens… the reply will be perfectly straightforward. The good education they have received will make them good men…” (Plato Laws 641b7–10). Educational methods at that
time, embodied in Plato’s Academy (founded in 428) and in Aristotle’s later Lyceum (334),
emphasized four elements of training important for citizenship: natural ability, direct instruction
by the teacher, modeling by the teacher, and extensive practice through conversation and
participation.  

For these early educational theorists, the most effective way for men to learn to be good
citizens was not in the hearing of Sophistic lectures, which Plato criticized as overly mimetic in
his Gorgias, but rather through exposure to and interaction with other virtuous citizens, guided
participation in public life, and through dialogue (dia, or two, and logos, words or reason). This
art of reasoning or disputation by elenchus, the method of critical investigation and inquiry
through a logical series of questions and answers, was supposedly invented, according to
Aristotle, by Zeno of Elea. Plato and Isocrates refined this concept, using the term διαλεκτική, or
dialectic, to refer to the art of definition or discrimination of ideas, and also more broadly to the
science which categorizes a number of ideas through connection to a single principle. Plato
specifically mentions his respect for διαλεκτική as an educational technique at the end of the
Phaedrus, emphasizing that it promotes philosophical thinking, and it came eventually to be
called the Socratic or Dialectical Method. As Aristotle put it, the strength of this method lies in
how it requires a thinker to "go through the problems on both sides of a subject [which then]
makes it easier to see what is true and what is false" (Aristotle Topics 101a24-26).

Isocrates, born in 436 BCE, was an early pedagogical theorist, philosopher, and
rhetorician educated by Gorgias, Tisias, and Socrates, who opened his own school in Chios in
404 and then in Athens in 392. He conceived of rhetorical education as built upon a triad of

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19 Of course many of these early rhetoric-based educational practices were taking place in a culture that was still quite suspicious of
writing. The oldest manuscript of the eighth-century BCE Homeric Iliad is from the third century: the famous poem that so many
students today read was transmitted orally for the first five hundred years of its existence (Homer in Print, Chicago). Socrates, who
supposedly never wrote down any of his ideas for publication, distrusted writing because its permanence might cause thinking to be
less flexible: we have his ideas and his words only through his students Plato and Xenophon.

20 This becomes, in the modern ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire, the dialectic, which is characterized by the interactive
nature of dialogue, in which multiple voices, discourses, etc., coexist, responding to and engaging with each other. “The correct
method for a revolutionary leadership…is, therefore, not ‘libertarian propaganda.’ Nor can the leadership merely ‘implant’ in the
oppressed a belief in freedom…The correct method lies in dialogue” (1970, 67). “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and
the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers” (80). “Finally,”
comments Freire, “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking…thinking which perceives reality as
process, as transformation, rather than as a static activity” (92).
ability, practice, and training, which required teachers to personalize instruction (teaching only five or six students at once), and combined theories, models, practice, teacher instruction, and demonstrations in the shaping of students as philosophical thinkers. He publicized his new profession of *philosophia* with *Against the Sophists*, writing to emphasize his approach in contrast to the educational missteps and mistakes of the popular and formulaic Sophistic tradition. He strongly criticizes the Sophistic teachers of disputation\(^{21}\) (eristic learning, or learning characterized by argument) for their attempts to win, and to deceive with lies rather than to seek the truth: he accuses them of failing to teach the art of inquiry through dialogue and rather simply stressing mechanical commonplaces used to win arguments.

Isocrates emphasizes that skill in philosophical thinking and rhetorical speaking requires a combination of natural ability, practical experience, and formal training. Part of being human is that we have imperfect knowledge, so we must employ what knowledge and skill that we have to work out the best course in any situation. A man must approach knowledge-building with the love of wisdom and the love of honour (*Isocrates Antidosis* 47-48); the power of dialogue is the primary tool in the struggle of understanding, as we use questions and answers to work out conflicts and confusions in everyday affairs and those of state. This kind of dialogue teaches, persuades, and leads speakers and listeners toward knowledge, and not just aloud but also in thought and in writing, in what will under Aquinas come to be called the Scholastic method.

About 200 years after the death of Socrates in 399 BCE, this Hellenic system of philosophical education through dialogue, founded in Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum, was beginning to take root in Rome, especially among the elite. Men of Athens were seen as having “been educated as have been no other people in wisdom and in speech . . . Athens is looked upon as having become a school for the education of all able orators and teachers of

\(^{21}\) Isocrates specifically criticizes Hermagoras, for promoting formulaic thinking, with no concern for style or context: “Hermagoras [unlike Aristotle who based his theory of rhetoric on a careful induction of what had been found useful in the practical work of oratory] deduces his theory from an abstract definition of the subject matter; calculates with almost mathematical accuracy the exact place for each portion of the speech; can tell you where to put in a digression, and where to put in an emotional appeal; and has little or nothing to say about the various types of oratorical style... he was prepared to write a speech on a murder-case, developed according to the best rules of his school, but without a single allusion to the crime or the victim” (Gwynn, 1926, p. 98, 99).
oratory." (Isocrates Antidosis 253-257), and Rome, in its desire to become the new Athens, took up this mantle. The Greek method of dialogue (διαλέκτική) became the Latinized concept of inquiry, a project of building knowledge through seeking and asking, from the Latin prefix in- and quaerĕre, to look.

There was not, however, unilateral acceptance of these Hellenic educational practices. Around 200 BCE, Gn. Domitius Aenobarbus and L. Licinius Crassus wrote that “A report has been made to us that certain men have begun a new kind of teaching, and that young men are going regularly to their school; that they have taken the name of teachers of Latin Rhetoric (Latini rhetores); and that our young men are wasting their whole days with them. Our ancestors ordained what lessons their children were to learn, and what schools they were to frequent. These new schools are contrary to our customs and ancestral traditions (mos maiorum), and we consider them undesirable and improper. Wherefore we have decided to publish, both to those who keep these schools and to those who are accustomed to go there, our judgment that we consider them undesirable” (Gwynn 61). The new system was seen by some Romans as not passing on particular transferable skills or concrete abilities (making them not nearly “college and Career-ready” enough, in our modern parlance), and they seemed rather to be fostering a kind of anarchic questioning, the same socially disruptive method of inquiry for which Socrates was put to death. These methods survived the resistance, however, and in 155 BCE, Carneades founded a new Academy in Rome (Gwynn 39).

By the time Cicero’s political career was beginning to flourish, in about 75 BCE, this kind of civic education was called humanitas, and was seen as necessary for the intellectual and moral shaping of a proper citizen through an apprenticeship to public life: in Greek, the paideia, and in Latin, the tirocinium fori. The historian Tacitus, almost 200 years after Cicero, continued to promote the larger project of childhood education as creating citizens driven by virtú (a combination of manliness, courage, intellect, rhetorical skill, and martial abilities): “whilst the child’s character was still fresh and open and unspoiled by wrong, he should be taught to
embrace the practice of virtue with all his heart... whether destined to be a soldier, jurist, or orator” (Gwynn 14).

Founded in the dialogic method of Socrates, this civic education was an important part of success of these great societies. In a much broader and longer task than education specific to schooling years, young men were shaped from youth to conduct lives of reason and virtue through structured exposure to the skills required of a zoon politikon, or a civis Romanus. Rather than drills and memorization, students were mentored in intimate intellectual relationships with other men (and sometimes emotional and physical relationships as well, as in Plato’s Symposium). Apprenticed to more capable citizens and to the ideas of the great masters, students continue this shaping of the sight until the “very end of life. Mother and nurse and father and tutor are quarrelling about the improvement of the child as soon as ever he is able to understand them... when the boy has learned his letters and is beginning to understand what is written, as before he understood only what was spoken, they put into his hands the works of great poets which he reads at school... just as in learning to write, the writing-master first draws lines with a style for the use of the young beginner, and gives him the tablet and makes him follow the lines, so the city draws the laws, which were the invention of good lawgivers who were of old time; these are given to the young man in order to guide him in his conduct” (Gwynn 26).

Long before students could be apprenticed to texts, in the model of most humanities education for the past thousand years, students were apprenticed to ideas and apprenticed to other students and teachers through dialogue. Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Isocrates, and Cicero, like Sapir and Whorf, believed that we think in and through language. Although many of the claims of Sapir and Whorf have been troubled by modern cognitive psychologists and linguists, it is clear that whether spoken or written, language has a powerful ability to shape our thinking. Rhetoric has since, over the intervening centuries, come to mean writing as much as speaking,
a transition that began with the literate practices of the Romans, grew in the Renaissance, and ultimately flourished with the advent of the printing press.

2.3.2 Renaissance Rediscovery: Writing to Learn and Writing to Think

In 410 CE, with the sack of Rome by the Visigoths, the fall of the great Empire began. Christianity spread throughout Europe, through the growth of the monasteries and the Crusades, and much of the wealth of classical scholarship became isolated in the Middle East, translated from Greek to Arabic and contributing there to the Islamic Golden Age of science and culture. With the sack of Baghdad in 1258, and the translation of many classical texts from Arabic to Latin, innovation in knowledge began to shift back towards the West once again.

In 1336, having climbed Mont Ventoux with his two brothers, and aided by Augustine’s *Confessions*, Francesco Petrarca had a realization: “I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again... we look about us for what is to be found only within... How many times, think you, did I turn back that day, to glance at the summit of the mountain which seemed scarcely a cubit high compared with the range of human contemplation” (Petrarch 318). Driven by this epiphany about the worth of a rich inner life, he embarked on a humanistic project of rediscovering and redistributing the scholarship of ancient Greece and Rome, particularly Cicero’s letters about the importance of an education in the humanities, and became the *fons et origo* of the Renaissance rebirth of classical culture after the Middle Ages.

By 1510, despite one hundred years of decimating plagues across Europe, this humanistic trend managed to reach London, and evidence of its flourishing came when St. Paul’s School was founded to teach classical rhetoric and humanism to the children of the Renaissance. With the encouragement of Erasmus, the school was organized to educate young men into a kind of Ciceronian eloquence through dialogue. St. Paul’s early headmaster Richard Mulcaster was one
of the leading intellectuals of his time and wrote a humanist classic on education, and graduates of the school include John Milton and Samuel Pepys.

Around the same time, in the Perigord region of France, a young man named Michel Eyquem de Montaigne was born at Chateau d'Yquem. His father Pierre wanted to create a perfect Renaissance citizen out of his son, a man versed in the language of Virgil and Cicero, who could embody the ideal of the new humanistic education of the Renaissance, while carrying forward the newly-earned nobility of their family. Pierre hired a German, Dr. Horst, to come and tutor Michel, and the rule of the family became that no one spoke to little Micheau in French or even the local Périgord dialect, but only in Latin. Even the servants learned basic phrases, and he learned from immersion in the language, learned from living surrounded by it; “without artificial means, without a book, without grammar or precept, without the whip, and without tears,” (Montaigne 156-7) he learned Latin so fully that later in life, when surprised or in pain, he often cried out in his *mater lingua* before French.

In 1539, Montaigne was sent off to be formally educated at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux. It was a typical urban school of the time, a long journey on horse and boat from the chateau, set away from the commercial district of Bordeaux and surrounded by trees and high walls. The school curriculum was centered around the mechanical memorization and abstract grammatical study of Latin, dictated analyses of texts, and competitions in oratory and rhetoric (135-150). It was a harsh dose of educational reality for a child whose father had hired a lutist to gently wake his son with music each morning, so that learning could be approached with “gentleness and freedom, without rigor and constraint” (157). In the end, having spent nearly ten years at school, Montaigne left knowing less Latin than he did when he came in (158), and perhaps having learned that it is more intellectually profitable to study things you are interested in: “I stand up well under hard work; but I do so only if I go to it of my own will, and as much as my desire leads me to it” (591).
When Montaigne graduated the College de Guyenne, in 1548, he went on to study law, perhaps in Paris or in Toulouse. In 1554, he began to work at the Cour des Aides in Périguex and then in Bordeaux in 1557. There he met and befriended Etienne de La Boétie, and worked in the Chambre des Enquêtes summarizing civil cases, writing within strict genre conventions and suffering the posturing of other junior councillors, constantly interpreting “the interpretations [rather] than to interpret the things… we do nothing but write glosses about each other” (996). He found the law to be particularly unsatisfying because it relied on humans who denied their own fallibility, refused to acknowledge their imperfections, and made decisions based on inclinations rather than evidence (998).

When Michel de Montaigne was thirty-eight, in 1571, he was at a crossroads. He had endured nearly ten years of great deal of personal loss: his great friend La Boétie died of the plague in 1563, his father died in 1568, and his brother died in 1569. In late 1569 or early 1570, Montaigne nearly died in a riding accident caused, perhaps, by a careless servant on a large horse, and he and his wife Françoise de La Chassaigne lost their firstborn child. He was deep in professional frustration and was witnessing the disintegration of France’s political structure into terrible civil war. So he retired from his political career in the parliament of Bordeaux, and embarked on a project of writing.

On the vast and fertile estate of the Eyquem family, he remodeled a tower to be his library and writing retreat: set off from the main house and surrounded by his books, he had the words of the ancients painted on the roof beams, so that when he paused to think or to entertain his cat with his quill, he could gaze up and be reminded of the ways he had chosen to live and to think, he could look to the ancients for how to live and even how to die, quotations from Euripides, “How can you think yourself a great man, when the first accident that comes along can wipe you out completely?” and Sophocles, “There is no more beautiful life than that of a carefree man; Lack of care is a truly painless evil.” In the main chamber, a beam bears the words of Pliny the Elder “Solum certum nihil esse certi,” which is “Only one thing is certain, that
nothing is certain.” Perhaps he was not yet exactly sure what kind of work he would produce, what he would write about, or how, but he knew that he had something to say about the problems he found plaguing his body and mind and heart.

Surrounded by Plutarch, Seneca, Pliny, and Socrates, he reminded himself to attend to the questions, to lean into the confusions, even though it is “a thorny undertaking, and more so than it seems, to follow a movement so wandering as that of our mind, to penetrate the opaque depths of its innermost folds, to pick out and immobilize the innumerable flutterings that agitate it” (331). He imagined the project as a dialogue, a letter to a friend that would never be sent, as his closest companion and most familiar epistolary correspondent Étienne de La Boétie died in 1563; because he no longer had “someone to talk to,” he wrote as if recreating a dialogue between friends within himself (225). Montaigne identifies his purpose as one of personal preservation, for the “private convenience of [his] relatives and friends, so that when they have lost [him] (as soon they must), they may recover here some features of [his] habits and temperament, and by this means keep the knowledge they have had of [him] more complete and alive” (2). His intention was to write about himself and his experiences, clearly and without adornment, filled with his defects and preserving the development of his thinking inside the writing. He closes his “To The Reader” with the clarification that, rather than a treatise on politics or theology or history, “I am myself the matter of my book” (2). He wrote in order to create a self-portrait, both “domestic and private” (2) of himself and his culture.

In “Of Repentance,” he wrote that this model of uncertainty shaped not only the content of his writing, but also the form: “If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I
would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial” (740). They are ambulatory, flexible, and intimate, but also logical and purposeful. Although he could read and write in many languages, and his classical bona fides were undeniable, Montaigne chose to write in French, like Dante’s fortunate decision to write in the Florentine dialect. Montaigne thought that French would be less immortal of a language than Latin, and so he could write in this flexible and uncertain and personal way in French and not be worried that it would be read throughout the ages and mocked: the unchanging perfection of Latin made it harder to write in this personal way (913). He was also casual about mechanics, not worrying whether his punctuation was flawless: Étienne Pasquier would often take Montaigne off and point out all the grammatical and stylistic errors and Montaigne would ignore the suggestions (283).

About thirty years before and just over a thousand kilometers to the east, outside of Florence, Niccolò Machiavelli took a drastically different approach to writing and thinking. He saw intellectual work like appointments at court, as he describes his evening routine of preparing to think: “I strip off my muddy, sweaty, workaday clothes, and put on the robes of court and palace, and in this graver dress I enter the courts of the ancients and am welcomed by them” (Machiavelli, Letter to Vettori). In stark contrast to this formality, Montaigne converses with the ancients in a casual tone, as if they too are correspondents, familiars, friends: “I mortally hate to seem a flatterer, and so I naturally drop into a dry, plain, blunt way of speaking... I honor most those to whom I show least honor” (225).

Out of the more recent style of the courtiers, Montaigne created a sense of diligens neglegentia, a studied and casual elegance, a planned spontaneity or sprezzatura. Also sometimes known as apian imitation, named for the bees’ method of selecting and combining various pollens into a delicious honey, Montaigne inherited and adopted Petrarch’s method of spoliatio aegyptorum, a method of literary selection and elision identified by Augustine in the Israelites’ taking of only carefully selected desired resources from their former Egyptian masters in Exodus (Dagenais 35). This tradition continued over the next many centuries as Pagan
literature was looted for the resources it could give to Christian society (and certainly the dubious tradition of *spoliatio aegyptorum* continues in the modern Western adoption of, for example, Eastern medical and spiritual practices).

Through this stolen inheritance of Pagan riches, Montaigne was able to select which pieces of the classical education he saw as most useful to his work in writing for understanding. He was able to choose, for himself, what was most proper and decorous. Montaigne writes so that both he and we can become intimate with his inner life and with his outer culture; he sees his readings of self and culture as possible through his writing about self and culture, a recursive process of reception of ideas and production of questions, of hermeneutics and dialogue.

Montaigne embodied the Pyrrhonian Skeptic’s idea of *Ephko*, of suspending judgment. He approached even nascent conclusions with the idea of “*je soutiens,*” or “I hold back” (454). He realized that “We, and our judgment, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion” (553). Following Socrates’ example of inquiry, Montaigne acknowledged that “Even if all that has come down to us by report from the past should be true and known by someone, it would be less than nothing compared with what is unknown” (841).

Even his most direct inheritors, such as the essayist Bacon, aren’t able to sit comfortably in the fruitful metacognitive confusion of Montaigne’s style of writing. Bacon issues orders, divides and subdivides his pieces, doesn’t invite response, and writes more academically; all of which, I will venture, make him a much more boring read. Like Stern’s *Tristram Shandy* and Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, Montaigne’s essays immerse us in his river of thought as he floats where the current takes him, a method which, wonderfully, manages to lead him and us to very deep thinking. William Hazlitt, himself an essayist in the Montaigneian tradition, who also spoke of Coleridge’s writing as “the flower of conversation,” wrote of Montaigne that “In taking up his pen he did not set up for a philosopher, wit, orator, or moralist, but he became all these by
merely daring to tell us whatever passed through his mind, in its naked simplicity and force” (Hazlitt xxxvii). Virginia Woolf described this technique of “talking of oneself, following one’s own vagaries, giving the whole map, weight, colour, and circumference of the soul in its confusion, its variety, its imperfection [as belonging] to one man only: to Montaigne… he refused to teach; he refused to preach; he kept on saying that he was just like other people. All his effort was to write himself down, to communicate, to tell the truth, and that is a ‘rugged road, more than it seems’” (Woolf 1).

Above all, Montaigne was a man willing to admit his failures of understanding, from the profound to the inane, and that is what allows readers to enter into his text again and again, with new questions and ideas each time: “I cannot reckon, either with counters or with a pen; most of our coins I do not know; nor do I know the difference between one grain and another, either in the ground or in the barn, unless it is too obvious, and I can scarcely distinguish between the cabbages and lettuces in my garden. I do not even understand the names of the chief household implements or the roughest principles of agriculture, which children know. I know still less of the mechanical arts, of trade and merchandise, of the diversity and nature of fruits, wines, and foods, and of how to train a bird, or doctor a horse or a dog. And since I must make my shame complete, not a month ago I was caught ignorant that leaven was used to make bread” (601).

It was nine years from the beginning of his project before he published the first volume of his essays; the second edition came out two years later, punctuated by his election as the mayor of Bordeaux. In addition to his ideas about the instability of knowledge and, in particular, the instability of philosophical knowledge (501), Montaigne had a very postmodern sense of the instability of a text: he kept revising,
writing, and editing long after the first edition had been released: the title page of the 1588
edition read: “enlarged by a third book and by six hundred additions to the first two”; it was
almost twice the size of 1580 version\(^{23}\). The title page of the Bordeaux copy, which was
Montaigne’s own, and the major source for posthumous revisions, read “\textit{viresque acquirit
eundo}” from Virgil, meaning “it gathers force as it proceeds”. Other revisions and editions
appeared during his lifetime, but the complete version, including many substantial additions
suggested by his marginalia on earlier versions, was not released by his literary executor,
adopted daughter, and replacement correspondent for La Boétie, Marie le Jars de Gournay until
1595, three years after Montaigne’s death (Frame 1965, 146, 283, 289, 308-9).

Gournay, Montaigne’s self-chosen executor of his literary estate, had been, as almost
any well-educated woman was at the time, educated through her own desire, “without formal
schooling, because she instructed herself in Latin by rote, aided by setting the translations side
by side with the originals, and who therefore would not dare to speak the language for fear of
making a false step - a learned woman who cannot equivocally guarantee the meter of a Latin
verse; a learned woman without any Greek, without Hebrew” (Gournay 126). She wrote to him,
having read and admired and connected with his Essays, and asked that he pay her and her
family a visit. In 1588 he came to stay with her family and the two of them set about revising a
new edition. After his death, she worked closely with the Paris publishers of the 1595 edition,
even making last minute corrections and annotations on sheets for publication\(^{24}\).

Even now, as students of all ages keep reading him, we create a new version of the
Essays with each reading, each commentary, each reference, an hermeneutic continuity that
would have delighted Montaigne, who “read in Livy a hundred things that another man has not

\(^{23}\) III.9 925, III.8 872, I.40 224, I.26, 140, III.9 876, all in Frame translation of Montaigne.

\(^{24}\) Over the years since, especially with the discovery of the Bordeaux copy in the late eighteenth century, her skill and honesty as an editor has come into question by other scholars, such as Pierre Villey and Arthur-Antoine Armaingaud (Keffer), but what is perhaps most interesting about the arguments is that Montaigne himself would likely dispute the idea that there could exist a definitive copy of his work, a final edition of his essays.
read in him. Plutarch has read in him a hundred besides the ones I could read, and perhaps besides what the author had put in” (140).

2.3.3 Writing, Composition, or Literature: Two Schools of Thought on “English”

The teaching relationship between composition, writing, and literature, is a complex one: in the last forty years at the university level, due primarily to intense specialization, literature and composition have become quite distinct and distant, and of course, subdivided into many smaller and highly distinct categories (teaching of, and writing of, poetry, novels, essays, memoirs, journalism, etc., in addition to the even more recent development of introductory writing courses and basic/remedial/developmental writing courses). On the secondary level, the teaching of literature and the teaching of writing are often done together, by one person, in one class, simply called English.

Due to my own constraints here (temporal and spatial in nature), I will be focusing on the history of instruction in writing, which is, not unlike the teaching of literature, full of controversies, new solutions, new standards, and progressive ideas. Let me also, at this moment, make a distinction between what I mean by “writing” and what I mean by “composition,” using Harris’ very clear definition: “The teaching subject is writing. It only becomes composition when embroiled in a set of arguments over the sort of intellectual work matters in English departments – lit vs. comp, rhet vs. comp, theory vs. comp, and so on” (Harris xii).

The history of instruction in English (by which I mean, for the moment, both literature and composition) in this country is a history of conflicts and controversies. Additionally, writing the history of a teaching subject is tricky; we have tests, articles, textbooks, and statistics as artifacts, and testimonials of what people think they did or learned or taught, but those sometimes tell us little about actual classroom practice (Gere 93). In 1878, Yale University instituted the Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory, which was changed to Rhetoric and the English Language in 1939, and then to Rhetoric and English Literature in 1963. By 1900,
English departments at universities as we picture them now were beginning to come into existence, and composition came to have a place mostly in the writing of literary criticism (Scholes).

In the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, the MLA (founded in 1883), NCTE (founded in 1911), *English Journal* (first published in 1912), and CCCC (founded in 1950), were all working to professionalize their spheres of the field of English education (Stock and Gere), and to support scholarship on pedagogy. In 1910, Edwin Mortimer Hopkins, Professor of English at the University of Kansas, published a report titled “Can Good Composition Teaching Be Done Under Present Conditions?”, which outlined many of his concerns about the working conditions of composition teachers, especially in teaching a newly diverse population, and amidst concerns about the curriculum-constricting Uniform Reading Lists designed to prepare students for college-entrance examinations (Stock 2). He lamented, “Every year teachers resign, break down... in a struggle to do all the work expected of them. Every year thousands of pupils drift through the schools... to emerge in a more or less damaged linguistic condition, incapable of meeting satisfactorily the simplest practical demand upon their powers of expression. Much money is spent, valuable teachers are worked out at an inhumanely rapid rate, and results are inadequate or wholly lacking. From any point of view – that of taxpayer, teacher, or pupil – such a situation is intolerable” (Hopkins 1 in Stock 6, and Gere 96).

In 1966, representatives of NCTE and MLA came together with NATE (the British National Association of Teachers of English), for two summer weeks at the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English at Dartmouth. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, theorists and practitioners gathered to attempt to define what we mean when we talk about teaching English, in order to define English as a school subject and outline the best teaching methods. At the conference, two schools of thought on the issue of English as a teaching subject met: one saw English focused on information about language and literature and the other saw English as about the use of language for growth in thinking and language
use. Joseph Harris, in *A Teaching Subject*, describes the divide as between “the [American concern with] analysis of a fixed set of great books and... a [more British] concern with the uses that students make of language” (Harris xv). To over-simplify the effects of Dartmouth, the Americans, who viewed themselves as scholars, saw English as something you learn about, whereas the British, careful to identify themselves as teachers, saw English more as something you practice and do in what came to be called a *growth model*.

In a result that would have pleased Socrates and the other originators of διάλεκτική, because there was so little agreement, the conflicts about how to teach English, and even how to think about what English is, were revealed and clarified. Herbert Muller, an American, was commissioned to write one of two reports, titled *The Uses of English*, which was quickly forgotten because it was clear from his report that he understood very little about what happened at Dartmouth. John Dixon, of Bretton Hall College of Education in Yorkshire, was commissioned to write *Growth Through English* for an audience of “the professional community,” but those who most needed to read it, namely the Americans, didn’t (Sublette 348).

A significant exception to the British-American divide was the practitioner-teacher James Moffett, one of only three K-12 teachers among the twenty-four American delegates, who saw English very much as a subject for practice in the British growth model (Blau 85). In 1968, James Moffett published *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, which he had been working on for many years before the conference (Blau 87), and which put into both theoretical and practical terms many of the growth ideas discussed at Dartmouth. In 1974, Arthur Applebee’s *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* not only reminded the discipline of the use and worth of the growth model of Dartmouth, but also acknowledged that little had changed in American schools as a result of the work done at the Seminar. In his report, he noted that teachers in America still relied on drills, writing for the teacher, and writing for tests, in a subject-centered manner.

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25 The same year as the conference on English Education and two years before the founding of English Education Journal in 1970.
What makes Dartmouth, and the debate that came out of it, still so relevant today, is that shockingly little has changed, even since Applebee in 1974, much less since the Seminar itself in 1966. At the same time and in philosophical contrast to the ideas discussed at Dartmouth, Project English, begun in 1961 America in the post-Sputnik climate, was pushing teachers to create curriculum for “academic excellence” (Gere 110), with a “model of teaching centered on the transmission of skills (composition) and knowledge (literature) [rather than]... a growth model focusing on the experiences of students and how these are shaped by their uses of language” (Harris 1).

2.3.4 Writing to Learn and to Think Since Dartmouth

In trying to figure out the role of writing in schools today, what I think we need to do is to look back to Dartmouth and ask ourselves, as James Britton did, what “The function of English is in the curriculum and in the lives of students… What do we want students and teachers to be doing?” (Harris 5). Dartmouth’s proponents of the growth model saw that “Growth in skill [should be] expected to occur in an incidental fashion, not through direct training in stylistic or grammatical exercises… but as a natural outcome of meaningful practice in writing and reading. The English lesson [is] to be less about literature than in it” (Harris 10). In a growth-based community of writers, “neither [the teacher] nor [the students] will learn to write. You will [all] use writing as a way of learning, a way of discovering and exploring, of finding what you may have to say and finding ways in which you may say it” (Murray 5-6).

This community of writers requires also that teachers write with their students in the classroom, and also write with other teachers, in organizations that transform teachers through the support of their colleagues like the National Writing Project (Whitney), and write, perhaps most importantly, for themselves: “Never forget that the best way to invite your students to write is simply to make writing possible. You write, your students write, you all share what you have
It sounds simple because it is. Never let your teaching get in the way of your students’ learning” (Murray 125).

This embracing of writing has not, however, been the common practice in the last 50 years. In 1975, at a departmental meeting of senior faculty in literature at University of Texas at Austin, an argument arose over who should be teaching college freshmen to write. The senior faculty adamantly wanted to avoid teaching the classes, and instead leave the job to adjuncts and graduate students, for “one absolutely central reason… it involved an overwhelming amount of dull, tedious, drudgery. Let me be more precise… marking the hundreds of pages of essays they write in a semester is a time-consuming, boring, uninspiring chore, primarily because so much of one’s effort is spent correcting merely mechanical errors” (Nash in Newkirk 62).

Historically, writing courses on the university level have been and are still taught by adjuncts and graduate students who are often underpaid, undertrained and untenured in underfunded departments (Gere). Quintilian, Cicero, Horace, Montaigne, John Dewey, James Moffett, and Donald Murray would all be disappointed by this deemphasizing of writing, as they all seem to agree that it “is not superficial to the intellectual life but central to it: writing is one of the most disciplined ways of making meaning and one of the most effective methods we can use to monitor our own thinking” (Murray 3).

Writing is also given short shrift in our culture of testing. The College Board began examining students in 1901, and the SAT as we know it was born in 1926 (Lawrence, Gere), and they have evolved, or failed to, in such a way that “We need look no further than the John Dewey would identify the failure of most standardized assessment today as originating in an emphasis on answers. Answers close the mind of a thinker, ending the process of curiosity. The teacher cannot create thinking or curiosity out of nothing, but rather must “keep alive the sacred spark of wonder and fan the flame that already glows… to protect the spirit of inquiry, to keep it from becoming blaze from overexcitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise upon trivial things” (1909, 207). Occasionally a very thoughtful and useful standardized test will emerge, produced often by teams of actual teachers, and designed to assess writing across many genres and grade levels by having students actually produce real writing, such as the CLAS and CAP tests in California in the 1990s. In addition to carefully and thoughtfully creating these tests with panels of experienced teachers, the California DoE worked with the California Writing Project, knowing that testing does and will affect teaching, to conduct in-services on the teaching of writing and to support teachers in improving the quality of their instruction in writing. Sadly, this kind of innovation is expensive and complicated, and therefore these tests, when they are born, are often short-lived and killed for political or economical reasons by minds suspicious of tests that ask students to give personal, but textually substantiated, responses. These tests leave room for multiple interpretations, and have multiple plausibly “correct” answers, and that can seem frighteningly liberal to generations of politicians, parents, and administrators who were raised to think that texts have one “right” answer (Blau, 2001). The cycle is hard to break.

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emphasis on specified (and, I would argue, reductive) types of writing called for in the Common
Core Standards, the increasing use of both high- and low-stakes standardized tests in the
secondary writing curriculum… Increasingly, the practice of education is being mandated by
legislators, publishing companies, and others who are neither scholars in the field nor teachers
of actual students” (Fleischer 163).

Teaching students to write with flexibility, fluency, and facility, to make well-developed
claims, in a logical order, for a variety of audiences and purposes, and in genres such as
narrative writing as well as informative/explanatory and argumentative writing is an important
goal (CCS ELA Writing 11-12) but it fails to take advantage of the deeper cognitive processes
fostered by writing. Over the last 50 years, however, powerful and important research has been
done around the cognitive processes happening in the minds of students when they write that
should, I think, convince us as a community that writing deserves to be taught well and
thoughtfully across levels and disciplines.

In 1971, Janet Emig published a seminal and groundbreaking study where she
attempted to identify and track thinking in the composing processes of teenagers. She begins by
dividing all writing into two modes: reflexive and extensive. Reflexive writing is “the mode that
focuses upon the writer’s thoughts and feelings concerning his experiences; the chief audience
is the writer himself… the style is tentative, personal, and exploratory” (Emig 4). She notes that
almost all of the reflexive writing done by twelfth-graders is self-sponsored. In contrast to
reflexive writing, extensive writing, which is almost always school-sponsored, is “the mode that
focuses upon the writer’s conveying a message or a communication to another… the style is
assured, impersonal and often reportorial” (Emig 4).

Because of many temporal and curricular restrictions, writing in schools is often only
used as a tool to assess students on their reading of literature, and is therefore extensive. Of
course, reading and writing are inextricably linked mental and intellectual processes (Flower and
Hayes, Emig, Rosenblatt), and writing is, in fact, a highly effective way for a reader to process
what she has read (Elbow, Moffett, Gere), and for a teacher to assess understanding. Schools lose out by focusing mostly on extensive writing, because, according to Emig, “reflexive writing]… is a longer process with more portions; students writing reflexively often engage in quite long prewriting activities; they reformulate more; starting and stopping… and the aesthetic contemplation of their own product of writing sometimes occurs” (Emig 4).

In her close observation of these few adolescent writers, Emig found that when students are writing in self-sponsored ways, and writing to investigate, to find out what they think, to reflect, they automatically spend more time on the parts of the writing process that we seem to have so much trouble engaging students in when they are writing for schools, what Dewey described, in his School and Society lectures, as “embryo communities” (174), “institution[s] in which the child is, for the time…to be a member of a community life in which he feels that he participates, and to which he contributes” (88).

Around the same time as Emig’s study, James Moffett published “Kinds and Orders of Discourse,” where he attempted to categorize the cognitive processes of writers. He separated the work of a writer into two spectra: the distance between the writer and her subject, “I-it,” and the distance between the writer and her audience, “I-you.” His work shows that as the distance on each spectrum grows, the work of writing becomes harder; as the writer is asked to bridge a greater gap between herself and her subject, or herself and her audience, she has to abstract more, be more empathic and less egotistic, and take more variables into consideration (Moffett). Most school-sponsored writing (extensive, for Emig) asks students to bridge both of these large distances simultaneously: an essay on King Lear for a teacher or for a test is asking a student to write about a subject that is distant from her, for an audience also distant.

While an ideal situation would perhaps be to have separate courses for writing and or literature so that most school writing would not have to serve the double purpose of also assessing the reading of literature (although there are arguments against the separation as well), this is not the reality in most American secondary education. Teachers usually have to use
writing to assess reading, limited as they are by time and resources (Moffett), and the idea of 
assessment itself usually asks students to focus on answers rather than problems and formative 
reflection.

Students, too, are limited, in the time they are able to devote to writing as a way of 
thinking, and this “desire for efficiency and coverage can cut short numerous possibilities for 
students to explore issues, articulate concerns, formulate and revise problems- all necessary for 
good writing to emerge- and can lead to conversation patterns that socialize students into a 
mode of interaction that will limit rather than enhance their participation in intellectual work” (Hull 
and Rose 296).

Seven years after Emig’s study and Moffett’s book, when some of the essays of Lev 
Vygotsky were posthumously published as *Mind in Society*27, researchers in education began to 
take more seriously the call that it might be “possible to trace... the development of thought... 
undergoing changes right before one’s eyes” (Vygotsky 61). Sondra Perl began looking into the 
possibilities of using Vygotsky’s call as a way to examine the “recursive process of writing 
[where] forward-moving action... exists by virtue of a backward-moving action” (Perl 364). She 
borrowed the term “felt-sense” from Eugene Gendlin, at the University of Chicago, to describe 
what she was trying to examine within the writing process: “the soft underbelly of thought... a 
kind of bodily awareness that... can be used as a tool... a bodily awareness that... 
encompasses everything you feel and know about a given subject at a given time” (Gendlin in 
Perl 365). Writers often pause, “go back and repeat key words... waiting, paying attention to 
what is still vague and unclear... looking to their felt experience, waiting for an image, a word, or 
a phrase to emerge that captures the sense they embody” (Perl 365).

This inner writing process, full of stops and starts, attempting to move the felt-sense from 
the body of the writer and onto the page for a reader is not at all linear, but rather “recursive.

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27 According to Sheridan Blau, Janet Emig and James Moffett were close friends later in life, but it is possible that even at this early point in both of their careers, they knew each other at Harvard and knew of each other’s work. It is also likely that Moffett knew of Vygotsky at this point, through Jerome Bruner, who was also at Harvard and wrote the preface to the first edition of *Mind In Society*. 
The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage. There is not one process, but many. The process varies with the personality and cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task” (Murray 4). Flower and Hayes call this complex process translating, taking a meaning “which may be embodied in keywords… and organized in a complex network of relationships, into a linear piece of written English” (Flower and Hayes 373).

One of the common ways we begin this process of translation with students is through freewriting. Peter Elbow describes this technique as allowing him to “write decent stuff [when] I let go of planning, control, and vigilance. I had to write down without stopping whatever came to me in my thinking about my general topic, and above all I had to stop worrying about whether what I was writing at the moment was any good. I had to invite chaos and bad writing. Then, after I had written a lot and figured out a lot of thinking, I could go back and find order and reassert control and try to make it good” (Elbow xviii). Research done by Peter Elbow, in particular, does suggest that speaking out freewriting, which he calls “speaking onto the page,” is an effective way to bypass the self-conscious monitors that stymie freedom of thinking in writing, although talking and writing are truly very different processes, developmentally, cognitively, and physically.

Of course, the purpose of all of this free writing and translating in and out of body and mind, the purpose of this recursive process filled with difficulty and struggle and triumph, is, in the end, to communicate ideas from a writer to a reader. Writing is, like speech, fundamentally interactive: an interchange between readers and writers across a text, even though that text may seem to be non-interactive and autonomous when it lies inert on a page (Nystrand and

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28 Adding to the cognitive load of this process, is that grammatical and spelling concerns can deplete the power of conscious attention and the short-term memory, interfering with the process: we spend so much time telling them to avoid bad writing that they cannot invite in the chaos and just write: “our students are terrified of failure. They have been taught, by teachers and parents, the press, and their own instinct, that everything must be done perfectly the first time. They are inhibited, constipated, frightened – in no condition to produce good writing” (Murray 9).
Spoken into the air or spoken onto the page, language “involves an exchange of meaning, and the text is the means of exchange” (Halliday in Nystrand and Himley 198).

Writers are able to construct these meanings much more powerfully when the conversation happens not just at the end of the process, in publication, but throughout. They will, of course, have deep understandings of audience and subject, but interaction in writing throughout the process of translation, throughout the attempts to move Perl’s “felt sense” of what a writer wants to say from the belly onto the page, “reinforces the notion that writing is not just what you end up with but the activities you undertake in creating it: the process as well as the product” (Spear in Gere 620). Writing aids us in our task of accessing past experiences and understandings to use them in new thinking, in clarifying and reviewing new experiences, and in the abstract process of re-categorizing knowledge: “As Langer and Applebee put it: ‘Written language not only makes ideas more widely and easily available, it changes the development and shape of the ideas themselves’” (Gere 621).

In 1996, Arthur Applebee published *Curriculum as Conversation: Transforming Traditions of Teaching and Learning*, in which he made the argument that all academic curricula must be constructed around the idea of knowledge as participatory activity in cultural practices rather than as a static body of information to be passed from teachers to students. In teaching English as a “universe of things to know,” we create for ourselves a major conflict between our desire to have “students… think for themselves and to get the right answer” (Applebee 45). This conflict of aims creates for students a sense of teachers who “know the answer they are looking for and then they will sort of hint up to that answer and they won’t be satisfied until they get that answer, even though they are trying to make us think for ourselves. It is odd like that… I don’t think it would really bother me if their objectives were to teach us like that, but they say their objective is to make us think for ourselves” (“Brett” in Applebee 45).

If we see knowledge as a fixed and transmittable body of facts, in Freire’s “banking model,” this method of asking questions of literature that might be asked of expository prose

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(Brody, DeMilo, and Purves in Applebee 45), is perfectly appropriate. But if we see “reading books with comprehension, making arguments, writing papers, and making comments in a class discussion [as] social activities [that] involve entering into a cultural or disciplinary conversation” (Graff in Applebee 47), we have to shift our definition of learning as something “constructed by the learner rather than inherited intact…. emphasizing thoughtfulness and reflection” (Applebee 46).

In a growth-based, constructivist curriculum, students synthesize material and build knowledge together in a “culturally significant conversation” (Applebee 47), which happens in depth in individual disciplines but also across disciplines. This allows students to “discover interrelationships across all of the elements in the curriculum… [that] provide not only new contexts for exploring or redefining the established topic, but new perspectives on other elements in the conversation, and on the topic itself” (Applebee 77). This curriculum as conversation is constructed in the spirit of Rosenblatt’s characterization of literature as a quiet conversation about good books, where “students learn to enter into a conversation with a multitude of related voices and to add their own voices to the conversation [integrating] current concerns into a context of history and culture—what others have said and written—that constitutes a true cultural literacy” (Hirsch in Applebee 50).

James Gee makes a similar argument for a disciplinary move away from positivist ideas of teaching, claiming that English teachers should be, instead, teaching a set of practices situated in discourse. We must see ourselves as “gatekeepers…[because] there is no access to power in the society without control over the discourse practices in thought, speech, and writing of essay-text literacy and its attendant world view. [We must] accept the paradox of literacy as a form of interethnic communication which often involves conflicts of values and identities, and accept [English teachers’] role as persons who socialize students into a world view that, given its power here and abroad, must be looked at critically, comparatively, and with a constant sense of the possibilities for change. Like it or not, English teachers stand at the very heart of
the most crucial educational, cultural, and political issues of our time” (Gee 1989 60). In a kind of philosophical answer to Gee’s call, Applebee’s conversational curriculum keeps writing as a central tool for involving students in the “socially constituted traditions of meaning-making” through education as “a process of mastering new traditions of discourse” (Applebee 9).

Writing to learn and to think has, in the last twenty or thirty years, come to be identified by a number of different names, but is still deeply concerned with the questions of why and when people write, how people learn to write, and what effects writing may have on learning and thinking. These same familiar strategies of using writing as a tool to support thinking and learning are often contained in the phrase “Writing Across the Curriculum,” particularly on the post-secondary level, which is used to describe programs of writing in classes outside of English departments, harnessing strategies of writing to learn and to think, including computer-supported collaborative learning, in such diverse disciplines as mathematics, science, and history (Klein 250).

Writing to learn is also often divided into subcategories based on research into the processes of thinking as currently understood in cognitive psychology. This began in the early 1980s (MacArthur 24), particularly with Flower and Hayes’ “Cognitive Process Theory of Writing.” Work in the last thirty years has created further theoretical subdivisions to include information-processing models, knowledge-constituting models, and distributed cognition models (Klein 243), all of which attempt to understand processes of thinking and writing through a lens of cognitive science.

Writing to learn and to think is also examined, often by educational psychologists, in the field of Sociocultural Studies, in terms of its use as a “social technology designed to communicate among people… learned and produced in social circumstances [which] establishes social relationships, changes the writer’s social presence, creates shared meanings, and accomplishes social action” (Bazerman 2016, 11). Particularly related to the history of writing to learn and to think that I have given here, sociocultural examinations of writing often
take into account questions of how writers learn “to write within certain domains [which] is closely integrated with learning the knowledge, forms of reasoning, criteria of evaluation, and forms of action in those domains” (Bazerman 2016, 16).

What seems to be common across these various recent subdivisions in the larger field of composition is the superordinate question of “Does writing contribute to learning?” and the concern with finding effective classroom strategies to support this process. Whether the sphere of examination is primary, secondary, or post-secondary, the overarching research question is consistent: can we use “composition to help students understand and reason about subjects such as science, history, [literature] and mathematics[?]” (Klein 243).

2.3.5 Writing to Learn and to Think in a Community of Practice

Throughout much of history, beginning with the founding of Plato’s Academy, schools have been viewed as important sites for systematized training. Greeks and Romans saw the most valuable kind of education as an apprenticeship to civic and public life, whereby a young man was trained to be a citizen by participating in small parts of life in the polis from a very young age, guided by older children and young men. Quintilian founded his system of rhetorical education on a progression from imitation of great authors to original invention, in a practice of apprenticeship to the great texts. Montaigne’s tutor taught him to learn Latin through speaking it, not through lessons in grammar, and in fact, when he was taught Latin at school, he lost his earlier fluency (Montaigne 158\(^{29}\)).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influenced by philosophers like John Dewey and psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky and Sigmund Freud, theories of education began to be shaped by cognitive and psychological sciences. Vygotsky developed a theory of learning called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) at the end of his life, not long before his death in 1937. By the 1980s, the ZPD began to be known in developmental and educational psychology circles.

\(^{29}\) Also Montaigne I.26 135-150.
in the west. According to the model of the ZPD, there are three zones for a learner. At the bottom is a zone of actual development, of independent capability where the learner resides, able to work unassisted with their current understanding. In this middle is a zone of proximal development, where a child can learn new skills with scaffolding and assistance, where understanding and independent capability can be built through practical activity in a social environment. And at the top is a zone out of reach, where the learner cannot work even with scaffolding and help (Vygotsky 79-91).

The goal of any teacher, whether a peer, a professor, or a parent, then, is to help the learner move into the ZPD with appropriate assistance and support. In this way, as a learner progresses, their ZPD is always moving upward towards new skills as new learning takes place. Once something is learned, it is no longer located in the ZPD and instead is located in the learner’s zone of actual development, such that the ZPD, and the site of learning, moves constantly upwards, achieving progress into the out-of-reach zone with regularity. Vygotsky did not use the term “scaffolding” to refer to this structured assistance, but according to Wood, scaffolding can be defined as assistance that helps a learner achieve “those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence” (Wood et al. 90).

An effective metaphor Sheridan Blau has often used to describe this process of the ZPD is of a child learning to ride a bicycle. At first, a child at a particular phase of motor development (perhaps 4 years old) cannot balance on two wheels alone at all, but with help from training wheels or a judicious parent, the child can reach the pedals and the handlebars and ride. Independently riding a bike, at this point, is not within the child’s zone of actual development but it is within the child’s zone of proximal development because it is only one or two steps away from what the child can do alone now. So, to move upwards, more nuanced scaffolding than training wheels is required. First, a parent will run alongside, holding onto the handlebars and the seat. Then, as the child learns within this ZPD, the parent can just hold the seat, and then
just place a hand on the child’s back, and eventually let go. In this way, a parent scaffolds the
child with the right amount of help, gradually releasing responsibility to the child until the child
can ride unassisted.

One of the revolutionary applications for the ZPD in school is to see this as promoting
and clarifying a developmental model of learning. Often, in schools, students are performing
tasks that they have already mastered, or they are being asked to perform tasks that are too far
ahead of where they are and they fail because they are not yet ready. Research in social
learning systems has also demonstrated that an effective mentor to help a learner move into the
ZPD is not just a traditional expert teacher but also a student who has, himself, recently moved
through the same ZPD and learned the same skills, and that the proximity of their zones of
proximal development makes them well-suited as mentors for each other.

The efficacy of a community of practice where apprentice-learners work together in
closely associated ZPDs, although not labeled as such by Vygotsky, was apparent in his
research. He observed that “collaboration with more capable peers” could be just as effective in
closing “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent
problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving”
(Vygotsky 86). Not only do the tutees benefit, but the tutors also are able to solidify ideas and
information they only learned imperfectly the first time around through this tutoring, while making
affective gains in terms of seeing themselves as legitimate readers and writers.

In 1991, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger published a work called Situated Learning:
Legitimate Peripheral Participation, in which they clarified these relationships between
apprenticeship systems and Vygotsky’s ZPD. They constructed an account of learning as social,
of knowledge-building as grounded in participation in communities of practice. Learners in
training to be architects or doctors, teachers or scientists, are shaped through a combination of
reading, direct instruction, experiments, and training, and an intentionally created group of
engaged learners, working together to build knowledge in a specific field, might be called an
apprenticeship system or a community of practice (Lave and Wenger). This community is based on a system where learners share information and experiences as they learn from each other and develop expertise.

Lave and Wenger had been working, in the late 1980’s, on theories of learning, especially as they related to the growing field of computing and machine learning, and realized that in all the conversations about cognitive apprenticeship, no one seemed to have a clear sense of what that really meant. To answer their question, they moved out of schools and classrooms and turned to functional apprenticeship systems they had seen in tailor shops in Vai and Gola communities in Liberia. To be a midwife, a blacksmith, a carpenter, a butcher, or a surgeon, a student is trained not only by great masters but also by students who are merely a few levels above them. These systems are structured so that learners can be mentored from participation on the periphery into expertise, through situated legitimate participation in fields of skill and expertise.

Lave and Wenger purposely excluded schools from their study, partially because schooling and teaching and learning, although culturally seen as interrelated, are not necessarily always working functionally and together. In fact, quite often students are mostly learning other things than the ones we think we are teaching them in schools! This is not to claim that no learning can happen as a result of teaching, but we cannot “take intentional instruction to be in itself the source or cause of learning,” (Lave and Wenger 41) particularly as evidenced by the fact that often what is taught is not the same as what is learned.

In their study, by viewing learners in the world, and not in isolated classrooms, as legitimately peripheral participants in working systems, Lave and Wenger came to examine what it meant to learn in situated ways, and to see the “transformative possibilities of being and becoming complex, full cultural-historical participants in the world” (Lave and Wenger 32). They studied how apprentices engaged in “a common, structured pattern of learning experiences without being taught, examined, or reduced to mechanical copiers of everyday tailoring tasks,
and of how they become, with remarkably few exceptions, skilled and respected master tailors” (Lave and Wenger 30). Rather than learning through a passive reception of facts and information, a learner begins mentored by slightly-more-advanced peers in legitimate peripheral activities that gradually become more complex and integral.

The question, then, is how to apply these ideas of Vygotsky and Lave and Wenger to the composition classroom. The goal is to create a community of practice of writers and thinkers who can work together, apprenticed to other learners and to the texts they study and the texts they create, moving inward towards full participation from peripherality, “gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement” (Lave and Wenger 37). From the beginning writer, on the periphery of the discourse community, to the expert comfortably in the center, the goal of all this writing is to manage “the resources of the written language, not to transmit but to make meaning” (Nystrand and Himley 206).

The problem is that traditional methods of instruction are often “foreign to the existing capacities of the young…beyond the reach of [their] experience…[T]he very situation forbids much active participation by pupils” (Dewey 19) which then, in turn, fails to inspire genuine interest in solving a problem, which is a critical site of failure in much of educational practices designed to teach critical thinking. Many of the points of inquiry offered in schools are too general, and aren’t made with consideration of the possibility of “the existence in his own [the student’s] experience of some difficulty that troubles him and disturbs his equilibrium” (Dewey 190). To “urge [a child or a grownup] to think when he has no prior experiences involving some of the same conditions, is wholly futile” (Dewey 191).

Dewey speaks against techniques of teaching that, while appearing to educate, actually do little more than create “prejudices, that is, prejudgments, not judgments proper that rest upon a survey of evidence” (Dewey 184). It is our job as teachers to create intellectual contexts for students that cause them to write out of a real need to communicate to a real audience, this urgency that helps students to engage in “active inquiry and careful deliberation in the
significant and vital problems” (Dewey 55) that they confront in their lives, across an authentic “experiential continuum” (Dewey 28, 33).

The commentary offers an opportunity for theoretical synthesis of Vygotsky’s ZPD, and the learning-through-apprenticeship systems of Lave and Wenger, combined with James Moffett’s discourse schema describing distance between audience and subject and writer. This apprenticeship-based composition classroom is created by broadening the audience for student publication from only the teacher to a group of peers, accustomed to working together as writers and readers, in (to rephrase Lave and Wenger) “a common, structured pattern of learning experiences without being taught, examined, or reduced to mechanical copiers of everyday [writing] tasks, and of how they become, with remarkably few exceptions, skilled and respected master [writers]” (Lave and Wenger 30). In this system, my role as teacher “shifts from judging students’ performances to helping students perform better [and] Assessment will then shift from knowledge of a subject to knowledge-in-action… emphasizing students’ developing abilities to enter disciplinary conversations” (Smagorinsky 111).

By allowing students to write and read for one another, we are shortening the distance between the writer and the writer’s audience (Moffett), allowing the audience to be in a closer ZPD (Vygotsky), and therefore more suited to reading with empathy and responding with efficacy than a teacher can. In this classroom-based apprenticeship system, students look forward to the responses from their peers, students take more care with their work, imagining real (and not ideal) readers taking in what they’ve written, and students push each other to think and write more deeply and clearly. The group provides responses “based on the readers’ efforts to understand the writing and enjoy it… rather than trying to judge it… the benefits seem to come not from hearing right reactions or getting good advice from readers, but rather from being understood” (Elbow xx).

Student writers can also learn from admiring each other’s work: when one student makes a developmental leap, learning to do something new and effective, it can catalyze that
leap for others, as they participate where they can, but also then moving to greater levels of expertise through the example of colleagues just ahead (Blau, Lave and Wenger). This multiplicity of readers can also teach student writers something about hermeneutics: really entertaining these multiple readings, taking them on to believe and doubt them (Elbow, Blau), and seeing whether and how many are plausible in the text, can translate to the reading of other texts as well. If so many readers can have so many different readings of my work, what does this teach me about the possibility of interpretation when I read other things, like Milton, or Shakespeare, or the newspaper?

Then, in future writing activities, in anticipation of this group of readers who want to understand and not to judge, student writers see the purpose in revising and rewriting for clarity, because they have an audience in mind to whom they wish to communicate and whose missed understandings they will have to face. Framed in this tradition of philosophical education in the humanities, growth-models of composition, and theories of situated learning in apprenticeship systems, writing becomes more like talking, a dialogue with a recursive process of inquiring, explaining, hearing, responding, clarifying, and revising in the service of the shared goal of building knowledge. It is this kind of learning in communities that then promotes what I identified as the goal of education in the humanities, that is, to form citizens who are prepared to engage thoughtfully in a society. As Melissa S. Williams describes it, “learning cooperation as a practice is the only way to develop individuals’ sense of agency to reshape the world they share with others. It teaches moderation in promoting one’s own vision, and the capacity of individuals to see themselves as part of a project of collective self-rule” (238).

To return to my research question, I want to see whether the commentary, grounded in these various traditions of humanitas, composition, and apprenticeship systems, can function as a place for students to develop the skills to question their ideas, the ideas of the text, and the ideas of their peers. If I use this inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing in a required sophomore level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly
selective college, can it help students become active legitimate participants in an academic community?

2.4 Essays, Excursions, and Explorations in the Montaigne Tradition

2.4.1 Radical Writing: Bringing New Life to the Ancestral Rootstock

So how is the commentary a new branch of an old kind of writing? It is my belief that this practice of inquiry-based dialogic writing develops a way of seeing writing as more than just a place to prove what has been learned or a place to make an argument that has already been worked out: rather, writing can be a place for thinking, a site of investigation and discovery, a place for the cultivation of new and deeper ideas and thoughts through this process of engaging in a writing practice, a practice central to the intellectual work of a university community. I'm asking students to write their reading experiences just as Montaigne writes all his experiences. The writing then becomes a site for thinking, for making meaning, and for organizing provisional theories from personal evidence. The Montaigne tradition identifies the kind of intellectual work I am attempting to introduce my students to through the commentary.

Montaigne used his essay writing as a place to try and to test out ideas about how to live, how to die, how to educate children, why we have thumbs, and other quandaries, from the quotidian to the profound in a kind of metacognitive Socratic dialogue with himself. Although he wouldn’t have used the term essay as a noun, he used it as a verb in the description of his work in writing as that of trying out or testing (j’essaye). Although Montaigne would not have used the noun “essay” to describe the form of his writing, he does use it as a verb (j’essaye) to describe his method: “If it is a subject I do not understand at all, even on that I essay my judgment, sounding the ford from a good distance; and then, finding it too deep for my height, I stick to the bank… Sometimes in a vain and nonexistent subject I try (j’essaye) to see if [my judgment] will find the wherewithal to give it body, prop it up, and support it” (Montaigne 219).
To expand Montaigne’s riparian metaphor, it is a difficult task to urge students to write as a way of dipping a toe into the water, testing the temperature and distance and water speed, perhaps venturing further in, or maybe retreating to see whether there is an easier crossing just upriver beyond the bend. In my attempts at dismantling the years of rigid writing instruction I received as a student, I found that my own writing flow was terribly cluttered by all kinds of intellectual flotsam and jetsam, picked up from years of being dammed in by the concrete walls of the five-paragraph essay, pushing me to unnecessarily fear the dark and deep water, and allowing me to merely skim across the surface in my singular interest of getting to the other side, desperately dog-paddling instead of gliding in a graceful stroke. The more I think about this, the more I begin to see that many of the myriad negative influences on my own work come from restrictions that I impose on myself or rules that I misinterpret as inflexible or overly rigid. In the interest of helping myself and my students, and inspired by Montaigne’s freeing the head of the horse of his judgment (Montaigne 219), I try to play with ways to create freedom and ease in the process and in the product.

Montaigne’s essays were an open conversation between Montaigne and all readers, and also between those who read him and talk to each other; in each class at Columbia where students read “Of Cannibals,” they bring the old conversation to new life. These commentaries are also a conversation, an encounter, a dialogue, in which the thoughts of each reader receive a “Rub and polish” (I.26 136), being clarified by contact with other thinkers. Reading about someone else’s reading allows you to experience their reading perspective, just as reading Montaigne’s essay about his kidney stones allows you to experience someone else’s body and perspective- a kind of intellectual empathy. The conversation begun in the commentaries, like clone vines of Chateau d’Yquem that now grow around the world, continues to grow, doesn’t reach a conclusion; you write, someone replies, someone else replies, you revisit the original text, craft another reply. Meaning is created, both in the transaction between reader and text, and in the transactions between readers: “An able reader often discovers in other men’s writings
perfections beyond those that the author put in or perceived, and lends them richer meanings and aspects” (Montaigne 112).

Montaigne’s essays take various forms, some long, some short, some unified, others bafflingly random, yet unified by their shared stance of inquiry. In the commentaries, like in Montaigne’s essays, there are endless variations on form that arise, organically, from the community. Montaigne’s essays are a rich bibliographic melange: so full of cited and uncited references to ancient texts, plays, farming techniques, including words from many languages, personal anecdotes, and asides. Similarly in their commentaries, students respond to questions with more questions, rather than with answers, include personal anecdotes, references, citing other texts and websites, pointing in many directions and offering contradictions. In a way, the questions and the stories are the essays themselves: they are the ways of trying things out, of essaying into the idea, into the problem. Even in concluding his essays, he avoids neat endings. Rather than tying them up with a thesis, he opens a conversation: “We are all steeped in [inanity], one as much as another; but those who are aware of it are a little better off -- though I don’t know” (Montaigne 931).

As I try to navigate my way in a new landscape of dissertation writing (and I think my use of these essays and excursions in the Montaigneian tradition is certainly an example of my efforts to admit my presence as researcher and author in my writing, but also keep the rigor and foundation of other theorists and the structure of academic discourse) I’ve been thinking a lot about Moffett’s I-You and I-It scale (from Chapter 2) as I write to discover, write to organize the chaos, write to make meaning. The first application of Moffett and his scale, for me, is in looking at Montaigne’s work through the lens of these two axes. In order to increase his fluency, his ease in writing, he wrote about a subject not at all distant from himself (that is, he began by writing about himself); he also wrote for an audience not at all distant from himself (that is, he began by writing for himself and his close friends and family). By lowering the abstract distances he needed to cross, both in subject and audience, he was able to increase his fluency and write
incredibly copiously. In this way, he meandered easily from meditations on himself to ruminations on cannibalism, friendship, educating children, imagination, and philosophy as a way of learning to die.

To widen my sphere of examination a bit, let me move from using Moffett to see Montaigne to using Moffett to look at what we ask students to do: we ask them to take on subjects (It) that are far from them and their knowledge and their concerns (I), and we ask them to do it in a stilted and overly-formal style, as if their audience (You) is far away and official. The difficulty in bridging both of those distances simultaneously is not to be overlooked, especially when we ask students to take on this task when the stakes are high, such as on standardized tests and in application essays.

The construction of the commentary is, then, an attempt at bridging the abstract distances for writers, budgeting on which axis the more complex cognitive leaps are required. In my own practice of the commentary, I have found it interesting the way I navigate the distances of I-You and I-It as I write, and the shifts in fluency, formality, and ease, and I wonder whether other people find themselves seeking a similar balance in their own writing and work. I have been using my daily writing time lately as a kind of reading journal; I am reading so many articles for so many classes that writing my way into understanding of them is the only way I have found that helps me organize them and digest them and keep them from tangling into one huge hairball of theory. Therefore, all of this writing that I do for the Commentary has an initial audience that isn’t very distant from me. Mostly I write only for myself, so the distance between the I and the You is still small and relatively constant. If “a writer is in dialogue with his various selves and with his audience” (Berthoff 650), when I can make the audience and the selves closest to me, I can take on more and more difficult ideas and budget my mental and intellectual energy by directing it towards the It rather than the You.

Looking back over my own personal reflective writing, the formality of diction and syntax has an interesting inverse relationship to the distance between the I and the It. When I write
about reading over a woman’s shoulder on the train, or write about a cold morning walking through Chinatown, or write about the phenomenon of coming back to my childhood home, the fluency is smooth and easy, and the ideas flow without difficulty. Perhaps out of a sense of self-consciousness or shame over the seeming triviality of my topic, I end up writing more formally, as I try to use my mental energy to play with word choice, with anaphora, with semi-colons. I try to create mood and momentum with my punctuation. The work and the practice comes in the shaping of the text, because the topic just flows out of me: I do not have to go very far inside to find out what to say.

However, when I am drafting a section of my Literature Review on Harris’ article on the Dartmouth Conference, or meditating on Riessman’s theory of thematic analysis, the writing becomes more casual, more fragmented, and less fluent, because I am operating closer to the edges of my competence. There are more abandoned lines of thinking, more questions. My diction is not fancy at all. I use short words, the first that come to my mind or to my fingers. My interest is not in playing with the sounds of words or the rhythm of sentences; the mental work is really just in figuring out what I think. The work and the practice there is in trying to figure out what the article means to me, what I can do with it, what meaning of my own I can make out of it. Even when the audience does not change, the formality of my writing shifts in direct relation to the distance between the I and the It, as if I am seeking some equilibrium, balancing far off subjects with casual language and close subjects with much more complex and formal prose.

All of this meditation on abstraction is significant because so much of the writing that we assign, in English classes from high school to graduate school, asks students to take on great distances in both the I-You and the I-It, and so it is no wonder that they struggle and trip and fall, and that they see most writing as terrible drudgery. I have seen for myself that I only have a certain capacity for mental work, and that I cannot really navigate both distances well at once. The beauty of the commentary is that I am choosing my subject (to some degree) and
know my audience, so I can decide, on a case by case basis, where to put in the work and where to play and the places where those can coexist.

I find myself composing these commentaries (sometimes just the vague ideas, and sometimes the actual sentences) in my head while I sit on the train, or walk home from the grocery store, or bike across Manhattan, or in a difficult yoga posture. I try not to forget them until I can write them down, and sometimes I succeed. I also find that sometimes it takes me a very long time of sitting in front of my computer to figure out where and how to start. I am both trying to figure out what I want to say, what I think, and also how I want to present myself to the class as a thinker and reader and writer. It’s very complex and the pressure of such a real audience is difficult. I think that the combination of writing to uncover our thinking and writing to play with language (or at least demonstrate skill with language) is perhaps a piece of what makes them a struggle at times, because I know that I am not the only one who finds this assignment surprisingly difficult.

I think what all of this reading and writing and weaving that I’ve done here over the last many paragraphs reveals and confirms for me is that writing is not a way to show what I have learned, but rather, writing is the way that I learn. To turn back to Dewey and pick him up from where I left him a few pages ago, in Democracy and Education he writes that “Thinking is the method of intelligent learning, of learning that employs and rewards mind” (Dewey 159), and for me, writing is the next step in that process; writing is the method for organizing my thinking out of chaos so that I can learn from it. While I certainly can think without writing, which I do daily, in the shower, on the yoga mat, while waiting for the subway, or while trying to fall asleep, when I think without writing, the thinking just keeps swirling around in my mind, circling the drain and often escaping down the pipes and into the sewer of forgotten ideas.

Montaigne wrote about himself to invite in other readers, to begin a conversation, founded on shared experiences and common humanity. I would argue that writing about a reading experience in an honest, ethnographic, metacognitive manner is like writing about
yourself: just as Montaigne wrote about the experience of losing consciousness (Montaigne II.6), I am urging students to recreate their sensations of reading and thinking, confusion and understanding, as they happened, from instant to instant: I ask them to take up the task of recording a reading experience, what they read, what they thought, whether they stopped and looked things up, or carried on, whether they revised interpretations and encountered seeming contradictions. Instead of abstract theories on life or philosophy, Montaigne tells us what he does, what he thinks in certain situations; a commentary follows this ethos, where instead of putting forward some big interpretation of the text, a student simply records what she thought as she read, how she made interpretive moves as she tried to construct meaning. Nietzsche, Woolf, Pascal and others reported that one of the great pleasures of reading Montaigne was that, reading him, you see yourself in the text. To Emerson, reading Montaigne, “It seemed as if I had myself written the book, in some former life” (Emerson 1); Gide echoed that sentiment, acknowledging “So much have I made him my own that it seems he is my very self” (Gide). To my continual delight, student commentaries show evidence of this same reading empathy: students often begin replies with “yes- I had the same reading experience.”

It seems to me that much academic writing, maybe gradually over the past four hundred and fifty years, but most rapidly in the last century, has lost this heuristic quality and shifted from a tool for excavation of self and meditation on problems, to a forum for presentation of authoritative (or, more often falsely authoritative) answers (and, in fact, answers is such a complex and loaded and positivist word that I feel the need to lean into it with italics). It also seems to me that we make the biggest mistakes with our most delicate developing writers: we ask high school students to put on a voice of certainty, to edit out digressions or questions or evidence of their thinking process, and only to make the arguments we assign to them, using a stiff and artificial form and a falsely elevated style.

We should, as twenty-first century teachers of writing, return to the roots of the Royal Society and re-situate our teaching of writing in the decorum of Quintilian, Cicero, Petrarch, and
Montaigne, and the clear and unadorned style of the Royal Society, allowing writing to be a purposeful place for dynamic discovery, for finding understanding rather than just demonstrating it in a way that prevents dialogue and obfuscates the ideas for anyone but a select few of designated insiders.

I would like to teach writing as a place where writers can “regenerate or recreate their own goals in the light of what they learn” (Flower and Hayes 381) as they write, rather than being restricted to a predetermined argument presented in a predetermined form. NCTE’s Standards for the English Language Arts follow a more Montaigneian, Ciceronian appreciation for context and flexibility, but they have not been as widely influential as other, more restrictive standards (Gere). We should move away from the tyranny of form, and rather allow content, context, purpose, activity system, and audience to dictate language, and encourage our students to draw on the experience they already have in their literate lives, reading and writing their worlds, for the writing we help them to create in school.

I would like to suggest that we make academic writing into a radical act, that we reclaim and preserve the process of thinking and discovering and meditating not only in the process but

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30 “Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts” (NCTE Standards for English Language Arts)

31 In the current most common model of writing instruction, most teachers focus on the content to be transmitted to the students, that is, particular skills in writing, or vocabulary words, or rules for grammar, with students as passive recipients. The idea behind this way of teaching is that students need the pieces before they can assemble the whole effectively, and that allowing them to see the whole too soon might be overwhelming (Fort, Pirie, Murray). Once they are allowed to begin to write whole pieces, the topic is usually one that is assigned by the teacher, often in a two-birds-one-stone manner to assess reading as well as writing, and rarely is there much openness for the student to interpret or learn through the writing process. The writing is also usually done for the teacher as the sole reader, and evaluator, and the teacher is usually more expert than the student on the topic assigned, so the student has to put on a false voice of authority to compensate for this writing from scarcity (Bartholomae, Blau, Fort, Pirie). This traditional method and manner “doesn’t work for most students; the particulars are not abstractly significant to students who cannot understand their purpose or importance until they use them to make their own meaning” (Murray 4): a tool has no meaning without use, and a lesson on semi-colons has no relevance without a piece of writing that calls for particular punctuation. Perhaps one reason this method hasn’t fallen out of fashion (my MA students are shocked every semester to learn that direct grammar instruction has no measurable positive effect on the quality of writing, and might even have a negative effect [Braddock, Hartwell,]), is that so many teachers were taught this way when they were students, and then go on to teach as they were taught, even though respected and important members of the field have been writing and speaking against it for over one hundred years. In 1909, Fred Newton Scott called grammar lessons “subsidiary [matters, which] must be treated as such… To treat them as an end in and for themselves is to turn education in this subject upside down” (in Stock 11); at Dartmouth in 1966, Britton and Dixon mocked direct instruction in style and grammar as “dummy runs” (Harris 10); in 1968, Donald Murray wrote against it in A Writer Teaches Writing, and yet we cannot seem to get away from worksheets on comma placement and handbooks on error, although many of the handbooks make staggering numbers of the same mistakes they condemn (Williams in Harris 116). I also think that so many of us suffer from Janet Emig’s “magical thinking” (Emig 136), in that we fear that if we don’t give direct instruction on grammar, students will never learn to use commas properly; we place so much responsibility on ourselves as teachers that we lose faith in students’ abilities to learn things without our spoon-feeding it to them.
also in the *product* of writing, that we encourage students to allow themselves to sometimes write in, to paraphrase William James, a kind of stream of consciousness of reading and thinking. I propose that we move forward by looking back to Montaigne and many of his contemporaries (certainly Erasmus, but also More and Sidney), and even further back to Cicero and the educational system he inherited from Isocrates and Aristotle and Plato, who saw writing and rhetoric as places to try out (*essaye*) ideas and theories, places to examine problems and test solutions, and most importantly, as places to form virtuous and dutiful citizens as critical thinkers and speakers and writers (Gwynn 14, 25, 28, ff.). Perhaps essay writing does not have to be a falsely authoritative act of posturing. Maybe it is okay, or even more productive and better and more honest, to wonder and question rather than to answer: “I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it” (Richardson 924).

**2.4.2 Practice, Process, Risk, Result, and Play**

In some ways I am a very confident person. I know the things I can do well, and I do them with dedication and enthusiasm, and I find great satisfaction in my success. I think in some ways this quality has and continues to make me very successful in school, but I’m not sure how I feel about that kind of “success” (and it is certainly telling that I can’t resist the temptation to offset that word with quotation marks in an attempt at critical distance). I know the answers, smile when I say them, get As on my papers and tests, and do my homework. Getting that “well done, Nicole” was and is very important to me. I feel like the work isn’t valid or complete until I’ve had feedback, hopefully of the positive kind. I realize that this quality or habit or pattern is problematic, and I’m working on staying mindful of it, staying ahead of myself, and trying to set aside the finish line and focus on the beauty of the trees.

I don’t think that I am alone in this quality- we all like to do things that we do well, or things that we think we can do well, either now or in the future. Somehow, that expectation of
success forms a feedback loop with actual success, and we keep on moving ourselves up into more and more expertise, shifting our own zone of proximal development through genuine interest, investment, and excitement. Fear, self-consciousness, trepidation, hesitancy- these are all anathema to success, to growth, to learning. Why, then, do we as teachers and teachers of writing spend so much time telling students what they are doing wrong? Why do we make them into fearful writers? Why do we remind them so often of what they cannot do, what they must do better? It has been said that it takes about seven times as many positive interactions as negative to keep us on an emotionally sound level, and to thrive probably requires more. As teachers we have a tendency to focus on the easiest seen; perhaps because giving meaningful feedback about what works is much more difficult than nit-picking? It is far easier to note "run-on" in the margins than to take the time to tell the writer why a particular sentence or paragraph has voice and moves the reader or coheres with the theme.

Looking into my own life, I don’t know when this pattern began, this feedback loop of fear and reluctance and lacking confidence and refusal and passivity, but I know that it dictates many aspects of my personal and professional lives, and largely dominates my personality. For the last five or six years, I have had a very devoted yoga practice. Almost every day, I step onto my mat and work in near silence, alone at home or alone together in a room full of people with a shared goal. We are there to practice; we compete not against each other, but against our own limitations and fears and mental and emotional barriers, finding our quiet minds inside of the physical work. Years of ballet dancing and lucky genetics gave me loose muscles and ligaments, so the twisting and binding is not a place for too much work. Upavistha konasana and parsvottanasana and hanumanasana have never been much of a challenge.

However, handstands and forearm stands and headstands, bakasana and mayurasana and ekapadakoundiyanasana- they all confounded me for much longer than I thought they should. I don’t trust my arms and wrists and elbows, I don’t have faith in the muscles of my shoulders and back. When I am faced with the idea of the floor mere inches from my nose, my
weight balanced on my hands and my feet high in the air, twisted or bound or flexed, the fear stops me. It isn’t that I try and fail, but rather that I am so crippled by my lack of confidence that I refuse to even try, and rather work on something else that I can do, or watch and marvel as people around me seem to sail up into peacock without even much effort.

Finally, perhaps two years ago, I realized that my strange refusal to even attempt was coming from an audience-related magnification of my fear of falling: I was too scared to even try, too afraid to fail in a room full of people, too worried about crashing down and bringing some other unfortunate yogi along with me. So I started to try the really scary ones at home, alone, when no one else was watching. One night, I got up into a handstand. Another morning, I curled in and extended up into a headstand. And then, back in class, with the memory of having done it at home as my guide, I sailed up into a forearm stand. I knew I could do it, and so I could do it again. The fear faded and confidence grew, allowing me to bring to my arm balances a sense of play, and spirit of experimentation, and my handstands became scorpions, my headstands folded into lotus. I still can’t do mayurasana, but I’m practicing, working on it, with a blanket as a crashpad in front of my face.

Most critically, I think this focus on result, and fear of failure as a part of process has, for me, been an impediment to critical thinking and to real creation and possession of knowledge. Sometimes I want to be right so much that the how and the why of the thinking process tend to fall by the wayside, and I fear asking questions as a revelation of my weakness, preferring to look things up later in the solitude of my apartment or the library, and that quality in me becomes more and more problematic as I move forward in academe. As I climb this ladder to the Ivory Tower, I’m going to have to let go of wanting to be correct, wanting to say what I think superiors want to hear, and instead find what it is that I want to say. That is, after all, the whole idea of graduate work and eventual transition into a faculty position somewhere- for me to say something new and different that no one else could have said, and there will be lots of people who, if anyone notices me in the first place, will say and write that I am wrong.
I’m going to have to let go of my pathological desire to have the answer, to please, to be the good girl who never falls out of handstand, because in trying so hard I am neglecting what is unique about myself, and only really trying to do what I think other people want from me. I suppose, in fact, that it is those unique and different and sometimes wrong parts of myself that will help me to publish and write and think in new ways that can make significant contributions to the discourse community into which I am trying to gain entry. I have to grow more comfortable with this disequilibrium and the accompanying discomfort of operating at the edge of my competency, and allow it to be the step before I grow and reintegrate new knowledge at the next level of expertise.

For me, this is the value of the practice in the commentary. I am learning to write even when I am still confused, when I haven’t sorted out my ideas, when I don’t yet have the answer. The seemingly simple and trivial ideas and fragments and tangents appear useless and barren at the time, and I wander around in the darkness, grasping and tripping. But then, something begins to coalesce, and even in the dark, I start to see the path, and eventually those little seemingly-useless pieces are what get me to the important point, the specialized argument, the thesis. And, perhaps most wonderfully, like Montaigne with his “stings in the tail,” I have learned that it is okay if my statement of truth only comes at the end, or maybe never, because, after all, Que sçais-je?

Sliding across 500 years of writing and writing research, I turn now to my modern mentors, writers and educators with well-founded yet still dynamic identities who can offer some insight into their own processes as both working writers and teachers of writing. In looking for a modern mentor (and perhaps a mentor text) I had a few criteria: I wanted a writer who is prolific, because the nature of this practice is that it produces a lot of writing; I was also hopeful that I could find someone who is both a writer and a teacher of writing, which Montaigne was not; lastly, I wanted to find a professional writer who wrote metacognitively and reflectively about his or her own writing practice, a writer who hopefully practiced the same kind of dedication to
exploratory, auto-ethnographic writing in which I was asking my students to engage. After some searching, including Lamott and Oates and Wallace and Didion and Lahiri, I found a writer who I thought could mentor this project in a very powerful and profound way. Not only was William Stafford an extraordinarily prolific writer\textsuperscript{32}, who gives my desire to read all of his work quite a testing, but he was also a very patient and respected teacher of writers at Lewis and Clark for many years. Additionally, his son Kim Stafford is a writer who writes about the influence of his father’s practice on his own.

William Stafford wrote at length and in many volumes about his writing process and his dedication to the practice of writing every morning, allowing himself to work out ideas and problems and bits of inspiration without judgment, simply letting the words flow out of him and onto the page, not knowing what he might write until he wrote it, not knowing what he would find until he looked back at it, but still having faith that the process would produce: “A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them. That is, he does not draw on a reservoir; instead, he engages in an activity that brings him to a whole succession of unforeseen stories, poems, essays, plays, laws, philosophies, religions…” (Stafford 1978).

His writing practice began when he was a young man: he found that in order to be true to his heart and his beliefs he had to stand up against the draft and World War II as a conscientious objector. As a result of this stance, he found himself living in camps for conscientious objectors all over America, starting in Arkansas and then later in both Southern and Northern California. It was in this community of pacifists that he began the practice of writing daily. Many of his campmates were artists of various kinds: musicians, painters, and poets, all of whom found themselves so exhausted at the end of the day of physical labor that they didn’t have much mental energy left to create works of art. To solve this problem, they

\textsuperscript{32} Supposedly when asked how he could possibly write a poem every day, Stafford replied, “Lower your standards.”
began waking early in the morning before their physical labor to make time for the labors of the mind. It was this work and writing that became Stafford’s MA thesis for the University of Kansas. He wrote to find a way to justify the ideas of Quakerism and pacifism and living as an exile in a world that had just come through a massive war, a society that was quite hostile to these insider-outsider conscientious objectors: he created a poetics of peace as a way of finding his way through words, in the practice of writing everyday.

After founding this assignment in Montaigne, and confirming the value of regular practice with Stafford, I’d like to circle back for a moment to John Dewey. In my reading of Dewey’s *How We Think*, I often find my mind weaving together a tapestry of Dewey and pieces of the many other things I’m reading; my thoughts stitch together a bricolage of ideas about writing and playing and thinking. My weaving begins on the very first page of *How We Think*, with something Dewey wrote in the Preface: “The native and unspoiled attitude of childhood marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and love of experimental inquiry, is near, very near, to the attitude of the scientific mind” (Dewey 179). I know I am not alone (I am certainly thinking of Patricia Stock here) in finding an important connection between the play of children and the curiosity and interest involved in writing that creates real thinking.

My mind keeps circling back to an earlier work of Dewey’s that I read in a class years ago, so I open up my notebook from the class and look back through my scribblings and jottings and meditations: “Persons, children or adults, are interested in what they can do successfully, in what they approach with confidence and engage in with a sense of accomplishment. Such happiness or interest is not self-conscious or selfish; it is a sign of developing power and of absorption in what is being done” (Dewey 35-36). This idea of engagement and absorption is absent from most student writing: we assign, and they produce for a grade. They are not fully absorbed in the process or invested in the product, and therefore rarely manage to attain any level of confidence or accomplishment or success. So how do we find ways to create the conditions in which students can find real absorption in writing? How can we restore the fertile
intellectual ground of childlike wonder and curiosity and imagination and play to school writing?

I read an article in *Time* magazine not long ago that addressed research on creative thinking and the ways our society seems structured to eliminate creative impulses (Paul). The short article discusses how jumping out of bed and into the shower, then on to a commute filled with bad news on the radio or in the paper, and a stressful office environment really kills the creativity of today’s professionals. I couldn’t help thinking how this negative adult environment is much like many schools: outside accountability and test pressure create negativity and stress, and students don’t have much time to play, either literally, during free time, or in classes. How do we find space in the crowd of accountability, testing, coverage, rigor, and stress to build play back into the curriculum?

With this focus on curiosity and absorption, Montaigne seems to belong back in the conversation: he clearly found a way to create a physical and intellectual environment that supported his pursuit of questioning and curiosity, and despite occasional distractions by the pain of chronic kidney stones, he seemed to have little problem with absorption in his task. I suppose that his circumstance of landed nobility, free to choose to retire and devote himself to an intellectual and hermetic life, (Aristotle would agree, arguing that the contemplative life is only possible with a degree of material resources) will be hard to replicate for students today, but I still think he has worthwhile ideas to share about method. I start by looking back at what he said about choosing topics for his meditations: “I take the first subject that chance offers. They are all equally good to me” (Montaigne 219). How often do we let students write their essays on (or, more accurately, make essays into) topics with such freedom and pleasure?

Moving again through time, I turn to Robert Scholes who, I think, both advocates for and demonstrates that writers can play with and manipulate texts and language in powerful ways: in crafting what is a relatively “academic” piece, he uses widely ranging metaphors and a whole lot of (occasionally biting) humor. I think he best sums up his idea about what writing can and should be when he writes: “The skill of a writer is a happy one because it is based upon play.”
But as I read that, all I think is: if I asked my high school or undergraduate or even graduate students what the skill of a writer is, how many of them would say “play”?

So this brings me to a new color in my tapestry: play is important. Hugely so. Why do we abandon it in schools, except for carefully designated and structured times in the early years? What are we doing when we are playing? We are playing at, playing with boundaries, with danger, with independence, with solitude. We are learning with less risk; encountering, experimenting, testing the world and ourselves; using our imaginations to see where we end and where others begin; creating independence and identity. We are wondering: who am I in relation to the people surrounding me and the world surrounding me? What is the difference between playing while feeling alone and playing while being alone? Through play, we are beginning to theorize about ourselves and the world and our role in it and the possible roles for us in the world. Imaginative play is a narrating act: we use it to make sense of the world, to make meaning, to take ownership and authorship over the stories we inherit and hear, filling in the gaps, and taking license with the narrations of others.

Where do I play now, in my "grown-up" life? Why does it seem to me that the places where I play as an adult are also solitary and somewhat meditative activities? Does play stay mostly alone and get more quiet as we get older? Does it look more serious on the outside, but really is the same on the inside? I play when I run alone and outside, sometimes unable to contain my exuberance over the beauty of the day, the freedom of my legs, the view, and feeling of abandonment and power. I play when I cook, eschewing recipes and combining whatever sounds good, with music in the background. I play on my yoga mat, testing myself and my fear and my cautious temperament. I'm not alone but I feel alone; I go inward. I play when I write, playing with language, constructions, sounds, anaphora. I also realize that a great class session, surrounded by colleagues I respect and care for, bouncing ideas around the room, building new theories, can feel like play. I also felt like I was playing earlier this spring at a conference when I presented: we were playing together, and that's even how I began my
presentation: I opened with a request for people to openly “play along,” and when I thanked them at the end, I heard myself saying “Thank you for your willingness to play with me.”

I think that Dewey can speak to this coming together of disparate places of play. In the long essay *Interest and Effort in Education*, Dewey creates a parallel between school-learning and sculpting and, although he wrote this long before the process movement took hold, inspired by thinkers like Don Murray, Dewey can inform the theory of process-centered writing in interesting ways. A sculptor has an end in mind: Michelangelo can see the form in the stone before he chips away and reveals the figure. Because the sculptor is so focused on this end, and places so much value on it, each strike of the hammer calls his full attention, and “Whatever interest or value attaches to the end attaches to each of these steps. He is as much absorbed in one as in the other. Any failure in this complete identification means an inartistic product, means that he is not really interested in his ideal... Interest attaches to it because of its place in the active process” (Dewey 26-27).

I suppose it might be connected to my own background in the arts, or maybe it is the continuing influence of the class I took with Maxine Greene in the fall of 2010, but it seems to me that there are very significant parallels in the practices of the fine arts and the practice of writing. The division that we have institutionalized in schools between art-making and school-learning seems to me more and more ridiculous, and more and more false, and more and more damaging. Plutarch, in his *Life of Cato*, describes the act of educating a child as a kind of art-making: “when Cato had thus taken every pains to fashion his son, like an excellent work, to virtue” (Gwynn 20).

Another thought that comes to mind as I ponder this parallel is that, with the fine arts, we accept repetition as a very necessary part of the practice and process (the number of scales and boring warm-ups I’ve sung in my life far outnumbers the number of beautiful and moving arias, but I don't resent them, and accept them as necessary; as a ballerina, it was the rehearsal and repetition that I loved, because the stress of the performance removed the joy of it for me),
and, to a certain extent, I think we accept repetition as a part of the process with writing, but it’s funny to me each time I realize that we (or our students, and then, certainly, it is we who give them this idea) seem not to believe in repetition as part of the reading and writing process.

Let me complicate that: I think that I as a reader and writer understand and participate in the idea of repetition (as I read over and adjust this paragraph for the 400th time in the last three or four years) but I as a teacher found myself often making apologies for repeating things. We are about to begin reading a play or a poem or a novel, and some student shares that they read it already in their last school or their other class, or even on their own, as if that might exempt them from reading the work with us. And I would find myself automatically apologizing and asking them to still read it, and see whether they might find something new and interesting, as if that was possible but with a slim margin of odds, when of course I know that it is possible to read something even ten or twenty times and still find new and interesting ideas in it. This is one of those moments where I see myself as a teacher and myself as a writer/reader as two beings separated by some odd barrier, and I can't figure out how or why it got there, but I do know that it is strange and makes little or no sense and only impedes the learning of my students.

Dewey's analogy of sculpting in this passage seems apt to me: even the early strikes of the chisel are important, although they may not feel that way at the time, and the sculptor invests himself in each point of the process because he has a larger goal in mind. I find myself resisting this analogy a bit because of an image of Michelangelo that rests in my mind: I see him uncovering, reducing the stone to an essential core of beauty, releasing the figure inside (I'm thinking of the sculptures I've stood near and marveled at that are in the Louvre and in the Accademia) whereas I see our work more often as constructive and accretive, and then maybe later comes the paring down. Maybe I also resist it a bit because it seems very close to the idea of an "essential self" or "essential identity" that you just have to peel back enough layers of flesh and fruit and psyche to get to it. To steal a line from Maxine Greene that I often repeat, I prefer the idea of becoming: "I am what I am not yet."
To return to Dewey’s parallel, maybe there is something in the analogy of writing and art making to the world of weaving or stitching (often used by Ruth Vinz) or bricolage (often used by Janet Miller). When I sit down to write, whether a meditation or commentary or a larger paper for a wider audience, I see my early work as piecing together swatches of meaning that I’ve already cut and assembled from what I have read and what I have observed and what I’ve thought and data I’ve sorted, moving scraps around and sewing carefully, sometimes unstitching and restitching in a new way, until I’ve sewn together a quilt that I am proud to hang on my wall. And a dissertation is certainly a kind of bricolage, a kind of quilting, taking pieces of work that have a similar theme and piecing and then threading them together in a way that makes something both utile et dulce (More, Frontispiece to Utopia).

So the challenge remains: how do we create interest and engagement in the product and therefore in each piece of the process so that students are absorbed enough to invest genuine effort? It certainly can’t happen in boring topics assigned in a perfunctory manner, completed in a rigid form, for the audience of one teacher or a few regents readers who may or may not respond in a meaningful way, and might not respond at all. I suppose the constant ideal of real topics, chosen by students because they care about them, in forms dictated by content, and written for real audiences, whether themselves or peers or parents or communities or more, is the general idea. But, as Montaigne would say, I can do nothing other then keep essaying my way forward, because, after all, “Que sçais-je?”
3. The Story of My Ways of Looking

3.1 Introduction

John Dewey tells us, in “How We Think,” that the spirit of inquiry is an inherent quality in children that teachers must direct and develop in the project of training thinkers for intellectual lives. The “natural capacities of inference [must be transformed] into habits of critical examination and inquiry” (Dewey 206) until students can live motivated by a curious “interest in problems provoked by the observation of things and the accumulation of material” (Dewey 206). A full and functioning democratic society, in which all citizens participate, requires “continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse,” (Dewey 83).

The only way to form this citizen prepared for “full and free interplay” among social groups (Dewey 79) is an education in critical thinking and inquiry (Dewey 90). Such an education is the explicit aim of the course I teach to sophomores as part of the required undergraduate core curriculum at Columbia University, where Dewey himself taught in the Philosophy department from 1904 until his retirement in 1930. Dewey remains a spiritual and intellectual presence at Columbia, at least in my understanding of the core curriculum that is so central to the undergraduate experience in Columbia College, and certainly manifestly in Columbia’s Teachers College, where Dewey’s bust welcomes all visitors who enter the main hall. All of the courses I have taught and taken at Teachers College have been infused with Dewey’s texts and pedagogical theory.

In my core curriculum course, as in courses with a similar aim at liberal arts colleges across the country, such an education does not require inspiring all students to become philosophy majors, but to ensure that students who will major in chemistry and history and sociology and music and economics and all the arts and sciences learn to engage in philosophical thinking in and beyond their own academic disciplines and experience what it means to be a contributing member of a learning community or of an intellectual community
within and beyond the university. After all, “to communicate is our chief business; society and friendship our chief delights; and reading, not to acquire knowledge, not to earn a living, but to extend our intercourse beyond our own time and province… Communication is health; communication is truth; communication is happiness. To share is our duty; to go down boldly and bring to light those hidden thoughts which are the most diseased; to conceal nothing; to pretend nothing; if we are ignorant we say so: ‘car, comme je scay par une trop certaine expérience, il n’est aucune si douce consolation en la perte de nos amis que celle que nous aporte la science de n’avoir rien oublié a leur dire et d’avoir eu avec eux une parfaite et entière communication’ (Woolf 3, quotation in original from Montaigne).

In my course, the problems and observations that provoke our interest and challenge us to engage in close critical examination and inquiry are found in the canonical philosophical and political and literary texts that have profoundly shaped the values and culture and ways of interpreting the world we have inherited from our collective intellectual ancestors. In order for the texts we encounter to have powerful and lasting transformative effects on us, we must engage with them as active makers of meaning, not just as passive recipients of information. Petrarch tells us that he “read Virgil, Flaccus, Severinus, Tullius not once but countless times, nor was my reading rushed but leisurely, pondering them as I went with all the powers of my intellect; I ate in the morning what I would digest in the evening, I swallowed as a boy what I would ruminate upon as an older man. I have thoroughly absorbed these writings, implanting them not only in my memory but in my marrow, and they have so become one with my mind that were I never to read them for the remainder of my life, they would cling to me, having taken root in the innermost recesses of my mind” (Petrarch 22.2).

We cannot passively receive information from and about texts, as in Freire’s “banking” model of education, and expect to use them to further careful philosophical thinking and lives of

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33 “For, as I know by too much experience, there is no sweeter consolation in the loss of our friends than that which brings us the knowledge of having said everything to them and having had with them a perfect and full communication.”
praxis; we must, rather, enter into dialogues with texts and with authors and with other readers to give shape to ideas that we continue to think about and think with as we carry on our fill up our intellectual and personal and professional lives. Curriculum in schools must be built as “systems of knowledge-in-action, available as tools to guide present and future behavior, rather than systems of knowledge-out-of-context, stripped of their constructive and constitutive potential. That means, in turn, that the process of schooling must be a process of actually entering into particular traditions of knowing and doing. Students must discuss literature they have read, not simply be taught about its characteristics; they must do science, not simply be told its results; and they must engage in mathematically based problem solving, not simply memorize formulas” (Applebee 36).

It has long been understood that writing about reading is probably the most reliable and productive way of engaging deeply with texts (Klein 243), although there is also a long tradition of complaint in schools and colleges that the writing assignments that follow reading assignments serve mainly as tests of reading and can make the reading less stimulating and engaging for a student who has to worry about somebody else’s questions about the text rather than her own34. The particular approach I employed to assign writing about reading to students in my course is the subject of this study, which is designed to explore whether the writing allowed for deeper engagement with the texts and with the community, and how and to what extent the writing contributed to two Deweyean goals of my course: first, to develop in my students habits of critical examination and inquiry; and, second, to enable my students to experience what it means to be a contributing member of a learning community. If, along with all of that inquiring and contributing I can also convince them to see writing and thinking as infused with a spirit of play, in the spirit of Montaigne and Dewey, then I will have really built something.

34 See extended discussion of this issue in 2.3.3 and 2.3.4
3.2 Research Design

I am using here, for this long-term observation and for these multiple close studies, a methodological framework of teacher research, utilizing tools from the tradition of ethnographic research. I have conducted studies of a smaller number of students across three years, in order that I might increase my reliability and possibility of replication (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, Yin). However, because of the complicated nature of research in my own classroom, I cannot claim to understand the many intentional and unintentional factors contributing to the unique community that we constructed here (Athanases and Heath). In the section that follows, I situate my work in the tradition of teacher research, particularly as it relates to insider observation (Husband, Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor) and collection of classroom artifacts (mostly student writing on a discussion board and in anonymous course evaluations). I will also trace the influences of ethnography on my research, and my choice of discourse analysis as a method through which to view this student writing.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Insider and Observer: Teacher-as-Researcher

Although the label of teacher research has really only been in wide use in English Education since the 1980s, this idea of an engaged teacher making inquiry into her own practice was emphasized by John Dewey, when he argued that the best way for a teacher to improve her own practice was for her to be “moved by [her] own ideas and intelligence” (Dewey 1904) gathered from reflection on practice and integration of these reflections into her own classroom.

I see my work as situated in the tradition of teacher research and insider observation, in which the “ultimate purpose of the enterprise is to promote the educational, social, and emotional well-being of the students we teach in classrooms” (Baumann, Shockley, and Allen 3). I became a teacher because I could think of nothing more fulfilling than reading and writing
and talking about ideas with students and colleagues; I became a teacher researcher because I wanted to be a better teacher, because I wanted, as Marian Mohr says, to figure “out how students read and write, how they learn” (Mohr 19) in order to more effectively talk with them about ideas.

This paradigm of teacher-led inquiry begins with the observations by a teacher about the work of her students, and is a “consciously initiated process that is implemented with a plan for data gathering and analysis” (Baumann, Shockley, & Allen 6). To clarify and specify this definition a bit further, I’ll use a definition out of Cochran-Smith and Lytle. They describe teacher research as “systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers [which] makes accessible some of the expertise of teachers and provides both university and school communities with unique perspectives on teaching and learning” (2): systematic, in that it is carefully designed research, intentional in that it is carefully planned, and inquiry in that it originates in the observations of teachers who desire “to make sense of their experiences- to adopt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 3). Teacher-researchers do not lose focus on their teaching because of their research; rather, the research enriches the teaching so that all teaching becomes research (Mohr 20).

For most of the history of research on teaching, outsiders have been coming into classrooms to perform etic research, telling teachers in what and how they are succeeding and failing. This is complicated by perceptions of “ivory tower” academics and outsider politicians writing the standards and the exams by which teachers and students are evaluated (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2-9). Rather than etic, where an outsider comes in to study ideas or theories, teacher research is emic: the research process begins with a moment of inspiration in the work of students, curves out into theory and history, and then back again to practice with the researcher’s insider status as teacher, weaving around in a recursive spiral.

Moving teachers from the objects of the research of outsiders to the leaders of research in their own classrooms provides a space for the incredibly valuable “voices of the teachers
themselves, the questions that teachers ask, and the interpretive frames that teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 3).

Classroom research is taken up by teachers because they have important and real questions that arise out of their classrooms, and it requires bravery because this kind of work “is difficult, involves exposure, and requires courage… research logs, classroom observation field notes, and audio and video tapes are not places to hide” (Mohr 19). It is a process of attempts and experiments, a “simultaneous doing and reflecting [which] underscores the tension and exhilaration inherent in teacher research” (Baumann, Shockley, and Allen 38).

Significant to my own belief in the power of this kind of research, perhaps, I am quite literally a child of, and a product of, some of the early important classroom case study research done in the United States. With the support of the South Coast Writing Project (SCWriP)branch of the National Writing Project (NWP), and SCWriP’s director Sheridan Blau, the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group was formed in 1990 with the intention of creating a hybrid of emic and etic research in high school classrooms35. Under the supervision and guidance of university professors and researchers Judith Green and Carol Dixon, and with Green’s graduate student Leslie Rex, a team formed to undertake classroom research with the partnership of teachers interested in inquiring into their own classrooms. I was a student of two of these teacher-researchers, in Sandra Robertson’s 7th grade English class and David McEachen’s 12th grade English class.

Teacher research, performed by an insider in her own classroom, is indeed inherently subjective, which can sometimes be viewed as unreliable, because a teacher cannot remove herself from the data, cannot set aside her assumptions and biases; however, when a teacher can “acknowledge [her] assumptions… the resulting research can be honestly derived from the data and valuable to others” (Mohr 20). A teacher is an engaged researcher with interest in successful outcomes. She is also a trusted member of the community, able to understand the

35 http://linc.education.ucsb.edu/history/
participants and the setting in a unique way, and with a depth inaccessible to an outsider. Because she has “daily access, extensive expertise, and a clear stake in improving classroom practice” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2), a teacher is a natural source of important information about what actually goes on in classroom life from an emic perspective. When a teacher researcher works to be particularly aware of the “interrelated nature of social systems within which the culture under study is situated” (Athanases and Heath 268), there can be no researcher better situated to observe and understand the workings of a classroom community than the teacher herself. She is a subjective insider participant, able to integrate theory and practice in a deliberate and recursive process of inquiry, observation, collection, analysis, and adjustment.

This emic teacher-research is, then the kind of new research described by H. L. Goodall in Writing the New Ethnography. It begins in, and includes the stories of teachers working in their classrooms, balancing “accounts of communication and culture… [with] personal, self-reflexive, narratives” (79). However, the stories cannot stand alone as scholarship- they must be synthesized and examined so that they can become theoretical arguments about teaching practices and also “about the value of stories in scholarship” (Goodall 79). Stories capture readers and create a kind of hypnotic space for learning: from didactic religious parables to fairy tales and fables, humankind has relied on stories as teaching tools. Narrative, then, certainly can have use in studies that seek to fulfill the project of qualitative research in education, that is, to “enlighten us about the way learning happens in specific settings… [by] bring[ing] us closer to the lived experiences of the individuals we see here… to invite you to think about if, and how, these stories work for you” (Perl, Counihan, McCormack, Schnee 324). In this way, teacher-research built on a foundation of narrative research certainly strives toward a goal of all research, which is, to “invite dialogue with those who interact with it” (Van Manen 21).

So, in order to continue to build a body of legitimate teacher research, we must make meaning out of our classroom stories with the use of theory. Lankshear and Knobel describe a
teacher researcher who begins a project of engaged research in her own classroom because of students’ low scores on exams: “for the scores to appear unusual, problematic, or unexpected to the teacher, the teacher has to have some kind of ‘theory’ or ‘idea’ in mind in the first place” (22), which positions her in the intersection, or praxis, of theory and practice. Teaching is an incredibly complex art, requiring integration of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, as well as understanding of individual learners, curricula, standards, values, and traditions in teaching. This capacity of teacher research to center on questions originating in the daily experience of teachers is particularly powerful because it is reflexive, immediate, and grounded in particular classroom contexts with particular students (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 6). A teacher researcher is necessarily immersed in the theory of the field and also in the practice of her own classroom, and therefore will engage in the reflexive process of constantly adjusting instruction as a result of the observations gained in her inquiry. It is not just research and practice, but, rather, as Ruth Vinz would say, *research in practice*, that teachers engage in when they examine their own teaching.

One of the many beautiful messes of teacher research is that we cannot ever isolate a single influencing factor in student growth. We cannot use an elimination diet to test for allergies, or systematically turn on and off certain genes in a DNA strand. This can create the issue of a perceived lack of rigor and triangulation. Baumann, Shockley, and Allen acknowledge that no successful protocol can ever be reapplied to a new classroom context without significant adjustment “because each group of students was unique, opportunities for data collection were different. [Therefore]... analysis was ongoing, [and] we designed methods responsive to what we were (and were not) seeing and hearing” (Baumann, Shockley, and Allen 19). This may seem to be an issue with generalizability, but in fact, taking context into account offers a chance to understand not just what works, but “the particulars of how and why something works and for whom, within the contexts of particular classrooms” (Zumwalt in Cochran-Smith and Lytle 6): it is not just research in practice, but *research in practice in context*. 
Of course, it is impossible to capture the complexity of classroom context, because, as Rosenblatt tells us, “any encounter between readers, teachers, and texts in a classroom has as its setting the society, the community, the ethos of the school, the total curriculum, the cumulative social concepts embodied in the works presented to the pupil over the years, and their earlier experiences with literature at home and in school. The dynamics of the particular classroom, in turn, provide a context for the individual students’ evocations and responses” (Rosenblatt 50).

Due to these complex contextual factors, it is not possible for me to claim that any changes seen in the writing of students is entirely due to the implementation of the commentary. They come into my class with certain skills that I cannot isolate, and they are influenced by all kinds of moves I make in the classroom, intentional and unintentional, as well as other influences in other classrooms and in their lives. Although I can make claims about their own perceptions of their growth due to the commentary through their interview responses, demonstrate correlation between success in the class and engagement in the commentaries, and show certain changes over time in the texts of their actual commentaries, the nature of this classroom research is that I can never perfectly isolate influential factors. In *North American Longitudinal Studies of Writing*, Rogers attempts to outline the constellation of factors that may contribute to the development of writing."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What teachers say about writing in the classroom, including direct instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer to peer talk, reading and writing groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole class discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online class discussions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive teacher attitude in relation to feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate rhetorical context, e.g. classroom &amp; grades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Rogers also identifies a long list of possible influences on the development of student writing that are not classroom-related, such as self-esteem, confidence, or anxiety; time as it relates to growth, maturity, and development; preexisting abilities and writing experiences; cultural backgrounds, and gender; student engagement; and institutional context, including assessment regimes.

This inherent messiness in classroom research, and this complex and chaotic variety of influencing factors requires a variety of research techniques “suited to the variations of individual classrooms… constantly evolving and innovating (Baumann, Shockley, & Allen 39), which now brings me to the value of tools from ethnography in teacher research.

### 3.3.2 Classroom Research Tools Out of Ethnographic Traditions

Deeply rooted in the tradition of naturalistic inquiry practiced by cultural anthropologists and other observational social sciences, non-interventionist, observationalist ethnography has a long history, reaching back as far as the late sixteenth century, and extending forward into the current postpositivist research climate that began in the 1990s (Athanases and Heath 264).

For educators and teacher-researchers, tools drawn from the tradition of ethnography are particularly useful in that they can help provide us with “rich documentation of learning as it
unfolds and varies over time, leading potentially to insights into cultural patterns, formulation of hypotheses for testing, and support for generation of theory” (Athanases and Heath 263). Ethnography began to take hold in educational research in English in the 1980s with the work of Ken Kantor, Dan Kirby, Judith Goetz, Louise Rosenblatt, Sondra Perl, Ann Dyson, Marian Mohr, and Melanie Sperling. Miles Myers, in 1985, argued particularly for the use of ethnographic norms such as generalizability, grounding in problem definition and research design in teacher research to, in some ways, bridge the divide between teacher research and university-based research. More than just a “tolerated observer” (Athanases and Heath 267), I am a member of the community: a participant, a researcher, and a guide.

Ethnography has also been particularly important for examinations of the cultural influences on school learning, in the work of Heath, Ball, and particularly, in Morrell’s applications of ethnographic techniques in research in critical and cultural pedagogies. Ethnographic tools provide teacher researchers with the ability to carefully examine “language uses in their social contexts [and therefore] to cast cognitive processes in active form, accounting for language and activities that give evidence of remembering, thinking, and perceiving” (Athanases and Heath 266).

For this research, I am using many of the ethnographic tools for observation, taking into account cultural and linguistic habits and contextual influences, using the perspective of an insider to represent what is going on within this group. This is not, however, a formal ethnography in the strict sense. I am employing “a wide range of observational techniques, direct participation in some of the group’s activities, and… work with interviews… [to] supplement documentary and oral data [and] survey and statistical data” (Athanases and Heath 264).

I am also aware of the concern that “much classroom-based ethnographic work… has lacked grounding in anthropology, and hence has omitted the techniques necessary to locate studies so they could be used for comparative analysis with those from other classrooms”
(Athanases and Heath 267). I have made significant attempts to ground my work in techniques that might allow for comparative analysis, by portraying, with as much fullness as possible, the unique classroom culture into which I am inquiring, to make it “possible for other researchers to make use of [the] results” (Schensul and LeCompte 338) out of a nuanced understanding of how they were achieved.

Another set of critiques levied at teacher-research from the ethnographic community has been that it is not often undertaken with sufficient length of time, not based rigorously in theory, and that data is often presented in raw form (Athanases and Heath 267). I have anticipated some of these concerns in the design of my study, including the three-year length, and in my use of the work of 52 students. I also have attempted to select a variety of informants for the studies, in order to increase the validity of claims I might make about the use and effects of the commentary. I have also attempted to capture the “wisdom of practice” (Shulman in Athanases and Heath 273) in my own work, by providing as much grounding as I can in terms of purpose of class activities, reasons behind teaching decisions, and what I hope students will take with them from the course.

I have also drawn from the tools of ethnography in my record keeping. I have the full collection of commentaries as classroom artifacts, I have student evaluations, and I also have interviews from specific students. I have a teaching notebook that, in addition to my reading and teaching notes, contains field notes from each class session, reflecting on what worked, what I might keep for the future, and what created teaching difficulties. This teaching notebook is a kind of log of procedures for me, so that each year, I can review the steps taken in the previous class and make adjustments as I see fit. I also have notes from individual interactions with students, by email and in person, that have encouraged me to see my implementation of the commentary and my data collection as flexible. A student recently remarked in class, and received support from other students, that the discussion fora are easier to use when I title them by reading rather than by date, so I went in and labeled all of the fora for this semester with the
author and text, rather than the date of the commentary. In early March of 2017, prompted by a response to one of the interview questions, I began to use the first ten minutes of each class session as a time for the students to read and take notes on each other’s commentaries, as a way of having them see the corpus of writing and the trends in ideas at the beginning of our time together. This is what I do each morning before teaching, and so, in the spirit of Vygotsky and Lave and Wenger, I decided to begin to gradually release that responsibility to them.

Another element of my study that has been influenced by the tools of ethnography is my data analysis. Of course, different groupings of data, viewed through different lenses, would yield different results. As a way of reconciling this, I have used both macro-level and micro-level analysis of the body of data, looking at trends in the body of work produced by all three cohorts, and also looking deeply into the work of nine individual students, spread across the three cohorts. I have also, in line with Berkenkotter’s identification of inherent limitations in the traditional form of reporting, let go of the idea of “a pretense of objectivity established through the researcher’s distanced stance, use of the passive voice, separation of knower from the known, linear reporting, the myth of value-free inquiry and a seamless tale devoid of reports of false starts” (Athanases and Heath 278).

My use of the tools of ethnographic research are, in large part, an effort to construct a framework for my research that includes “careful explication of field conditions, researcher actions, and methods for data collection and analysis” (Schensul and LeCompte 326), in order to construct a study that can be useful not only in my own classroom and teaching practice but also, hopefully, to other teachers in other classroom contexts. Of course, the methods of one teacher can never be fully adopted into the classroom of another: teacher research doesn’t produce that kind of directly transferable knowledge. Rather, teacher research provides opportunities for learning through the “systematic, unrelenting process of data collection and analysis” and then can be used to build theory that allows us to share the provisional answers to our questions across the field (Mohr 21).
I have also relied on the use of my own experiences and stories in what I have called my “Essays, Excursions, and Explorations in the Montaignian Tradition” as a way of enabling readers to discover “the informal logic of actual life” (Geertz 16-17) in my teaching experience, but also to connect my own lived experience to the development of my theories around the use and power of the commentary in an attempt at a demonstration of Aristotelian praxis.

3.3.3 Qualitative Method: Discourse Analysis

James Gee and Judith Green, in “Discourse Analysis, Learning, and Social Practice,” argue that observational research requires grounding in theory, or what they term a “logic-of-inquiry,” in order that the research can be “theoretically coherent [in] approach, and [can be described with] a language of the research that has a particular expressive potential” (Gee and Green 121). Because, as Gee also says, “any method always goes with a theory” (Gee 2014 11), I will explore the theories behind my use of discourse analysis as a way of making sense of the writings of my students.

Discourse is, of course, a complex term with a number of meanings. Let me turn again to James Gee for further definition. Discourse can mean the grammatical and syntactical ways that words and sentences “relate to each other to create meanings or facilitate interpretation” (Gee 2014 18). Discourse is also, however, language used in contexts, and therefore is “not just what you say, but how you say it…[and] what you are and do when you say it” (Gee 1989 5).

Gee continues on to make a distinction between these discourses by marking one with a lower-case “d” and one with an upper-case “D”. He defines discourse as “connected stretches of language that make sense” (Gee 1989 6-7) and Discourse as the combinations of language that allow us to participate in social roles by using language to perform particular identities. “At any moment we are using language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, what is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but saying(writing)-doing-being-
valuing-believing combinations... Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes... a sort of "identity kit" which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (Gee 1989 6-7). Drawing on ideas of participatory learning (which I have discussed at length in 2.3.5), Gee argues also that Discourses cannot be taught, but must be learned37 through "enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse" (Gee 1989 7).

Gee describes Discourse as using language, gesture, and "everything else at human disposal" to communicate through "enacting and recognizing socially significant identities" (Gee 2004 24-25). However, because of the written nature of my artifacts of classroom discourse, I will not be taking into account elements such as prosodic and nonverbal cues, gestures, and eye contact, although those are often important in understanding the situated meanings of speech acts (Gee and Green 122). My goal is to use discourse analysis in order to inquire into "the patterns of practice that make visible what members need to know, produce, and interpret to participate in socially appropriate ways (Heath in Gee and Green 126).

Particularly in the complex and ever-changing environment of the classroom, it is useful for educational researchers to combine tools from ethnography with techniques of discourse analysis in order "to examine questions of what counts as learning in a local setting, how and when learning occurs, and how what is learned at one point in time becomes a sociocultural resource for future learning for both the group and the individual" (Gee and Green 119). By viewing language and knowledge as socially constructed, a stance of discourse analysis allows

37 Gee also argues in his first theorem that "Discourses (and therefore literacies) are not like languages in one very important regard. Someone can speak English, but not fluently. However, someone cannot engage in a Discourse in a less than fully fluent manner. You are either in it or you're not... [and] your very lack of fluency marks you as a non-member of the group that controls this Discourse. That is, you don't have the identity or social role which is the basis for the existence of the Discourse in the first place. In fact, the lack of fluency may very well mark you as a pretender to the social role instantiated in the Discourse (an outsider with pretensions to being an insider" (Gee 1989 10).
a classroom researcher to examine the ways in which members of a community build resources for exchanging ideas and constructing knowledge.

This constructed knowledge or meaning is always built in a context, and therefore is never absolute but situated. Gee explains that “Discourse practices are always embedded in the particular world view of a particular social group; they are tied to a set of values and norms. In learning new discourse practices, a student partakes of this set of values and norms, this world view. Furthermore, in acquiring a new set of discourse practices, a student may be acquiring a new identity, one that at various points may conflict with the student's initial acculturation and socialization” (Gee 1989 60). There are, in a classroom community, certain cultural models that are “socially significant to appropriate participation within [our] social group” (Gee and Green 125) and that carry unique situated meanings. For example, in the culture of our class, the phrase “Thrasymachus Question” has a particular meaning, referring to our collective memory in context, because Thrasymachus asks whether justice is the advantage of the stronger in Plato’s Republic, in the same way that “Muffin Demonstration” conjures up the three kinds of Aristotelian law, reflected in my class when I used homemade muffins to demonstrate the differences between Distributive, Retributive or Corrective, and Reciprocal.

My use of discourse analysis here will be to examine the commentaries of my nine chosen students to examine the progress of their thinking and writing over the year of the course. Of course thinking is a very ephemeral process, and it is daunting to think about qualitatively examining something so intangible. I think combining James Gee’s ideas about situated discourse with some categories of thinking defined in Chapter 3 of John Dewey’s How We Think may give me some useful ways of categorizing and identifying trends in their writing and thinking. In How We Think, John Dewey describes the natural resources\textsuperscript{38} that we draw on in thinking, and subdivides them into stages and steps. He uses the example of a child in the

\textsuperscript{38} Dewey’s natural resources are Curiosity, Suggestion, and Orderliness. He then divides curiosity into three stages, which I have called “Identifying,” “Purpose or Function,” and “Categorizing or Theorizing.” Then, within the process of thinking, he distinguishes steps in Reflective thought, which I have called “Pause,” “Survey,” “Move,” and “Repeat.”
text, but this is simply a paradigm, he argues, for what also happens in a mature mind during critical thinking.

In order to examine the commentaries as an archive of a continuing conversation, contributing to and reflecting the classroom knowledge, I have here used a framework of questions from Gee’s *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (Gee 2014 34), adapted to fit the particulars of my research questions and of Dewey’s stages.

1. **What step in the Process of Reflective Thought is enacted via this utterance?**

   a. **Pause:** Dewey further refines his definition of thinking by describing stages within reflective thought, which is what is required as soon as a difficulty or obstruction arises or is presented. All reflective thought begins in this “forked-road situation” where ambiguity presents a dilemma, and the need for a solution to resolve the conflict of perplexity is the exigency that provokes reflective thought “a state of perplexity, hesitation, doubt” (183)

   i. **Does this “Pause” demonstrate curiosity?**

      1. Curiosity is a “search or inquiry to test the value of the suggestion before finally accepting it” (204). All thinking springs from “a state of perplexity, hesitation, doubt” (188), which must be followed by “an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief” (188). Therefore, “the most vital and significant factor in supplying the primary material whence suggestion may issue is, without doubt, curiosity… The curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought, as a vigorous and healthy body is on the qui vive for nutriment. Eagerness for experience, for new and varied contacts, is found where wonder is found.

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39 All the following page numbers are from Dewey’s “How We Think.”
Such curiosity is the only sure guarantee of the acquisition of the primary facts upon which inference must base itself (205)

ii. **At which stage of curiosity does this “Pause” seem to be situated?**

1. **What? or Identifying:** “In its first manifestations, curiosity is a vital overflow, an expression of an abundant organic energy. A physiological uneasiness leads a child to be “into everything” — to be reaching, poking, pounding, prying… The most casual notice of the activities of a young child reveals a ceaseless display of exploring and testing activity. Objects are sucked, fingered, and thumped; drawn and pushed, handled and thrown; in short, experimented with, till they cease to yield new qualities. Such activities are hardly intellectual, and yet without them intellectual activity would be feeble and intermittent through lack of stuff for its operations” (205-6).

2. **Why? or Purpose/Function:** “A higher stage of curiosity develops under the influence of social stimuli. When the child learns that he can appeal to others to eke out his store of experiences, so that, if objects fail to respond interestingly to his experiments, he may call upon persons to provide interesting material, a new epoch sets in. “What is that?” “Why?” become the unfailing signs of a child’s presence… Yet there is more than a desire to accumulate just information or heap up disconnected items, although sometimes the interrogating habit threatens to degenerate into a mere disease of language. In the feeling, however dim, that the facts which directly meet the senses are not
the whole story, that there is more behind them and more to come from them, lies the germ of intellectual curiosity” (206)

b. **Survey**: When we encounter a contradiction, we pause in uncertainty, “we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another… in an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief. A traveler whose end is the most beautiful path will look for other considerations and will test suggestions occurring to him on another principle than if he wishes to discover the way to a given city” (183). This stage is a place for summary of ideas, for restating what has been said, what ideas have been part of the conversation.

i. **Does this piece of language demonstrate Order?**

1. Along with curiosity and experience, flexibility in thinking must be accompanied by a sense of order and appropriateness in terms of which material to incorporate at what point in the process. Thought depends on this because “even when these two conditions [curiosity and suggestion] are fulfilled, the ideas suggested [may be] incoherent and fantastic, rather than pertinent and consistent” (205). Therefore, “suggestions must be organized, they must be arranged with reference to one another and with reference to the facts on which they depend for proof… We wish neither random diffuseness nor fixed rigidity. Consecutiveness means flexibility and variety of materials, conjoined with singleness and definiteness of direction” (212).
c. **Move:** With this city in mind, this potential imagined solution to the given problem, a reflective thinker moves “not simply [through] a sequence of ideas, but [towards] a consequence — [reflective thinking is] a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. The successive portions of the reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley. Each phase is a step from something to something — technically speaking, it is a term of thought. Each term leaves a deposit which is utilized in the next term. The stream or flow becomes a train, chain, or thread” (183). This stage is a place for synthesis and analysis of ideas, for beginning to organize existing ideas into relationships with one another, leading from one to the other in causal relationships.

i. **Does this piece of language demonstrate Connection?**

1. Thinking, having begun in curiosity, has to proceed towards provisional hypotheses, and for these, we require a fund of knowledge or experiences from which to draw ideas. A person’s “thinking may be irrelevant, narrow, or crude because he has not enough actual material upon which to base conclusions; or because concrete facts and raw material, even if extensive and bulky, fail to evoke suggestions easily and richly” (205). “The function of suggestion has a variety of aspects (or dimensions as we may term them), varying in different persons, both in themselves and in their mode of combination. These dimensions are ease or promptness, extent or variety, and depth or persistence” (208)
d. **Hypothesis or Claim:** Reflective thought can never be a passive activity; rather it must involve “persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (185). What is important, then, is for a thinker to identify a problem that, whether it is small or large, common or unique, causes such perplexity in the mind of the inquirer that there is a sense of genuine inquiry, or exigency, in the search. In a way, then, the telos of thinking is always “a question to be answered, an ambiguity to be resolved” (190). Dewey calls this “Repeat,” but for purposes of clarity, I am going to call it “Hypothesis” or “Claim” in that it is a place for creating new knowledge and making new and interesting claims about interpretations and applications of existing material. I would add that, in this level, there is also an acknowledgment of the provisionality of these claims, that these aren’t facts but claims to be explored, and about which the writer still isn’t fully sure. This includes acknowledgment of places where these claims may disintegrate. This element of reflective thought also appears in Iser’s theories of interpretation in reading, where he describes making of meaning as “not a smooth or continuous process, but one which, in its essence, relies on interruptions of the flow to render it efficacious. We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we are shocked by their non-fulfillment, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject; this is [a] dynamic process” (Iser 449).

i. **How? or Categorizing/Theorizing:** “Curiosity rises above the organic and the social planes and becomes intellectual in the degree in which it is transformed into interest in problems provoked by the observation of things and the accumulation of material. When the question is not discharged by being asked of another, when the child continues to
entertain it in his own mind and to be alert for whatever will help answer it, curiosity has become a positive intellectual force. To the open mind, nature and social experience are full of varied and subtle challenges to look further” (206-7)

3.4 Research Questions

This study investigates one major question: what happens when an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing (Blau 2011) is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college? This first question entails two sub questions that are also divided into smaller, more readily observable units, and so it became two, with subquestions. To review from 1.4, the questions are:

1. What happens when an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing (Blau 2011) is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college?
   a. Does greater engagement in the practice of the commentaries connect to success in the course?
   b. Does the writing of the students show evidence of philosophical thought?

2. Do students experience or perceive their participation in the assignment as leading them to be active contributors to the philosophical inquiries that are the focus of our class?
   a. How do the students describe and evaluate their roles in the class?
   b. Do students see themselves as having taken on intellectual roles in the class that they expected to take on or were accustomed to taking on?
   c. Did they see themselves take on unusual or surprising roles?

40 This incredibly broad term is defined more clearly in 1.7.1, 1.7.2, and 3.3.3.
3.5 Research Setting

3.5.1 Recruitment, and Procedures

To answer the set of questions that inform this project, I have engaged in an observational study of the work of students in my three sections of Contemporary Civilization from 2014-2017, a required sophomore-level philosophy course, to discover if my practice of teaching writing supports students in identifying and writing about the kinds of metacognitive and philosophical and critical questions Dewey sees as markers of deep and critical thinking.

In keeping with procedures of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Teachers College, participants were informed of my research prior to the commencement of data collection, and provided informed consent in writing for me to use their responses to anonymous course evaluations, use selected written work confidentially, and use responses to interview questions without their names. The students are aware that the course is the site of an observational study, but also that the work of the course is no different than it would be were the study not being conducted. The students are not aware of the particular focus of my study beyond the fact that I am observing their grown as writers, as any other conscientious instructor would in the course of teaching a class with an intensive reading and writing component.

Students have the option of choosing not to participate in the study while remaining in the course. There are many other sections of the course, so if the way that I am conducting the course is objectionable to them, they can enroll in another section. Again, this research is instructional, not experimental, and these same class activities would be required and completed whether or not this study were being conducted. All of my subjects are undergraduate students at Columbia College and all are over the age of 18.

The student work will not be collected anonymously, but will be used anonymously in the study, with pseudonyms. Course evaluation data will be collected through the official anonymous required Columbia University Course Evaluation evaluation form and through my
own Google Form, both of which are completely anonymous. The students will, then, be anonymous to all other readers.

Informed Consent Form is supplied in the Appendix and was given to all students, although this study has been granted Category 4 Exemption from Teachers College Institutional Review Board and therefore does not require informed consent procedures.

My participant cohort excludes students I didn’t have for the full year, and students who completed a very minimum number of commentaries for reasons of health or otherwise. I will analyze first for breadth, across all three years, looking at big-picture trends in their commentaries, and depth. Then, I will use nine students as studies, spread across all three years and as diverse as possible in terms of gender, first language, major, and place of birth. All participants will be analyzed according to the number and length of commentaries and grades in the course. The case studies are also interviewed about their experience in the course and with the commentaries, and it is on their nine sets of commentaries that I will undertake the Deweyan discourse analysis described in 3.3.3.

3.5.2 Participant Demographic Information

2014-2015

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41 This sampling includes about ¾ of the total number of students and omits only those who chose not to answer the survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNI</th>
<th>Ethnicities Nationalities Races</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Place Attended HS</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Gend er</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Culver, IN</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hefei, China (adopted to Brooklyn, NY at 6 months)</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Drama and Theatre Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
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<td>Santa Barbara, CA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>m</td>
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<td>Ojai, CA</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>American Studies Major, Potential History Concentration</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>Santiago,Chile</td>
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<td>Hebron, CT</td>
<td>Hebron, CT</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2015-2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNI</th>
<th>Ethnicities Nationalities Races</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Place Attended HS</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Gend er</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20151</td>
<td>Hispanic, Mexican-American</td>
<td>San Antonio, Texas</td>
<td>Winston-Salem, NC and Boston, MA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Political Science and Hispanic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>White rust belt American</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Pennsylvania USA</td>
<td>Pittsburgh PA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Political science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20152</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Madrid, Spain</td>
<td>Greenwich, CT</td>
<td>Spanish/English at the same time</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Caucasian, Southeast Asian, Pacific islander</td>
<td>Honolulu, Hawaii, USA</td>
<td>Mililani, HI</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Economics, computer science concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20154</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Amsterdam, Netherlands</td>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Economics-Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20155</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Montreal, Quebec, Canada</td>
<td>Montreal, Quebec, Canada</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>English and Comparative Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20156</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>River Forest, Illinois</td>
<td>Chicago, Illinois</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mjm2312</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Mathematics - Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20157</td>
<td>White, Jewish</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>Locust Valley, NY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Asian, Caucasian, Mixed</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>English, Japanese</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Art History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20159</td>
<td>hispanic</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA, USA</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA,</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201513</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Fresno, CA</td>
<td>Fresno, CA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>American, Polish</td>
<td>Arcadia, CA, USA</td>
<td>Walnut Creek, CA,</td>
<td>English, Polish</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2016-2017**
3.5.3 Student Profiles

Let me now introduce you to my study participants. I chose these nine students for a number of reasons. Across the three cohorts, I thought a selection of three from each year would be a representative sample that would allow for diversity of experience and be persuasive as evidence, but not such a large sample that there would be more writing than I could carefully analyze. Two students were invited to participate and declined, for reasons they did not share.

I chose, in the end, students who did very well in the course, students who did not do as well, and also students who grew remarkably over the course of the year. I tried to stay away from choosing my most high-achieving students, because they came into the course so involved in philosophical reading and writing and thinking that I thought it would be hard to claim whether the commentary had any effect on them.
It would be impossible to assert that I do not have a special and unique relationship with each of these nine students— that will be very clear in the profiles that follow. I also have very special and close relationships with many students I did not select. What I think is important about this closeness in selecting my nine to study is that they were willing to take the time to respond at length to interview questions for me, and be very honest in their interview responses, for which I am very grateful. I also selected students with whom I am still in regular contact after the end of their year of the course. For some, that regular contact is because they have requested that I write recommendation letters, which was also useful in that I could attempt to lean on their gratitude and goodwill when I asked for their time and energy in this study.

Although these nine students do offer up useful and insightful criticism of the course and the work at times, I do not have, here, any students who profoundly disliked the commentary or my way of running the course. This is largely because students who dislike my way of teaching CC usually transfer out after a semester and into another section, and I have excluded those students who participated for only one semester from the study at large.

I also chose a mixture of men and women, a mixture of native English speakers and non-native speakers, a mix of students born in the US and born internationally, as well as first-generation students born to immigrant parents. I also chose a mixture of majors in the humanities, in the sciences, and in engineering, as well as a mixture of student athletes and students with other extra-curricular interests. I will explain these characteristics, qualities, and particularities at length below.

2014-2015

Ben is a member of the tennis team, who was born in London but spent most of his childhood and adolescence in Santa Barbara, California. We bonded quickly over the fact that he and I went to the same elementary school, and even had some of the same teachers. We discovered this one day in office hours when my mother was in town visiting and she and he got
to chatting casually. Both of his parents are graduates of Columbia as well, and his younger sister is a current student. He speaks with a light English accent, and is a major in Political Science. He was an active participant in class, speaking up in group discussions with ease and bravery. He was often the student in class who was most willing to take a risk with a question that he thought might be viewed as dumb or controversial. He brought up a question rather consistently in the spring from Plato’s *Republic* that we had previously called “the Thrasymachus Question,” which had to do with justice being the advantage of the stronger, and so we renamed it the “Ben Question.” He always came to review sessions and office hours and has stayed in touch since finishing my course.

**Greg** is a member of the baseball team at Columbia. In the fall, he was in my class with two of his teammates, who were also his roommates, and in the spring, they brought in two more of their team to join our community. He is from Texas, and identifies quite strongly as a political conservative, which is a minority at Columbia. He began the course quietly, but as the community developed, he became much more comfortable sharing in class, both in large discussions and in small groups. He also grew comfortable with taking real intellectual risks, writing a paper in the spring that applied texts we had studied to a current case of sexual assault on our campus that was not only very high profile but also involved one of his teammates. His paper was well-thought-out, well-written, and perhaps most significantly to me, he felt comfortable challenging many of my personal views, which I do attempt to keep somewhat out of the classroom, to whatever degree that is even possible. He expressed to me in person on a number of occasions how grateful he was for my attempts to include conservative voices and perspectives in a course that is usually overwhelmed by the liberal majority at Columbia, and I have always been grateful to him for that extraordinary compliment.

**Jane** is in the engineering school (SEAS), which means she has a choice of taking this course, unlike most of the other students, for whom it is required. She grew up in Gangwon, South Korea, and is a major in Applied Mathematics. Her spoken and written English is very
good, although at times she makes mistakes with articles that reveal her as a non-native speaker. She speaks with an accent, but it is not difficult for me to understand her, and she seems to have little trouble understanding my sometimes idiomatic or idiosyncratic English. I know she uses American TV not only as a source of entertainment but also as a place to further her study of the particularities of spoken English. After her time in our course, she chose to continue working with me as a research assistant on a project I run at the Heyman Center and the Center for Justice at Columbia called the Justice in Education Initiative. The goal is to build a library of materials around the texts from our course that would aid students and teachers in studying these texts with a lens of modern issues of justice, and in particular, issues that relate to the carceral system. She has been a very valuable part of the team for almost two years, and my relationship with her is very strong.

2015-2016

Kyle is a member of the swim team at Columbia—he came into my section with 6 of his teammates, both male and female. I often teach a good number of athletes, because I like to teach in the morning, and they usually come to class straight from morning practice. Kyle is from Hawaii, and has an Asian mother and Caucasian father. One of the reasons I chose Kyle is that over the course of our year together, his work grew in extraordinary ways. In the winter, I began to notice a significant change in him in class. On the rare class when we sat in rows, he and a teammate (Matt, profiled below) always sat right in the front. His commentaries grew longer, and he began to come more frequently to office hours. He requested special permission to write his final paper on the legacy of colonialism in Hawaii, in line with some independent research he had been doing, inspired by reading Gandhi and Fanon in our class. I could not have been more proud of his work and his development as a thinker.

In the survey, in response to a Question 4 (Did your experience of CC have any effect on your thinking about the role or use of philosophy?), he described this same shift that I
noticed: “My experience in CC changed my entire view of philosophy. The crux of philosophy is, in my opinion, discussion and debate of ideas; the wrestling and tinkering of thoughts and opinions which precede revelations. However, I did not appreciate the mental tug-of-war until later in the class. It was not until early in the second semester of CC that it hit me; the extent of the realizations and understanding I had developed over that semester were directly linked to how engaged I was in our class. Realizing the source of my realizations was quite profound, and realizing that philosophy was much more active and engaging than I had previously thought was equally shocking. This began the shift of theory to action, as I began to participate more often, voice my own thoughts more often, and engage in a friendly debate or discussion gleefully. I began to shift from being in the presence of philosophic ideas, to engaging in philosophic discussions, to creating my own philosophic assumptions and ideas.”

Matt is Kyle’s roommate, and is also on the swim team. He is from Arcadia, California, a wealthy suburb of San Francisco, and is first generation Polish American. He grew up speaking Polish at home as well as English. His father is a professor at a university in the Bay Area, I believe of some kind of science. He plans on being an economics major. He is a very sweet and very quiet young man. He’s very handsome and also sweetly goofy. He and Kyle also confirmed a lesson I had begun to learn in my first year of teaching CC: having a group of athletes from the same team is actually very useful to the class community, if I can convince them to buy into the mission of the class. They know each other, they are willing to work hard, and if they feel respected, they give a lot of respect back. Matt went through a similar transition in engagement as Kyle- in the winter, they started coming early, always sitting near me, and participating much more. I know that his relationship to the subject changed greatly over the course of our time together- he said as much in a tearful goodbye after the last class. He has kept in close touch with me over the year since our class has ended, frequently coming to office hours, and finding other ways to show me how important the class was to him.
Rose came to my class already a very developed and devoted critical thinker. Her mother is Japanese and her father is Caucasian, and she was raised in NY speaking both Japanese and English. She began the class with a strong interest in exploring issues of power and justice especially as they relate to gender and race. She was a frequent visitor to office hours, and often made the most of outside opportunities that I shared with the class, such as visits to the Metropolitan Museum, and a philosophical talk I moderated on global citizenship. She is a very beautiful young woman, both inside and out, and she has a quiet bearing. She almost never spoke in class in discussions, although she would contribute in small group work, but she contributed in amazing ways in the commentary, and it was through that writing that I, and her classmates, got to know her powerful mind.

Peter came into class on the first day and proudly announced he was a member of the offensive line on the football team, although it would not have been hard to guess. He is perhaps 6'5" and built to intimidate. He is also incredibly kind, sensitive, sweet, and humble. At Columbia, there is a strange kind of stigma on the football players. Although I don’t have a lot of perspective from which to judge usual college relationships to athletes, as I went to Columbia myself, there seems to be a real cloud over student-athletes, and particularly football players. The team is infamously unsuccessful, and has been through many coaches in the last ten years. The players are used to being seen as failures by much of the student body, not only on the field but also in the classroom. The common perception seems to be that these are students who were admitted under strikingly different criteria and who don’t necessarily deserve to be there as much as other students. Peter is very aware of this stereotype, and works consistently, yet with great humor, to push back at it. He shares in class, participates in discussions, but always with wit and generosity commensurate with his physical presence. I knew I could always call on him when I needed a volunteer for anything, when I had a question that no one wanted to venture a response to. As a philosophical thinker, he grew by leaps and bounds, finding ways to make meaning in his own life through our texts. He became very passionately interested in
my work with the Center for Justice, and this semester, is one of three undergraduates in a
philosophy class I am teaching with 5 formerly incarcerated men. I could not have asked for a
better student to help create a community in that context- he is authentically and generously
friendly and welcoming, he is engaged but never in a way that excludes other students, and he
has been a real uniter in the group, building a very close community of thinkers even faster than
I could have hoped.

2016-2017

Alex is from Salt Lake City, Utah. He grew up dancing ballet, which, when we
discovered that shared passion, helped us quickly establish a rapport over our shared love of
and experience in that art. He is very handsome, and works as a model for a number of popular
clothing chains- I am often surprised to see his face staring back at me from a billboard when I
walk around the city. He is very socially aware- he worked in high school to establish gender-
neutral bathrooms at his school in Utah, and he has asked me for letters of recommendation in
applications to the ACLU and other similar organizations. He is openly gay, and has expressed
clearly the ways in which his identity as a homosexual man affects his readings of these texts
and his motivations to work for social justice. The election this past year affected him very
deeply as well- as a student who rarely asked for extensions, he needed flexibility with work
around the elections so he could attend protests, which I was happy to grant. I was surprised to
learn, in his interview responses, that he doesn’t view himself as incredibly academically gifted-
I think of him as one of my stronger and more dedicated students.

Ashley and I bonded quickly because she, like Ben, spent her high school years in my
hometown. She went to a very prestigious private boarding school that has a well-deserved
reputation for excellence. She is a very conscientious student, and also very quiet. She almost
always sits right in the front of the class, unless I have assigned the students into groups. She
will offer ideas occasionally in whole-class discussions, but is much more vocal in a small group.
Her commentaries are thoughtful and make connections to other texts and to other ideas in the world, which is very helpful to the class. She is incredibly sweet and, having noticed that I am a tea drinker, often will pick up a tea for me on her way to office hours.

Steve is an engineering student (SEAS) who was born in India, and raised in New Jersey, speaking both Hindi and English. He is a very involved student in the undergraduate community, working as a Residential Assistant and advocating powerfully for communication between the student body and the university staff, especially around issues of student stress and suicide. Early on in our course, he spoke to me in office hours about how much he valued CC because it gave him a chance to think about the ethics of the scientific and mathematical innovations about which he was learning in his engineering classes. He works incredibly hard, reading carefully, puzzling over confusions and contradictions in the texts, and pouring a lot of energy and time into his writing assignments. He is a very regular visitor in office hours, usually just to talk about an idea that has gotten stuck in his head and that he can’t quite make sense of, like how Descartes fits into the fall syllabus, or what to think about Kant. His answers to the interview questions are sometimes more critical than the other students, which I am very grateful for- he is unafraid to voice concerns and share honestly. I believe it is because he knows that I will take them in the intended spirit of assistance and improvement, and not as criticism. He is a very deep thinker, and I truly expect he will invent something important and world-changing in the area he is carving for himself between engineering and philosophy.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

I have multiple data sources comprised of a combination of teaching documentation, archival records, collections of consented student work, interview questions, and anonymous class evaluations. A large part of my analysis will be in discourse analysis of a selection of student-authored weekly commentaries, interview responses from a representative selection of students, as well as some additional notes from emails from and conversations with students
about their work. The documentation and archival records and collections of student work, which the program has granted me permission to use as data sources for my research study (see Appendix for Informed Consent Letter), will consist of: Fall 2014 - Spring 2017 Contemporary Civilization course materials, including my syllabus, class agendas, and permissioned student work. Anonymous student feedback was also requested from all students registered in the course and gathered through the official anonymous Columbia University Course Evaluation, required for all courses taught at the university.

This study involves no experimentation outside of the usual planned class activities. The effects of a particular kind of writing instruction are simply being observed, the work of the students collected and studied, and the students, at their discretion, are completing a survey that asks them to reflect on the work of the class. There is no control group.

Data is coded using my own categories, developed and refined throughout the coding process, based on Dewey’s stages of critical thinking and questioning, which I will explore and explain in more detail below. This course, despite being usually taught as a lecture-based Philosophy course, was taught aiming at the model made popular by the National Writing Project (NWP) and its founder James Gray, whereby teaching and learning follows an experiential, workshop model, with the instructor participating in almost all of the activities alongside the students, as a fellow writer (exceptions to this will be explained).

My process of analysis will involve examining the writing of 9 students. Through a chronological selection of their commentaries, I will analyze their texts using these three adapted categories from Dewey’s (201-203, 205, 215) categories:

● uses a variety of three types of Natural Resources;
● moves through Stages of Curiosity towards Theorizing; and
● employs Steps of Reflective thought in a recursive process.

The analysis will explore their attempts to channel curiosity into productive interpretive techniques, their embracing of uncertainty, their making of meaning and connections, and their
growth in the capacity to welcome and seek out productive confusion and doubt, all of which reveals growth in their interpretive abilities, distinguishing, in the words of John Dewey, “thinking from thinking-well.” Of course, as I explained at length in 3.3.1, I cannot claim that it was the sole influence of the commentary that assisted them in this growth, but by triangulating through discourse analysis of change over time in the commentaries and interview responses, I hope to be able to show a picture of supported growth in the context of this course, which is founded on the commentary.

I also will use a semi-structured, focused online survey of my nine chosen students from Fall 2014 to Spring 2017. They will be guided by the questions below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions For Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are your general feelings about your abilities in humanities classes? (English, Philosophy, etc)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What concerns do you have about your success in humanities classes? (English, Philosophy, etc)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What do you think it means to be a “Philosopher” or to “do Philosophy”?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Did your experience of CC have any effect on your thinking about the role or use of philosophy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. How do you feel about writing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Do you think the ideas from this class will stay with you beyond the course? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you think the reading and writing and thinking strategies from this class will stay with you beyond the course? Why or why not?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning About/Employing the Commentary:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about your initial thoughts when you learned about the commentary assignment for our class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What, in your words, is the purpose of the instructor’s use of the commentary? What do you think the instructor hopes that the commentary will do for you, as a student and participant in this class community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you think the commentaries influence what happens in class? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Have your feelings about the commentary changed over the course of the semester? If so, how?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Please just generally reflect on your experience using the commentary:</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breaking Down the Commentary:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do you think were/are positive aspects of the commentary, specifically related to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Encouraging careful reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Building community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Shaping the class discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do you think were/are challenges created by/in doing the commentary for our class, specifically related to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Encouraging careful reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Building community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Shaping the class discussions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.7 Essays, Excursions, and Explorations in the Montaigneian Tradition

3.7.1 Meditations on Emic Research: Inviting Self and Researcher into the Writing

Louise Rosenblatt writes about the act of reading as a transaction, a construction of a new text between the reader, the words on the page, and the meaning, or rather, a meaning which is plastic and fluid and changes from reader to reader, or even for one reader in multiple readings, because a reader is never the same reader. Living changes us, changes our hermeneutical lens from minute to minute. Interpretations and understandings do not spring, like Athena, fully formed from the father's brow, but rather, they are built and un-built, over and over, every moment of our lived experience. “Entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers. Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community generated and community maintained linguistic entities – or, more broadly speaking,
symbolic entities – that define or “constitute” the communities that generate them” (Bruffee 773).

So here, in this text, a relationship is developing. There is you, my reader; there are these black marks upon a white paper; there are the meanings you make as you read in dialogue with the words on the page; and there is me, with ideas in my mind that I am attempting to communicate through written language to you. I blend genres of Aristotelian rhetoric, moving through epideictic when I want to praise or criticize the traditions of the past, into deliberative when I want to try to convince you of the efficacy of my method and its potential to produce positive outcomes. I rely mostly on ethos and logos, but I don’t pretend to be able to omit my pathos. I also don’t pretend to the idea of total authorial agency over meaning, or the intentional fallacy, but who I am and where I am situated is important to this piece of writing, and I begin this paragraph self-consciously, knowing that I am attempting to communicate ideas about writing and teaching writing as a writer with many and changing identities, to you, a reader with many and changing identities.

Drawing on the traditions of ethnographic research, I have the responsibility to reveal, as best as I am able, the “theoretical assumptions and philosophical and political biases, as well as practical considerations” (Athanases and Heath 278) that have shaped my choices at all steps of this process, from method, to selection of site and participants, into collection and analysis of data.

I am a woman, a white woman, a white woman of Irish ancestry, thirty-three, living in New York City. I am a graduate of an elite educational institution. I am the daughter of an English teacher and a developmental psychologist. I am an older sister. I am a friend, a yogi, a dancer, a runner, a cook, a hopeful gardener. I am an adjunct instructor, a program coordinator, a preceptor. I used to be a high school English teacher. I am, at the beginning of my fourth decade, hoping to legitimize myself as a member of the academic community, publishing articles and presenting at national and international conferences. I am a writer, a reader, a
researcher of the developing writing of undergraduate and graduate students at an Ivy League institution. More than anything else, I am a teacher.

Of course, even if I were to list every part of myself that I can think of, each activity I undertake daily, each adjective anyone might use to describe me, my list would still be incomplete. There is no way for me to describe all of my selves to you, or even for me to know all of my selves, and even if I could, they change each moment, so my knowledge would be complete only for a fraction of a second. In my insecurity as a peripheral, apprentice member of the academic community, I want to appear expert, I want to communicate an identity of professor and researcher and academic in my writing, I want to have rigor in my research, to triangulate my findings; however, I also want to be as honest as I can in my presentation of myself and my work; I don’t want to rely on jargon or terminology to legitimize myself, I don’t want to set up false ideas of truth and answers and implications.

I want to write like Montaigne, to create a record of my thinking and my writing and my thinking about the writing of my students. I want to capture, in this kind of teaching and writing auto-ethnography, as much of the feeling of my classroom as I can, I want to bring as many student voices from the discussion board into this dissertation as is possible and logical. Anything I think I might know about the thinking of my students is filtered through the lens of their self-reporting. While I have the concrete data of their writing, these artifacts are not quite primary source material but rather secondary or even tertiary, as the narrations of reading experiences that my students perform in their writing are produced through and by their subjectivities. They are recording and metacognating themselves into ideas, and my subjectivities affect what I see as meaningful in their interpretations and reinterpretations of their readings.

However, I think that helping you to know more of me, of who I think I am, where I think I am coming from, is still useful. In all acts of writing, be they autobiographical or analytical or argumentative, writers encounter “dilemmas about self-representation” (Ivanic 2); how much of myself do I permit into the text? The word “permit” is misleading, perpetuating a fallacy of authorial control; I don’t have the ability to remove myself from my text. But to the degree that I am able, how much of myself do I try to remove, while acknowledging that the idea of a vanishing and objective author is a complete fallacy? Even if I remove every personal pronoun, every seeming opinion, I am still present. Who I am has shaped how I write, how I research writing, how I research identity, how I teach. My texts, much like my many selves and my teaching, are bricolages of experiences and ideas and identifications.

Then, also, who you are is important. Likely, you are, as I am, a hopeful or even fully legitimate member of the academic community. You are likely interested in composition or identity, or perhaps both. We are likely members of similar or neighboring discourse communities, with similar or overlapping contextual knowledge. Perhaps you read me as an advisor or a critic or a colleague or a student. All of those positionings affect the dialogue we are able to have through this text, and affect the meanings you make into and out of it through our transaction.

To move a bit from theory to practice, let me invite Joan Didion into our conversation. She is not a theorist or an academic, but she is a devoted practitioner of the art of writing. Not only is she herself a celebrated and prolific writer, she is also the widow of John Gregory Dunne and the sister-in-law of Dominick Dunne, so her immersion in the community of practicing writers could not be more full. In 1976, eight years after *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* made her famous, she published a piece in *The New York Review of Books* called “Why I Write.” In it, she describes her motives: “I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear… What is going on in these pictures in my mind?... Who was this narrator? Why was this narrator telling me this
story? Let me tell you one thing about why writers write: had I known the answer to any of these questions I would never have needed to write a novel” (Didion).

It seems to me that, while she may or may not not know it, she agrees with Berthoff and Montaigne in a deep and fundamental way about the power of writing to help discover and clarify thinking, “because writing is often our representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product, writing is more readily a form and source of learning than talking” (Emig 124). In her work, it seems that Didion not only makes meaning for herself, but also attempts to make meaning for us, as a culture, from events that seem shocking or senseless or inexplicable. Both for us and for her, she makes "the composing process... [into] a continuum of making meaning" (Berthoff 648). For these three women, and for me, writing not only is a catalyst to thinking, it is also a record of the thought and, when we practice it without an eraser or a delete button, a record of the process: what we wondered, what and how we were thinking, what moves we made, what we thought.

Lately, although I have not had much success, I am trying to force myself to write about the things I would rather avoid. I know that my hesitation means those are the things I have to write about, the boxes I have to open, the dark corners I have to explore. The Jungian shadow is knocking and I am pretending not to hear while at the same time realizing that I have to open the door and see what hides in the shadow. One of the lessons that I have only just begun to allow myself to learn in this commentary is that the times when I most need to write, the times when I most need to work something out, to wring out my brain and my heart and my guts, are the times when I am most resistant to writing. The periods when I’d rather do the laundry or do the dishes or go to the gym to avoid writing, to avoid that allusive peeling back, starting with that fragile papery skin, and then venturing into thicker and tighter pellucid layers, which, as I pry, release sulfurous fumes that prick at my eyes. I’m realizing that this writing practice is truly radical. Not the revolutionary, counter-culture, occupy whatever-street modern sense of the word, but the true sense- I am digging down to the roots, blindly plunging my fingers into the
soil, looking for those dark, deep water-seeking emissaries, unafraid to get grit underneath my fingernails and in the creases of my palms.

I am writing this now, writing about not writing, but maybe later I can also try to look at what I am avoiding, write about what I am trying not to see, to know, to think about, to write about. “Writing is always a way, for me, of coming to some sort of understanding that I can’t reach otherwise… It forces you to think, it forces you to work the thing through. Nothing comes to us out of the blue, very easily, you know. So if you want to understand what you’re thinking, you kind of have to work it through and write it. And the only way to work it through, for me, is to write it” (Didion 2012).

3.7.2 Meditative Metacognitions on Power and Authority, Teacher-as-Researcher

I had an interesting conversation with Sheridan Blau some time ago, prompted largely by having just read Bazerman and also having just read a bunch of papers written by my MA students. We talked about the complications of my role as an adjunct, as I am trying to figure out what I think and what I want to do and who and how I want to be in this part of my identity.

Our conversation began because I’d just finished responding to this group of papers written by my MA students, and I was telling Sheridan about how I found them to be, on the whole, markedly weaker than the previous year and quite disappointing. I was unsure how to address these weaknesses, and I came to him seeking guidance. I told him about wrestling with the irony of reading these papers about the teaching of writing that exhibited both bad writing in their writing about teaching writing and weak thinking about teaching writing, and not knowing quite how to address that.

The three previous times I had taught this class, responding to their writing was a different experience- for the most part (of course there were always exceptions) their writing was just a place for me to have a conversation in the margins with them, agreeing, interacting, suggesting further readings… at those times I found it very easy to be a Stafford-ian teacher of
writing: “My job was not to correct but to understand and participate. A student’s paper was a test for me, and I began not to put any evaluation remarks at all on a paper. My remarks were meant to show my accompaniment, sometimes my readiness to learn more. And finally I began to realize that I was just getting around to treating other people’s writings the way I had always treated my own— as exercises and revelations about the convergence of the two rivers [the times, the places, events people and the thoughts, the flow of my inner life, the reveries and impulses that never get known—perhaps even to me] in anyone’s life ” (Stafford 1986 18).

This time it was different. I found myself fighting the impulse to circle typos, to put question marks next to unclear sentences, to fix fragments and mechanical errors. I was, at first without meaning to, and then later with more intentionality, using Bazerman’s categories of writing to look at where my students were, and was surprised by what I seemed to find- he writes of the categories of writing as Secondary (mostly summary), and then College (synthesis and analysis), and then Graduate School (creation of new knowledge). It seemed to me that my students were still very much in the college category of rehashing and analyzing (both to some degree) what they had just read and then combining (to another degree) readings with other readings. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense: this year’s MA cohort is the youngest entering class in the history of TC- many more of them are coming here straight out of undergraduate than ever before. In the same way that we now often call college “post-secondary,” I’m thinking that perhaps many new graduate students are “post-undergraduates.” I suppose this young-ing of the cohort probably has something to do with the economy and with job prospects: faced with a dearth of employment opportunities, many students now move straight into graduate school from college. But even when I could see the reasons for it, I had trouble seeing how I would be able to move them forward… for a number of reasons.

I’m comfortable, in this adjunct position, with pushing my students to think about writing and teaching issues in more complex or new or different or concrete ways both in class and in their writing. I love asking them to un-think the thesis, un-learn the 5 paragraph, un-teach
themselves and their students about the tyranny of form in secondary writing instruction. However, I’m particularly uncomfortable taking on the role of teaching them how to write, even in my position of teaching them how to teach other people to write.

First, I promise that I see the irony here! Also, I’m also very hesitant to take on the role of copy editor, especially because we talk so much about helping students to think about the revision process as much more and deeper than just editing for grammar. However, these papers they turned in to me were filled with not only typographical errors, but also sentence fragments, what I saw as all kinds of stylistic mistakes, and sentences that just didn’t make sense, no matter how many times I read them. It’s an interesting problem, helping them to think about how they will teach writing on the high school level, while simultaneously struggling with how I want to teach writing, bridging the gap between what teaching writing was like for me on the high school level and what I learned there, and what it is like to teach writing on the graduate school level. I wonder whether when I tell them that their commentaries do not have to be grammatically correct, they are generalizing, incorrectly, to their more formal writing? I also wonder about how it worked out for me, moving from teaching HS to grad school, skipping over teaching undergraduates, and how it might have informed my teaching differently now, to have taught undergraduates in between.

Perhaps it is just being in graduate school, perhaps it is the nature of my research, or of my teaching, or just of the culture here, but I spend a lot of time thinking and reflecting on the weight of my role. It’s a dance of power and relationships that I dance each day, in every email, in every workshop, in every conversation with my students. I can’t help but see the potential for stumbling, the vast hole of potential tragic irony, in my role as a teacher teaching pedagogy in a pedagogically unsound way. So I agonize over my power, applying and reapplying Freire’s banking model to my own practice, typing and retyping and editing emails, painstakingly laboring over responding to essays. I hesitate to be in any way violent towards these future teachers of writing, trying to model care and kindness and freedom. I agree with Stafford:
“Imposing my will on language—or on a student, or on the citizens of a country—was not my style. I wanted to disappear as teacher, as writer, as citizen—be ‘the quiet of the land,’ as we used to designate ourselves in CO camps” (Stafford 21), but this time, with these papers, I find myself feeling the urge to impose, to shape, to correct. I am so torn.

I worry that too much instruction on their writing might seem insulting, that they might somehow doubt my right to do so. I worry about imposing myself on their texts, risking telling them that, in places, they were wrong, or at least were not right enough, that they were not correct… this is so much of what I argue against in the course and in our work together—that secondary writing instruction spends too much time telling students what to do, and then when they do it, telling them they’ve done it wrong. I’m trying so hard to practice what I’m preaching. But then Sheridan insisted that, on the contrary, it was every bit my job and my right and my place to help them be better writers by pointing out the places where they weren’t their best, and that I should be more comfortable taking charge and owning my position. Although I’m only 5 or 6 years older than the youngest of my students, and younger, often, than some of them, he insisted that I am mature enough and capable enough to take charge of the authority (although I’m uncomfortable even typing that word) that comes with my position as their instructor. I was, of course, grateful for his support and advice, but I’m still wrestling and dancing with this problem all the time.

“One issue, ‘How the hell do you teach others to write poetry?’ can be answered this way. One thing you do with others is try to encourage them, induce them and be company to them when they go ahead and follow the immediacies of experience. You tell them, ‘Don’t be inhibited, don’t be cautious, don’t be correct; just go headlong into the experience’” (Stafford 62). Although Stafford is here writing about poetry, I think it applies to all kinds of writing. But what do I do when perhaps they were too headlong, and not cautious or correct enough?
4. The Stories of the Commentary in Our Community of Practice

4.1 Introduction

My overarching research question was: What happens when an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing (Blau 2011) is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college? After three years of using the commentaries in my class, I could tell that it had been an important part of building the strong community I was so proud of, and an important part of the learning that had taken place. I had the collected work of over sixty students, who had written more than a half-million words.

It was as if I had a shelf filled with skeins of brightly colored wool, and now I just had to decide which threads to draw out and how to weave them together in order to show the changes in the students as thinkers. To continue with this metaphor of weaving, I needed to first to set up the loom, to stretch the structuring warp and weft, and then sketch out the outlines into which I will weave the many and more subtle colors of the words. What could I make of this? What tools could I use to reveal the patterns?

4.2 So What Happened? Or, Examining My First Research Question

Although learning isn’t linear, and I am not a statistician, I thought perhaps I should begin with what the larger story of all three cohorts’ commentaries might be and what questions I might ask of them. Perhaps the commentaries changed over time in quantifiable ways that might be significant, might have resonances, or might create productive questions. I set up a table of the commentaries of the students by cohort year and in various categories, hoping that I could start to see some patterns there. I have also included this chart with extensive notes regarding observable and possibly significant trends in the data in Appendix F.
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Starting on the left, the second column is their identifying code, then the number of commentaries completed in the fall, followed by the total number of words they wrote in all of their commentaries (which includes replies) for that semester. Next is their grade in the course (out of 100). Then to the right of that the same categories repeat for spring. The last two columns on the right are the approximate change in number of words from fall to spring, and the change in their grade from fall to spring, which is not a category I have for 2016-2017. The case study participants are highlighted.
(20154) | 18 | 4667 | 91 | 24 | 5852 | 90 | +100 | -1  
(20155) | 23 | 7731 | 97 | 26 | 8940 | 99 | +1200 | +2  
(20156) | 23 | 6456 | 93 | 26 | 6276 | 94 | -200 | +1  
(20157) | 26 | 8038 | 100 | 26 | 7998 | 98 | x | -2  
(Rose) | 23 | 7603 | 96 | 25 | 10976 | 97 | +3300 | +1  
(20158) | 23 | 7426 | 100 | 28 | 8235 | 97 | +800 | -3  
(20159) | 23 | 4612 | 89 | 26 | 5852 | 86 | +1200 | -3  
(201510) | 24 | 4544 | 95 | 26 | 4820 | 91 | +300 | -4  
(201511) | 23 | 5375 | 92 | 26 | 5928 | 89 | +600 | -3  
(201512) | 22 | 5988 | 86 | 29 | 7815 | 87 | +2000 | +1  
(201513) | 22 | 5306 | 92 | 23 | 6149 | 83 | +800 | -9  
(Matt) | 23 | 6218 | 93 | 26 | 6517 | 92 | +300 | -1  

2016-2017

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(20161) | 24 | 5554 | 90 |
(20162) | 27 | 15006 | 99 |
(20163) | 24 | 10290 | 96 |
(20164) | 23 | 6832 | 94 |
(20165) | 23 | 5356 | 87 |
(20166) | 23 | 7803 | 96 |
(20167) | 25 | 5307 | 84 |
(20168) | 32 | 11865 | 99 |
(Steve) | 26 | 10446 | 97 |
(20169) | 24 | 7055 | 92 |
(201610) | 20 | 4864 | 78 |
(Alex) | 25 | 7432 | 99 |
(201611) | 23 | 8328 | 96 |
(201612) | 21 | 6170 | 90 |
(201613) | 22 | 6947 | 89 |
4.2.1 Did Engagement Lead to Success? Or, Examining My First Sub-Question

One of the first things that I noticed was that there seemed to be some connection between how many words they wrote in the commentaries and how they did in the class, which connects to my first sub-question: does greater engagement in the practice of the commentaries connect to success in the course?

In terms of connections between engagement in the commentaries and their grades, of course the number of commentaries they wrote has influence over their grade in the class, because they are graded for completing the full number. However, the commentaries are never graded on a scale: they are just done or not. So perhaps the students who are writing more in the commentaries are more engaged in the rest of the class as well? Although I can’t know much about the many contributing factors, nor can I speculate usefully about whether the engagement of the commentary or the success came first, there does seem to be some echoing resonance between these areas of flourishing.

In 2014-2015, in both fall and spring, two of the three students who wrote the fewest number of words both also had relatively low grades in the course, and all three of the students who wrote the most words had the highest grades in the course. In 2015-2016, the pattern wasn’t as strong, but was still present: the students who wrote the most words had high scores in the course and students who did not produce as much writing did not do as well. Breaking this pattern, Peter, from my study group, wrote very little in both fall and spring but still did well.

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in the course. Kyle and Peter’s numbers both seem to tell an interesting story, which I will return to in a few paragraphs. In 2016-2017, although I only have data from the fall, this pattern appears as well. Two of the three students who wrote the fewest words also had very low grades, and all three students who wrote the most words had very high grades in the course.  

Another consistent trend, apparent in 2014-2015, but not particularly in 2015-2016, and something I that I cannot assess in 2016-2017 because I only have data from the fall, is that almost all students wrote fewer words in the spring than in the fall across a similar number of commentaries without a significant change in their course grade. There are some students where this trend is significant, in that they wrote far fewer words while their grade did not change at all: 20143 wrote 3,000 fewer words, 20146 wrote 2,500 fewer words, 20149 was down 2,700 words, 201412 was down 3,000, and 201414 was down 1,000. This trend was also apparent in two of the three case studies from that year, with Ben down 2,200, but his grade did change, going down from a 95 to a 91, and Greg down 1,300 words, and his grade also went from a 95 to a 94. Jane was one student who had very little change in either category: down 200 words and up one percentage point.

This makes me wonder if the students get more efficient, in a way, at the writing-as-thinking process over time. Perhaps they are able to question and to pause and to move in fewer words; their thinking and writing is more streamlined. I wonder whether it also could be that as they became more comfortable with the commentaries and recognized that they were really writing for each other to build knowledge and not to impress me, they felt less pressure to demonstrate their learning with longer commentaries? This seems especially interesting considering the fact that their mental library of texts from which they draw increases over the year, which I would have expected would make for longer commentaries, but this was not the


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case. This pattern did not seem to hold in 2015-2016, with most students moving up or down a few hundred words and a few grade percentages without the same connections.

Now I will return to the story that seems to be suggested in Peter and Kyle’s numbers. The numbers of both students underwent an interesting shift, which seems to point to a larger change that both they and I noticed. Between fall and spring, Peter wrote 1,300 more words and his grade went from a 92 to a 95. In the same period, Kyle wrote 1,200 more words and went from an 87 to a 93. Kyle’s grade change is the largest growth by far- the next largest grade improvement was three percentage points while his is six. Kyle’s numbers seem to tell a story of a student who wrote more regular commentaries, each with more words, and did significantly better in the class. I also remember noticing that, as I said in his profile in 3.5.3, he came earlier to class, sat in the front more, and participated more. I pulled him aside one day after class to compliment him on this change and he told me that he just felt much more engaged, more interested, and all of his work reflected that.

Kyle’s interview responses also reflected this shift: “It was not until early in the second semester of CC that it hit me; the extent of the realizations and understanding I had developed over that semester were directly linked to how engaged I was in our class… I began to participate more often, voice my own thoughts more often, and engage in a friendly debate or discussion gleefully. I began to shift from being in the presence of philosophic ideas, to engaging in philosophic discussions, to creating my own philosophic assumptions and ideas.”

Now that the numbers have taken me into a closer focus on the writing of Kyle and Peter, let me shift into closer examination of the writing of all of my study students.

**4.3 Did Their Writing Show Philosophical Thinking? Or, Exploring My Second Sub-Question**

The second sub-question within my larger question of “What happens?” was: Does the writing of the students show evidence of philosophical thought? In my many readings and
rereadings, interpretations, misinterpretations, and missed- interpretations of their
commentaries, I looked for patterns and signature phrases, looked for themes and ideas and
threads that they seemed to return to, and also applied, through a complicated color-coded
system, the Dewey-based stages of reflective thought I had developed47.

I expected to be able to see some provisional answers to this in a discourse analysis of
the commentaries of my chosen students. I expected that this body of commentaries, practiced
so regularly and over such a long period of time, would show some sort of trending changes
over time. Although I believe writing and thinking are not linear, I thought that perhaps the
students might rely more on earlier stages in early commentaries, more summary and less
analysis, more broad questions and less directed hypotheses  I thought that perhaps I might see
a growth in their ability to pause and circle back to question their own claims, or that claims
might be better (or more frequently) supported by analysis in their later commentaries. That,
however, was not exactly what I found.

4.3.1 An Attempt at Discourse Analysis: A Half-Chapter Where I Learn From Failure

What began to emerge for me was mostly just individual and interesting differences
more than common patterns. For me, as a reader, as their teacher, as a member of this
community of practice, and as a writer familiar with these works and ideas, the most interesting

47 To briefly summarize them again:

**Pause:** This is marked in ORANGE. I might also call this a “Notice” or a kind of non-judging observation (like labeling something
“interesting”). This stage of reflective thinking is characterized by what Dewey calls a forked road. It gives a thinker a reason to
pause, step back, climb a tree, and begin to make decisions about how to move forward. I have combined it with Dewey’s first two
stages of curiosity: What (or Identifying) and Why (or Purpose/Function), which involves reaching out to others for general
information.

**Survey:** This is marked in BLUE. This stage of thinking is a kind of summary of existing knowledge, in order to better situate or
understand the question that has created the Pause. It involves ordering of thought, and is a kind of survey of the landscape from
up in the tree that one climbed at the fork in the road of thought.

**Move:** This is marked in GREEN. This is when the thinker makes a decision and moves forward in a direction of thought. It may
involve analysis or synthesis, a connection or application or ideas, or an attempt to resolve a seeming contradiction.

**Hypothesis/Provisional Claim:** This is marked in PINK. This may be a kind of thesis. It can be posed as a question, it can involve
an acknowledgment of the provisional nature of the claim. It may be a thinker further explaining his questions or venturing toward
new ideas. I have connected this with Dewey’s third stage of curiosity, the How (or Theorizing/Categorizing) stage, because these
informed questions, which arise out of deep thinking, are a sign of growing understanding and generative confusion, especially
when accompanied, on either side, by further Moves.
and moving part of the ideas was that I felt like I was right back in conversation with these students as people.

This is not to say there were not common patterns. There certainly were trends: pauses often come at the beginning of a commentary, in place of what might usually be a “thesis,” or at the beginning of a new paragraph, where they begin to explore a new question. Claims often appear throughout, usually preceded and followed by surveying and moving, which the student is using to support, explore, and explain claims.

What seemed most interesting, however, aside from these commonalities, was in fact the differences in their voices, in their roles and identities as commenters in our community. As I read, I nodded, I laughed, I sometimes exclaimed or gestured or reread a sentence aloud. Their voices, their particular ways of phrasing and thinking, their kinds of questions, their jokes and slang, reminded me that they are messy, funny, and wonderful people: Kyle sometimes starts a commentary with “What’s good?” and Peter almost always closes with his initials as a signature, and both of them often use puns to play with the ideas and the language of the texts. This vibrancy of their responses meant that attempting to do a kind of detached discourse analysis of their writing as thinking was not the story I wanted to tell. These stories, as I see them, will make up the body of the next section. But before I move away from my Dewey-based stages of reflective thought, I want to look at what I learned in trying to apply them.

What was useful about my attempt to apply these stages of reflective thought to the students’ commentaries was that performing this kind of analysis reminded me that, even though both the students and I were aware of their growth (and this will be more clear in the section with their interviews), this exercise in analysis really confirmed the importance of seeing thinking as inherently cyclical, and that this writing as thinking method provides good transparency into the mind of the writer-thinker to show this recursive process, very much in line with what Emig and Dewey and Montaigne have to say about the iterative and cyclical nature of thinking and writing. Students do not move through these four stages chronologically and uni-
directionally within one commentary, but also they do not move though these four stages differently over time. It is a recursive process, whereby students make moves into one or another category, and then repeat, perhaps make a third move, then repeat.

To briefly return to Janet Emig’s categories of writing, the students were making school writing (which is usually more extensive) into reflexive writing, using this evolving genre of the commentary. As I outlined in more detail in 2.3.4, Emig divides all writing into two modes: reflexive and extensive. Reflexive writing is “the mode that focuses upon the writer’s thoughts and feelings concerning his experiences; the chief audience is the writer himself… the style is tentative, personal, and exploratory” and extensive writing is “the mode that focuses upon the writer’s conveying a message or a communication to another… the style is assured, impersonal and often reportorial” (Emig 4). She observes that writing in schools tends to be primarily extensive writing, while more self-sponsored writing is usually reflexive. According to Emig, “reflexive [writing]… is a longer process with more portions; students writing reflexively often engage in quite long prewriting activities; they reformulate more; starting and stopping… and the aesthetic contemplation of their own product of writing sometimes occurs” (Emig 4). Emig found that when students are writing in self-sponsored ways, and writing to investigate, to find out what they think, to reflect, they automatically spend more time on the parts of the writing process that encourage thinking.

4.3.2 The Stories of Their Philosophical Thinking in Writing

Let me reintroduce you to my students, beyond the earlier profiles (3.5.3). These are the stories in and of my students’ commentaries.

2014-2015

Ben is the tennis player who was born in London but grew up in California. He speaks with a light English accent, and is a major in Political Science. He was an active participant in class, speaking up in group discussions, and was often the student in class who was most
willing to take a risk with a question that he thought might be viewed as dumb or controversial. He was also the originator of our naming of “the Thrasymachus Question,” which had to do with justice being the advantage of the stronger: he brought it up a lot and so we renamed it the “Ben Question.”

His commentaries are in the lower middle of the group in terms of length (he averages 240 words; his longest was 362 and shortest was 116). He often structures his commentaries as a very clear account of a change in his thinking, beginning with a phrase like “At first I thought” and then coming to another idea or branch of thought with the phrase “The question is.” He frequently orients and contextualizes his ideas by paraphrasing and summarizing the arguments of others or what was said in class. He seems comfortable with situating himself in a conversation and making claims about his emerging ideas. He also, and not in a false way, acknowledges a lack of clarity in his writing and thinking, and often attributes it to his lack of expertise, although he doesn’t use it as an excuse not to write or think carefully and specifically.

In a commentary in response to Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, he began by honestly describing his struggle, that he felt “like this was probably the hardest section of the reading… I thought maybe if I tried to ask some questions I would get some clarifications. I found Nietzsche’s arguments on the origins of goodness to be quite confusing.” He goes on to summarize his understanding of some of Nietzsche’s argument, which uses a metaphor of birds and lambs. Then, he explains, “(and this is where I get confused), Nietzsche continues by explaining that ‘the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything.’ He uses grammar as an example to prove that in certain situations, we tend to think of actions only in regard to the subject. So does this mean that our actions are separate from ourselves? So in the case of the birds of prey and lambs, does the action of killing necessarily make the bird not good?” (2 April / Bird of Prey, Lambs, Grammar, Good.)

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48 I have included, as a hopefully-manageable supplement, Ben’s complete commentaries as Appendix K. His are, I think, fairly representative, and can serve as an example of what many of the commentaries are often like.

49 In this section I am italicizing my excerpts from the students’ commentaries because, between my quoting of them and their quoting of the texts, I worried that it might be difficult to determine what writing belongs to which interlocutors.
This commentary is a useful demonstration of many of his techniques, both in class discussions and in our online conversation. He allows himself to be vulnerable in his questions and also in his provisional, confused interpretations. He focuses on a specific element of the text, either an idea or a particular quotation, and outlines his thinking, both where he seems to understand and where that understanding begins to break down. He also often ends with questions that are perhaps both for himself, as a reminder and record of his continuing questions, and for classmates, as an invitation for response.

What happened for Ben when he participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Ben was the brave and vulnerable leader. He welcomed others into the practice by demonstrating his own vulnerabilities in reading and interpreting, both in class and in the commentaries, and always with the sense of a smile.

Greg is a member of the baseball team, grew up in Texas, and identifies quite strongly as a political conservative, which is a minority at Columbia. He began the course quietly, but as the community developed, he became much more comfortable sharing in class, taking intellectual risks, in large discussions, in small groups, and in his writing.

His commentaries are on the shorter side, averaging 210 words, with his longest at 283 and his shortest at 165. He often tracks progress in his thinking with the phrase “I began to think,” alerting readers and perhaps also himself that his thinking was evolving towards a provisional claim or hypothesis. He almost always writes just one paragraph that begins with “It is interesting.” This seems to me perhaps to be a less intellectually vulnerable way of pointing out something that confuses him, or a way of zooming in on a passage without making a judgment about it.

I know he worried a lot at the beginning of our time together about making politically conservative statements that might draw the ire of other students on our overwhelmingly-liberal
campus, and perhaps this is part of that. He does, though, in his later commentaries, begin to use phrases such as “I believe,” (in his earlier commentaries he uses the word “believe” to refer to the ideas of philosophers, and rarely to his own ideas) but he often brackets them with a safer and somewhat ironic statement like “being the grand politician that I am.” In this same vein of the intellectual insulation of casual language or self-deprecation, he often closes with a casual phrase like “If Smith were here today I believe he would say to the world, quite frankly, ‘I told ya so’” (17 February / Re: Adam Smith’s Stance on the Division of Labour Today).

What happened for Greg when he participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Greg was a reluctant and concerned conservative who grew in confidence in his own ability to interpret and in the contributions he could make to the growing knowledge of the class.

**Jane** is from South Korea and is in the engineering school (SEAS) in Applied Mathematics. Although not a native speaker, her spoken and written English is very good: she speaks with an accent, but it is not difficult for me to understand her, and she seems to have little trouble understanding the sometimes idiomatic or idiosyncratic English of her classmates, me included.

Her commentaries averaged 250 words, with her longest at 407 and her shortest at 168. She often uses a phrase such as “I couldn’t help but think” to show the connections between her ideas about the text and the world around us. Her commentaries often move very clearly from one idea to another, which I think might be the result of her engineering training. Also, when a philosopher moves logically and analytically she often notes her appreciation and admiration of that clarity. She closed a post on the Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali with “Overall, I really liked the tone of this essay...Ghazali sounds like a very well organized science professor” (10/16 / Re: al-Ghazali’s Muslim Philosophy). In line with the same kind of logical, almost mathematical thinking, she did not appreciate that Gandhi’s evidence seemed “weak, because [his reasoning]
depended heavily on anecdotes and hypothetical situation (especially his let-the-robber-steal example)” (28 April / Re: Ghandi expectations).

Often her connections are to pop culture (she particularly loved being able to notice the ideas of CC philosophers in the show *Lost*), which I appreciated and supported and often modeled myself in class as a way of confirming their intellectual and academic legitimacy in our community of practice: “I think [Wollstonecraft] was very insightful because such romantic love does not necessarily sounds bad, but limiting women as mere romantic creatures is definitely problematic. (I cannot help but think of a line from Beyonce’s Flawless: ‘I am expected to aspire to marriage/ I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support, but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same?’)” (3 March / Re: What's Love? (Got to do with it.)).

Many of her references were to pop culture because she uses American TV and music not only as a source of entertainment and as a source for cultural knowledge but also as a place to further her study of the particularities of spoken English, which was clearly a successful strategy, considering her facility in reading, writing, speaking, and thinking about complex and difficult philosophical texts in a language that was not her mother tongue.

What happened for Jane when she participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Jane was a nervous English-learning engineer who found a comfortable philosophical voice and realized, through the practice, that Beyonce and Wollstonecraft have a lot in common.

2015-2016

Kyle is a member of the swim team at Columbia. He grew up in Hawaii, in a multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial household. He began the course not particularly

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50 This, and all other errors, are in the original and preserved here.
engaged with the discussions in class, but grew extraordinarily as a thinker over the year we spent together, a change he attributes to growing interest in and connection to the material, which shows in his interview responses (in the next section) and in his commentaries: “As this is my last official commentary with all of you, I want to extend my thanks. You all have made this year wonderful and insightful; it was perhaps the best class I’ve ever had and most enlightening year that I’ve had yet. I hope you all feel the same and we all walk away from this remembering our own little Kallipolis for a long time” (28 April / Aspiring mayor Major).

His commentaries had an average length of 301 words, the longest at 498 and the shortest at 145. He often uses the format I offer to them in the first day of class, beginning with “I wonder” and moving to “this makes me think,” which seems to work well for him as a way of tracking his changes in thinking for himself and as a way of telegraphing changes for his readers as well.

He freely moves between philosophical terms and a digital millennial vernacular. His commentaries often open with “Yo” or “What’s up,” which is a convention I appreciate and encourage, as it seems to help merge the virtual board with the in-person community, still allowing them to still speak to each other through the page. He also uses texting slang, such as “tldr” (which stands for “too long, didn’t read” and is usually appended to a long response by the original writer, and followed by a brief summary): “I understand this is a jumbled post, I am guilty of Male entitlement and haven’t given it as much thought as I should. BUT, I am not anti-feminism, to be clear. tldr: feminism is good, need education of equality at a young age” (26 April / Re: Half the Sky).

As the year goes on, his later posts have joking titles and puns that show a comfort with the material and a genuine engagement in the community of the course. His last commentary, written on Orwell’s Animal Farm, was titled: “28 April / Aspiring mayor Major’s majorly majestic, moving monologue marring the men of Manor for mass management of manipulated mammals (and birds)” and his first sentence was: “Really glad I saved the title in a different tab. This one
closed and I lost my post _.” He often closes a commentary with a series of sincere questions that invite (and frequently receive) extensive and careful replies. His tone is almost always self-effacing and humorous and acknowledges the unformed nature of thinking in his work, while also making important claims and offering thoughtful interpretations.

What happened for Kyle when he participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Kyle came in not sure he cared about Philosophy and left realizing that philosophical thinking could be a very meaningful experience in his life, and also that he had the power to deeply influence the thinking of his classmates and teammates.

For me, what also stands out most about Kyle’s commentaries is his tone, which I often praised and complimented in class. I think it shows a wonderful balance between authentically and honestly engaging with the abstract ideas of the course and a real desire to engage and delight his readers while writing in his own playful voice, rather than putting on a kind of Engfish (Macrorie). So let me step into a digression here for a moment, in terms of the students’ understanding of the power of tone to disguise shallow thinking.

* * * * *

I want to take a moment and offer an artifact as an example of student awareness of Engfish, and the students’ resentment of its prevalence on required discussion boards for university classes. Many classes at Columbia, and many classes at universities all over the world, require discussion board posting as a regular part of the course. When I was a first-year student at Columbia in fall of 2001, we had a discussion board posting requirement for a writing course I took (the same course in which I met James, the friend who is working on a PhD in Philosophy at Harvard and who I have mentioned before). I dreaded those postings, not feeling like I had much to say, not sure how to say it, whether to pose as expert or write as my vulnerable self, or to write for the professor or for my colleagues. I am sure that in the last 15 years these conflicts have become ever more complex and pressing for students.
There is a group on Facebook called “Columbia Buy Sell Memes” that has a membership of 21,000 students, as of this writing. The group is a place where Columbia students post photos and short videos from the internet with clever captions and tags that express truths about life at Columbia, as they see it. It is very occasionally cruel or obscene, but on the whole is funny, insightful, and seems to work as a kind of therapeutic outlet for students talking about the difficulties and joys of being students with other students.

The group is run by students, and new members must be approved. I asked a former student of mine, who is an administrator for the group, to add me because I am interested in seeing the kinds of internet writing students do when they aren’t being required to do it for a class. Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, they talk a lot about their required internet writing in this chosen internet group. Recently, a participant of the group posted a meme, with the caption “Higher Education.” It was originally a public tweet (which is why I haven’t taken off the originator’s name), but it was reposted in this Facebook group and “liked” 564 times (including by Kyle, Matt, and a number of other current and former students of mine) and “commented” on over 40 times.

One comment read, brilliantly and satirically: “Wow Jim,
I totally agree, and it's a very insightful solution. On the other hand, you can divide each 2 into two 1's, and add those 1's 4 times over to get the same solution (1+1+1+1=4). It's really amazing how mathematics affords us the creativity to take different approaches to the same problem, and still allow us to come to one solution." Imfaooinoootoooonoo62.

I include this here just as a way to point out the awareness the students have of the posturing and use of English on discussion boards. Even though this post and the subsequent comments are very much in a casual student tone, they are simultaneously parodying the rampant use, in college classes and on college discussion boards, of fancy words in place of simple and more available ones, and strange formal sounding syntactic structures in place of conversational syntax, particularly to dress up obvious or simple statements and claims about ideas and texts.

* * *

To return now to their stories…

**Rose** came to my class already a very developed and devoted critical thinker. Her mother is Japanese and her father is Caucasian, and she was raised in NY speaking both Japanese and English. She almost never spoke in class in discussions, although she would contribute in small group work, so the majority of her contributions to the course, and the place where her voice was clear and influential, was in the commentaries.

She wrote longer commentaries, although not the longest of any students, with an average length of 368. Her longest (a final commentary on *Animal Farm*) was 1002 words, and her shortest was 249, which is an average length for many of her classmates. She writes more formally, making nuanced connections to texts from the course in ways that show her careful reading and thinking: “Finally, at the end of his Interpretation of Dreams, he reveals a sentiment that seems also Socratic... he does not claim to have found the complete truth, for there is always a larger truth that cannot be wholly and at once understood. This also reminds one of

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52 “Imfao” is a more emphatic version of the abbreviation “lol” (laughing out loud). It stands for “laughing my f**king a** off.”
the half-truths concept raised in Kierkegaard. But Freud deviates from the Cartesian and
Nietszchean pursuit of truth and the Kierkegaardian notion of knowledge… Ultimately, Feud [sic]
differs greatly from the other thinkers because his pursuits seem grounded in an intimately
personal and individualistic sphere, not a societal or communal affair” (12 April / Re: Darwin and
Smith).

She also makes connections to other canonical texts outside the scope of our class, but
ones that her classmates are potentially familiar with, including connections to works of art from
the required Masterpieces of Western Art course that all Columbia students take. She often
focuses on literary techniques, such as form and tone, or a particular metaphor.

Rose’s commentaries are long and complex, and I worried that because of that, and
because she rarely spoke in class, her colleagues would not read and respond to her
commentaries as readily as others. She did, despite my fears, get some substantive replies and
begin conversations that were lively and in depth, although not every time. Usually a student
post would get perhaps one or two replies, and a very long conversation would receive four or
five. She often had at least one reply, and sometimes two or three. But sometimes she didn’t get
any replies, and so those unanswered commentaries were often ones I used in class,
paraphrasing them or offering her a chance to paraphrase herself as a way of getting into a
discussion that would function as a kind of reply. I didn’t do this with all students, but certainly
with a few whose ideas I worried were not being heard and deserved to have voice in class.

What happened for Rose when she participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship
approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Rose found a
way to powerfully shape the class discussions without having to say anything. She found that
her classmates and her teacher valued her voice and her ideas and that speaking onto the page
was a legitimate way to write for school.
Peter is an offensive lineman on the football team, a kind and sensitive friend, a politically engaged citizen, and a very smartly funny man. He shares in class, participates in discussions, always with wit and generosity as he works in subtle and joyful ways to counter stereotypes of football players as poor or lazy students. I knew I could always call on him when I needed a volunteer for anything, and when I had a question that no one wanted to venture a response to. As a philosophical thinker, he grew by leaps and bounds, finding ways to connect these texts to his world and his ways of making change in it.

He doesn’t write particularly long commentaries, averaging 173 words, with a longest of 299, and a shortest of 82. He writes very casually, often opening with “Yo [name].” He also makes vaguely positive assessments about the ideas of his colleagues, saying, “You raise some good points,” and about the work of the philosophers, sometimes closing with “Cool stuff.” It seems like he uses these statements as a safe way for him indicate engagement, interest, and support, without taking big intellectual risks. He also often ends broadly, inviting response with the word “Thoughts?” and signing “PD.”

He has, for over a year, held an internship position with Governor Cuomo’s office, and sees himself as working very deliberately towards a career in politics. The kinds of connections he makes in his commentaries are most frequently political, seeing the ideas of the philosophers at work in our world today. In a post about MLK’s Letter from Birmingham, he writes that King “demonstrates… his understanding of how people view him. He understands that being violent will be counterproductive to his cause… This is a current trend also, I think, for President Obama. His calm demeanor in many instances is frustrating to his supporters, as they want to see him get fired up and yell at his opponents, but he does a good job remaining calm, even as he faces greater opposition from the media and congress than any president in recent memory. He knows that if he were to lash out, even once, the media would jump on him, and he would be deemed "the angry black president." He, as Dr. King did, understands the microscope he is under, and handles it perfectly” (19 April / Re: King’s Letter- So Many Connections).
These ways of legitimately participating in the digital political and philosophical conversation through humor and fluid, informal diction are very much like the way he participates aloud in class discussions: he is present and interested, making relevant and important claims, but he is never the loudest voice speaking at greatest length or using complex, and potentially exclusionary, vocabulary. Just as in class, his commentaries often include clever and textually-related jokes: he ends a Kant post, in which he communicates his struggles with the abstract a priori claims of the philosopher, with “I KANT EVEN”.

What happened for Peter when he participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Peter was a source of laughter and security, as well as knowledge. He is a deep thinker who never makes anyone else feel shallow.

2016-2017

Alex is from Salt Lake City, Utah. He is socially aware- he worked in high school to establish gender-neutral bathrooms at his school in Utah, and he has asked me for letters of recommendation in applications to the ACLU and other similar organizations, like the Housing Works Organization in New York City. He was open about how his homosexuality influences his politics in an interview with the student newspaper, and although he hasn’t explicitly made that connection aloud in class or in a commentary, he is very clear about those influences in his social justice readings of our philosophical texts. I think of him as one of my stronger and more dedicated students.

His commentaries fall about in the middle of the range of length, averaging 289 words, with a longest of 325, and a shortest of 171. He focuses particularly on ideas that trouble him, in moral and ethical ways, entering into careful conversations with many of his colleagues. He often begins surveys and summaries with “According to” and then takes up an issue in the current text, being careful to make distinctions between the ideas of the philosophers and his
own ideas with signals like "In my own opinion..." He also often brings class discussions back up in his commentaries, weaving together many threads of conversation into a single post. Frequently he ends with a number of specific questions, much like Ben does, as both a record of his own questions for himself and as a way of inviting interlocutors into the dialogue.

I know that he sees the commentary as a particularly useful tool for both working through his political thinking and as a place to show that evolving thinking. When he was working on an application for a summer teaching program at Columbia, where undergraduates can work as TAs for high school students taking courses in philosophy, he chose to use an early commentary as his writing sample. We revised it together, and it closed with a sentence that shows, I think, both his distinctive voice and his dedication to philosophical thinking as a tool for social justice: “To assume that police and other officials are capable of ruling without succumbing to their own interests—whether they are influenced by a desire for power, their own fears, or racism—is ludicrous. We must fight Aristotle’s defense of officials with his own conviction to the power of rational principle. We must rationally enforce justice where it is due, for it is the only way to keep innocent black men from being murdered at the hands of police.”

What happened for Alex when he participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Alex spoke out for silenced voices, led groups, and carefully wove together his own ideas with class discussions, philosophical principles, and the voices of other students.

Ashley was born in South Korea but grew up in Southern California. I never would have known she wasn’t a native English speaker if she hadn’t told me. She is a very conscientious student and also very quiet. She almost always sits right in the front of the class, unless I have assigned the students into groups. She will offer ideas occasionally in whole-class discussions but is much more vocal in a small group.
She wrote longer commentaries, with an average of 476: her longest was 552, and her shortest was 295. Her commentaries are thoughtful and make connections to other texts and to other ideas in the world, which is very helpful to the class. She often begins her writings carefully laying out her own confusion, giving readers a portrait of her thinking with phrases like “I think,” “I believe,” “first... second,” and “let’s assume.” She offers some of the ways she has tried to solve a particular intellectual puzzle, very much in the model of Socrates’ hypothesizing and testing through application.

Her responses to other students are often constructed in this same way, balancing tentative resolutions she has found in the text with disclosures of her own vulnerability and the provisional nature of her thoughts as a response to someone else’s confusion. In a commentary on Hobbes, she offers that Hobbes “states that a ruler who wants to govern a nation should be able to understand the entire mankind. (I am still unsure whether the English philosopher believes this perfect rulership to be attainable).”

Almost every commentary she writes is composed with her readers in mind, using many clearly cited quotations, and often offering links from other resources that helped her understand. She also often focuses very closely on terms or particular words, which she connects to other philosophers outside the scope of our course, such as Spinoza, Heidegger, and Hume, while also providing quotations and summaries so that her classmates are not excluded by a lack of familiarity: “Vitoria proposes that consulting experts is the best way to decide whether an action is lawful or unlawful. I regard this advice to be very Humean. In his writing called “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume claims that the best way to understand the world of aesthetics is through experts that have discriminating qualities. Both Vitoria and Hume suggest that there are different levels of opinions; they believe that some opinions matter more than others” (17 November New World 1 / Truth & Opinion & Sin).

What happened for Ashley when she participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Ashley found
a less formal way to talk and write about Philosophy, which also supported her sense of herself as someone who can think and write in English as well as a native speaker.

**Steve** is an engineering student (SEAS) who was born in India and raised in New Jersey, speaking both Hindi and English. He works incredibly hard, reading carefully, puzzling over confusions and contradictions in the texts, and pouring a lot of energy and time into his writing assignments.

Steve writes very consistent commentaries, averaging 394, with the longest at 408 and the shortest at 342. He is very clear in his commentaries about his role in the transactional relationship of constructing meaning in texts, starting many sentences with phrases like “I interpret,” “I think,” “I believe,” “I struggle,” and “I understand.” He often makes connections to issues and ideas in the STEM field, but it is clear that his conception of philosophy is very broad: he makes varied textual connections to articles and videos from NPR, TED, movies, an Abraham Lincoln speech, and lyrics from the musical *Hamilton*. He also uses the commentary as a place to share resources: he built a YouTube playlist as a way to review for the midterm, which he shared with the class.

What happened for Steve when he participated in an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing? In our community of practice, Steve was a leader who modeled careful thinking. He also found a place where he can be both an engineer and a philosopher, and neither of those identities has to invalidate the other.

Now, I’m going to pause Steve’s story here for a moment to step back from the stories I saw in my students’ commentaries to look at what provisional answers those stories seem to suggest.
4.3.3 What Do The Stories Reveal? Or, A Cross-Case Analysis

So, what did happen when an inquiry-based apprenticeship approach to teaching academic reading and writing (Blau 2011) is employed in a required sophomore-level interdisciplinary humanities course in a highly selective college? Did greater engagement in the practice of the commentaries connect to success in the course? Did the writing of the students show evidence of philosophical thought? I’m going to work through a kind of cross-case analysis of these stories, noting patterns of similarity and difference in themes and effects.

What seems to have happened in my classes, through the regular practice of the commentary, is that students grew more and more comfortable with their interpretive abilities, making assertions and asking questions of each other rather than waiting for me to tell them what the “right” interpretation might be. The writers developed in a direction that indicates that they were more inclined to ask questions, to wonder about claims, to interrogate texts and their own responses, and to participate in ongoing critical and hermeneutic inquiries. Although I was never explicit about asking students to include particular kinds of reflective thinking in their writing, they seem to be naturally reformulating, starting, stopping, contemplating both the process of thinking-in-writing and the product of their writing-as-thinking, pausing, moving, surveying and meditating, while also contributing to the growth of knowledge in our school community of practice. Their commentaries became beautiful and useful combinations of many of the important qualities of extensive and reflexive writing in one.

They also used the commentaries as a place of play, to make jokes with the texts, and puns. They used the commentaries as a casual and easy place to show the ways in which what they read got into their cells: they shared articles, shared observations on how our texts connect to the world through song lyrics and movie references, and how they saw these ideas cropping up in other classes and in conversations with other students.

53 This incredibly broad term is defined more clearly in 1.7.1, 1.7.2, and 3.3.3.
4.4 Are They Becoming Philosophers? Or, Taking Up My Second Question

In John Dewey’s *School and Society Lectures* of 1899, he described schools as “embryo communities” (174), “institution[s] in which the child is, for the time…a member of a community life in which he feels that he participates, and to which he contributes” (88). For me, this is what I hope to make of a class- a community of practice where students come together as thinkers, building meaning that they then take out into the world and use in their lives. It was this community that I hoped to investigate in my second research question: Do students experience or perceive their participation in the assignment as leading them to be active contributors to the philosophical inquiries that are the focus of our class?

In February of 2017, seeking to find another way to examine this question of the students’ understandings of the effects of the commentary on the community, I sent out a set of interview questions to my chosen participants. I asked them to take time and answer with as much honesty and in as much length as they could. I sent the questions out while working from a friend’s couch in Aspen on a long weekend trip and, while everyone else skied, I sat, watching the snow fall outside, and read their responses. I was moved to tears, moved to laughter, and I missed them, I loved them, and I thought carefully about my teaching and my relationships with my wonderful students and, more than anything, I couldn’t wait to share their words in this dissertation and wherever this work may go after this dissertation.

In deciding how to present the richness of their responses here, as I read and reread, I began to realize that the most powerful way to share this would be to find some way to let them speak for themselves. With Plato as my inspiration, I thought I might set it up as if my students are here sitting around a table, or perhaps even sitting in the garden of Cephalus, like Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Republic*, talking about one issue at a time, agreeing and disagreeing, moving forward and circling back.
4.5 A Socratic Dialogue Among Students

In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates argues, with warlike Polemarchus, wealthy Cephalus, volatile Thrasymachus, opportunistic Glaucon, and imaginative Adeimantus, about the definition of justice and what the possible benefits might be of a life centered in the practice of justice. Their conversation ends in Book X with Socrates constructing *The Myth of Er*, an imaginary city where he proves his assertion of the immortality of the soul, and the fact that the choices we make in our earthly lives have consequences into eternity. He closes the didactic conversation telling Glaucon that “if we are persuaded by me, we’ll believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and every good, and we’ll always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with reason in every way... [and] we’ll receive our rewards. Hence, both in this life and on the thousand-year journey we’ve described, we’ll do well and be happy” (621c-d).

What, then, are the rewards for a philosophy class centered in the practice of the commentary? How has this research and this process of writing helped to clarify my emerging and ever-changing observations from the sets of data? What do I make of this now?

To be very clear, what I have created here, out of their original written responses, is a dialogue using their words. I have fictionalized only in placing their responses to my questions as responses to each other, adding transitional phrases in weaving them together and correcting occasional typos and grammatical infelicities. I have also fictionalized by dividing them into thematic sections and replacing some of my more specific interview questions with my second set of research questions, in order to allow the constructed dialogue to serve as the evidence for what I claim as a finding. After each section of dialogue, I will step back from the

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54 Of course I am unable to avoid my own biases in selecting pieces of their responses, and the complete and unedited interview responses can be found in Appendix F.

55 2. Do students experience or perceive their participation in the assignment as leading them to be active contributors to the philosophical inquiries that are the focus of our class?
   a. How do the students describe and evaluate their roles in the class?
   b. Do students see themselves as having taken on intellectual roles in the class that they expected to take on or were accustomed to taking on?
   c. Did they see themselves take on unusual or surprising roles?
conversation and explain some of my thinking and reflections, clarifying the analytical claims I think I can make from the provisional answers provided by the dialogue.

Now I invite you in, as if we are all together in Polemarchus' father's house on the Piraeus, tired after observing a religious festival, but fed by food and drink and ideas.

* * * * *

4.5.1 Defining Contemporary Civilization and the Commentary

Nicole: Generally, how would you describe CC and your feelings about it?

Jane: Being a non-native and a science student, I don't necessarily feel like I am innately bad at these humanities-related skills, but I do feel more uncomfortable. Unlike subjects like science or math where you can clearly see the pattern or quantitatively absolute answers, humanities classes don't necessarily have absolutely correct or incorrect answers, which makes it hard!

Kyle: Yes- the subjectivity of the content is the difficulty. If there are a limitless number of possible interpretations and methods of understanding, how can they reliably be reconciled and judged?

Alex: In general, I feel like my "natural" or innate abilities in humanities classes aren't quite as strong as those of many of my peers at Columbia. It often seems like it takes me longer to process concepts and grasp ideas than it does for other students.

Peter: Because I am a slow reader, I have to carve out a lot of time to do the reading and be prepared.

Greg: Prior to this course I hated the humanities, I thought they were ridiculous and to be honest a bit of waste to try and study. My freshman year I was told by my literature humanities professor that my writing was "not up to Columbia standards", which as a first-year student was something that could've ruined my outlook on Columbia as a whole.
However, I still went into the year with an open mind and I was shocked at how much my ideas and feelings toward the subject changed. Nicole showed a true passion, that helped.

Ashley: Me too. I had an English teacher in high school who constantly told me I can't get better in English because I'm just not a native speaker.

Steven: I’m nervous because I know what people think when I say I’m an engineer.

**Nicole: How did you initially view the commentary?**

Steve: I thought it was kind of weird and uncomfortable to write. I was definitely concerned that my peers would not like some of the things I had to say, and I definitely thought Nicole was a little crazy. The potential for starting a flame war was just way too high!

Peter: To spontaneously start writing and spilling my thoughts made me nervous, because I wasn't very confident in my initial reactions to be very insightful.

Ben: I thought it would be difficult simply because I did not know how I could come up with so many thoughts or observations every week.

Kyle: I was pretty disappointed that I would have to do much more work outside of class instead of getting to come to class and have a teacher tell me the "right" way to interpret the text.

Ashley: Yes- because of my habit of writing slowly, I was afraid I would have to spend a ridiculous amount of time on each commentary.

Rose: It changed how I read. As a student and as a participant in this class community, it demands awareness, consciousness and openness to different perspectives, as well as a malleability for language style and preconceived ideas.

Alex: Yes, it forced the entire class to engage with the text--and each other--in an active, and critical way, to prompt us to think about the readings in a way that was internally-motivated.

Ashley: Yeah- since CC is not a lecture course, but a discussion course, we read these texts individually, but we develop our understanding of the texts collectively.
Jane: After all, the goal of philosophy is to help readers develop their own philosophical powers, not to inject them with ideas, right?

Nicole: What do you think my purpose is in using the assignment in our community?

Ben: I think you hope the commentary will provoke further thinking. Plus, reading other students' commentaries only helps facilitate further growth in understanding. There had been several times when I did not know what to write about. However, a quick look at my peer's commentary opened my mind and triggered my thinking.

Kyle: Yes, to get us engaged not only in the ideas of each text, but in the ideas of our peers. To take a look at their interpretations, look at our own, and then try to reconcile them, regardless of whether they are in agreement or disagreement with your own.

Steve: It gives you an opening into our minds and our understandings of the text, and it helps you figure out which themes of the text we really feel curious about and which ones might need a bit more Platonic reasoning and exploration.

* * * *

Generally, the students come into CC not sure whether they will be up to the task of a reading-and-writing intensive course. Particularly students who are engineers and students who are English learners, and some who are both, are particularly worried about whether they will be able to keep up, and whether they will be comfortable with the qualitative nature of the work. Although, there are a few students, like Rose and Ashley, who seem less worried about their ability to read quickly and write coherently. Although for Rose, she was not as excited about this course as she would be about a chosen course in a specific field of English literature, and the same is true for Ashley, with a course in a specific period of field of Philosophy.

The students are also, unsurprisingly, not very excited at the prospect of a required discussion board and the accompanying commentaries and replies. They view this kind of
assignment as extra work on top of the expected work of the reading. They also see it as a place where classmates might annoyingly show off knowledge or expertise, but not as a place where they will establish or clarify their own ideas. If anything, they view it as redundant or even contradictory to what they expect will happen in class, which is that the instructor will tell them the correct interpretations of the texts. They so seem to understand my goal with the commentary, as a tool for building community and supporting their own clarification of thinking and understanding, but they also don’t seem to believe that it will actually have those effects.

* * * *

4.5.2 Commentary in a Philosophical Community of Practice

Nicole: Did you see a change in your feelings about the commentaries over time?

Ben: At the beginning of the semester I was questioning my ability to write so much; towards the end I was, in a way, excited to see what my classmates took from the readings compared to myself.

Steve: Yeah- I’ve become more happy and open when writing commentaries. I kind of look forward to them when I read a text I really took the time to understand. There have been times when I just start typing and can't stop, because I just have a lot to say and being able to share some other afterthought from some other line of reasoning from some other moment of my life with a philosophical twist is very cool.

Ashley: Yeah. I was very worried about commentaries being difficult and time-consuming to write. But as we wrote over and over again, I was naturally able to write faster and more easily, and it wasn’t as daunting as I had originally imagined.

Alex: I began pretty concerned about the structure, spelling, and grammar of my posts. Now, I care much less about these things, and I try to focus more on the content of the
commentary. I think this is due to an increase in comfortability with the other students in the class.

Kyle: As the year went on, I began to take more risks with putting my opinions in my posts, and this caused my stake in the discussions to rise, which increased my overall engagement online and in class.

Greg: In the beginning, to be honest, I dreaded writing them, but as my writing abilities developed and as I continued throughout the semester I found them to be extremely useful in full rounding out my ideas and writing.

Peter: Yes- the initial nervousness I had started to subside, as I realized that everyone's initial knee-jerk reactions to a passage or to an idea are raw, and sometimes not always pretty. Everyone's flow of ideas is a little choppy, a little messy and not totally cohesive, which was encouraging to know.

Rose: Everyone experiences the text in a slightly different way, and the commentary does not necessarily show the big picture, but it certainly gave me a refreshing and valuable window into the way others read compared to mine, not necessarily in an evaluative way, but in a wholesome appreciative way.

Nicole: Do you experience or perceive your participation in the assignment as leading you to be active contributors to our class?

Kyle: Writing twice a week discussion posts really helped me feel engaged and forced me to think about the themes and ideas from class, outside of the classroom. I have ended up feeling more confident in my ability to explain what I am thinking, and at trying to understand what others are saying by asking questions and analyzing their words.

Peter: I learned how helpful it is to define your ideas by forcing yourself to explain them. Especially in the fall, most students come into class with generally raw ideas about the reading and the concepts that we discuss. The commentary allows for some expansion and more thorough consideration.
Alex: Yes- I feel that the act of writing allows me to better refine my ideas in a uniquely productive way. Being required to write down my thoughts often forces me to confront the gaps in my logic that need to be thought out a little bit further. I also think more students read more closely (and read more, period) because of the commentary assignment. The commentaries required me to have thought of at least one original idea with respect to the text, and often also with respect to the ideas of one of my classmates.

Ben: I mean, ultimately they help us learn from each other, too.

Steve: Yeah. I really do love looking at the words of others and figuring out what my classmates are feeling. And people just get a smile on their face when you bring up something they said in their commentary and add to it. They feel heard, and that builds a community in a way no other experience can. I think the process of writing commentaries has also made me feel more comfortable when free writing and also has made me more comfortable just engaging in general conversation with my classmates outside of class. I feel less afraid to engage in Socratic reasoning.

Jane: Yes. It encouraged the class discussion by inspiring the students to be engaged more with the texts. I think ultimately they help students understand each other more, in the sense that it helped each other know more of their opinions and philosophical ideas. We would learn from others who have different perspectives, which inspired us to exchange thoughts even outside the class.

Greg: I think they helped change the way we thought and thus allowed us to develop more thoughtful questions and ideas surrounding the topics we were discussing.

Rose: I can think back on the commentary process as truly foundational for my college career - it was never easy, but memorable in its reward for me personally, because I could see how tangibly the change in my writing impacted the interaction with others.

Ashley: I always start writing a commentary thinking that I would write about one thing and I always end up writing about so much more. By the time I'm done writing, I have not only
revisited my points x and y that I developed by reading the texts, but also established a new point z. Personally, I think that's the most useful aspect of writing commentaries.

Peter: All of our ideas are initially raw and messy, and that can lead to a comfort in the class community that allows for people to step outside of their comfort zone to share an idea that they aren't completely sure of yet. I think in that sense, the commentaries can help to provide a classroom environment that is conducive to collaborative discussion and discourse that the class is aimed for.

Nicole: *What changes did you see in your writing as a result of the commentary?*

Ashley: I'm somebody who has to be pleased with every sentence that I've written before I'm able to move onto the next one. They were really helpful in breaking my bad habit of "conservative" writing and I've grown better at writing free-flow, rough, imperfect train of thoughts by writing commentaries for CC. I am better able to explore my thoughts and build my claims without being restrained by structural perfection.

Steve: I was surprised that I'm able to share so much with people I barely know to some degree. I feel like sharing a part of yourself normally not shared before is hard, or sharing a different perspective not necessarily in 100% agreement with the text or the classmates around you is scary.

Rose: I learned how to write in a way that made others think about what I was thinking and challenge their own ideas, and this required me to read with a lens of grounded focus in this project.

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I started this dialogue, in section 4.5.1, using the words of the students to establish how they began the course, in terms of their feelings about humanities courses and the commentary.
Next, in section 4.5.2, I moved into how their feelings about the commentary changed over time and what they perceived as its effects on their writing and thinking.

When I asked them how their feelings about the commentary changed over time, most of them admitted that they moved from real reluctance and self-consciousness about the commentary to a sense of excitement to read the postings of their classmates, and also an excitement to move their own thoughts on the reading onto paper. They also agreed that the commentary helped build a class community of practice where the students were really used to talking to each other about their ideas, which made discussion easier both in class and even outside. They recognized that the commentary not only required them to participate more in class but that the habit of participation actually, over time, made them more excited to share as active contributors to our class.

The students seem to have also noticed a change in their thinking and writing in terms of less attention to form and more attention to content; they are less worried about grammar and style and more concerned with sending out good and exciting and engaging ideas.

My next question, then, is whether this participation and engagement helps them to see themselves not just as contributors to class but as active contributors to the philosophical inquiries that are the focus of our class.

4.5.3 Establishing Identities as Philosophers

Nicole: What does it mean to you to be a “Philosopher” or to "do philosophy"? Did CC affect this definition, in your perception?

Ben: When I think of a philosopher, I think of 'question'. To 'do philosophy' is to call into question preconceived notions on quite literally anything, so long as it has merit."

Steve: Being a philosopher requires asking a lot of questions, suggesting ideas to a broader discussion, and acknowledging where your ideas might fall through. I also don’t think being a philosopher requires a college degree. I think it just requires a lot of curiosity,
adding the conversation in new and exciting ways never been done before, asking:
What’s the problem in the first place? Why is it problematic? What did other people do to solve this problem before you came along? I kind of see philosophy as a way to challenge others and make sense of why they see the world in whatever way they see it.

I kind of see philosophy as a form of academic therapy.

Kyle: Kind of similar to being an attentive full-time student, except to the teachings of life, right?

Every action and reaction is owed a certain level of discussion and thought, instead of simply being forgotten... philosophy is not just reserved for old white dudes. If there is anything that I learned during CC, it is that everyone is qualified to do philosophy!

Alex: I'm sure Socrates would be pleased with these responses. From my perspective, philosophy's project is to bring into question any and every concept that could possibly exist, and work to more clearly define it, its causes, and its consequences. I believe that anyone doing the act of questioning can be considered a philosopher in that moment.

Peter: I think that philosophers are tasked with the awesome task of examining the human experience. The biggest question anybody can ask is “what makes us all human?” What do we all share in this experience? Roosevelt Montas talked about that at a talk Nicole took us to once. That we are all qualified to be philosophers because we are all experts at being human.

Jane: This can be uncomfortable and scary, because I would have to judge how I have been living and realizing that it has been wrong!

Peter: I thought that philosophy was intended to find answers, and explain why things that are true are true. The study of philosophy raised more questions in my mind and in my head than answers... We even pondered the question of what the purpose of a class like CC is more than once, and never came to a concrete answer, which is frustrating to me.

Alex: CC showed me that our current ideas about politics and human nature are based on the same ideas that have been disputed, contested, and shaped by the works of countless
philosophers throughout history. As a result of this, I now view our current ideas about political organization and humanity to be much less "set in stone" than I previously did. Therefore, I believe it is entirely possible that by using philosophy, further change can—and will—be made to our political system. It's hopeful.

Rose: Philosophy used to be an intimidating and foreign subject in my life to which I thought I was relatively unrelated to, but my CC experience completely inverted this thinking and today I feel that CC is everywhere in my daily life, and there is not a moment that I would be unable to make CC relevant.

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The students all seem to agree that one of the most important techniques of philosophical thinking is purposive and directed questioning, in terms of seeking out whether the things we do are thoughtful and grounded in reason-based decision making. They also seem to have broadened their definition of philosophy and philosophers from an academic subject for a select few to a way of living available to anyone who wants to engage in the discipline of questioning carefully. In this newly broadened definition of philosophy and philosophers, they have come to include themselves. They struggle with the sometimes painful and frustrating task of evaluating their choices and their worlds through these texts. They see themselves as having moved from positions of deference with the philosophical thinking of others into positions of participation, where philosophy has become a part of their daily lives. As Aristotle would describe it, they are no longer amateur musicians who sometimes manage to hit a lovely note by accident. They are now trained musicians who choose to play particular chords in particular contexts for particular reasons, out of their underlying knowledge and understanding of music. And perhaps most significantly, this position of philosopher was an intellectual role that they did not expect to take on.
The next question that seemed important, although it wasn’t one of my explicit research questions, was whether this practice helped them to see philosophy as something they would practice outside the class. Throughout this dissertation, one of the underlying assertions has been that the goal of liberal arts education is not to turn out a few expert academic philosophers but rather citizens prepared for a thoughtful life of participation in the project of democratic engagement. Columbia’s Core Curriculum, much like similar courses at colleges across the country, does not imagine its mission as inspiring all students to become philosophy majors, but rather attempting to ensure that students who will major in chemistry and history and sociology and music and economics and all the arts and sciences will learn to engage in philosophical thinking in and beyond their own academic disciplines. This is an idea as old as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Montaigne, the goal that students, no matter their major, will experience what it means to be a contributing member of a learning community or of an intellectual community within and beyond the university, as part of living a philosophical life.

4.5.4 Ongoing Influences: Enabling A Philosophical Life

Nicole: Do you think the ideas from this class will stay with you beyond the course?

Peter: What I think will remain constant with me was what I learned from the class as a whole—the benefits of an exchange of ideas in a classroom environment like the one we had, the differences of opinion that it is very easy for students to have on the same text, and the value in challenging my assumptions and defending my ideas. These all tie into the discussions we have had about the value of the core, and I think those concepts and ideas will stay with me long after I forget what Plato meant by certain terms he used or other details of the texts. (everyone laughs) For someone like me, who wants to go into public service, these ideas are critical to understanding the human experience and relating to someone you may have nothing in common with, and that’s what public service is about to me.
Steve: I think pretty strongly that I’m just stuck in this current moment in the middle part of Plato’s cave, still kinda chained to the ground but also fully aware of the world outside the cave and beginning to accept a different way of looking at things. I guess it is a pain that demands to be felt. I think these skills have to continue to be used in order for them to stay fresh, kind of like a rubber band that needs to be stretched every once and awhile or else it will lose it’s elasticity...I just got to surround myself with different people with different perspectives to keep my philosophical spirit alive sometimes!

Kyle: Absolutely. These lessons will stay with me for the rest of my life because of the process through which these lessons were obtained. The lessons of thought, debate, morality, society, humanity, and more were all delivered through engagement. Verbal engagement. Physical engagement. And the lessons were not simply touched upon a single time, and then neglected. Each lesson was touched upon multiple times during the course, and intertwined into every text we read.

Jane: I agree with Peter and Kyle that this class helped me the most by improving my skills of understanding the world I am living in better. I remember in the commentary assignment, me and my classmates would mention news or books or movies that we could connect to the text we had covered.

Rose: Of course. The ideas from this class will continue to stay with me beyond the course because each day Nicole thought about how to make the reading and the course relevant to the present, and themes and projects and issues of each of the thinkers we touched upon infiltrate my studies in other areas and also the way I think about daily life.

Ashley: Yes! I’m still in the class, but even now, I find CC concepts in my daily life. While watching movies, people-watching, thinking about current political status...

Alex: Yes- This course has forced me to confront the many ways in which western philosophers’ ideas still exist in our modern conceptions of politics and humanity. There is no way that I'll be able to divorce my ideas about modern issues from the ideas that I read in the
texts of CC. However, this definitely isn't to say that I've accepted or agreed with the works of every philosopher in the syllabus. In fact, the disagreements I had with the ideas in the texts were often extremely reminiscent of the disagreements I have with modern issues, for most of the same concepts I criticized in the texts are still largely echoed in our society today. Thus, the process of forming opinions about the ideas in the CC texts lead me to create my own thoughts about the universal concepts of politics and humanity that will always be available to be.

Steve: The idea of questioning is the biggest thing that sticks with me. I feel more in tune with the world around me. I've been asking myself more and more frequently, why does the world suck? Why am I doing what I'm doing? Unfortunately, sometimes those questions also leads to further sadness, but I think it's time well spent… Without a doubt, the general themes like free will, why do we do what we do, what is justice, what is reason, what is faith, how do we balance faith and reason, and why do societies form are topics that will stay with me, especially given the current political climate. I just can't see the news anymore without thinking about the social contracts or systems of ethics I prescribe to.

Rose: Facilitated by the right amount of control, freedom and reward, this class, and I think with the help of the commentary, has the potential to expand perspective, facilitate growth and make a long-lasting and effective impact on the way we think and interact with the world around us.

4.6 Concluding Meditations on the Effects of the Commentary on Our Community of Practice

In this Socratic dialogue, a kind of Platonic *Symposium*, my wonderful students revealed so much about their developing identities in our community of practice: brave and vulnerable
Ben, concerned conservative Greg, engineer and cultural-expert Jane, playful punning-philosopher Kyle, quiet and powerful Rose, comedian and good citizen Peter, socially-just synthesizer Alex, increasingly confident Ashley, and ethical engineer Steve. We took up questions of their fears about philosophy courses, their worries about the commentary, and their perceptions of my purpose. They also thought about what it means to truly be a philosopher, and brought up so many other beautiful ideas that I wouldn’t have thought to ask them about.

In September of each teaching year, as a part of their weekly reading assignment, I ask students to write a commentary in response to one or many of the readings. They are free to respond in whatever manner seems most useful: they can disagree, question, trouble, meditate, converse, connect, narrate, apply. As long as it is a useful and intentional contribution to the conversation, it is accepted\(^56\). In addition to posting a commentary, they are asked to make at least one reply to the commentary of a classmate.

Together, as a community of practice, using this commentary assignment, we altered the traditional process where an instructor comments occasionally on large pieces of high-stakes student work. In its place, we created a growing conversation that might harness students’ already significant skills with online posting and discussing. Participating in this group of thinkers building knowledge together enabled students to more realistically experience what it means to be contributing members of a digital academic community whose members read and write thoughtful responses to highly abstract and difficult topics.

This method, functioning as a kind of apprenticeship system in our community of practice, supported the writing growth of everyone in the class because students read and learn from the work of peers what is possible and what is useful in the commentaries submitted, (as in a traditional apprenticeship system, where each apprentice typically learns from another apprentice slightly ahead of him) without the direct intervention of the instructor (see Lave &

\(^{56}\) In all my experience of using this assignment, I have never had to remove or edit a student post because it was inappropriate or cruel or totally unrelated. I have occasionally mentioned, one-on-one, to students that their posts do not seem to reflect the same level of engagement with the material of their peers, and requested that they observe the posts of particular peers as exemplars.
Wenger). The genre of the commentary grows and changes because they, as a group, are changing each other’s perceptions of what is possible in the genre of the commentary.

This process places students in the liminal digital space between class discussion and formal college writing, and invites students to write and respond with real exigency, for real audiences of their peers, building on each individual’s ideas (and zone of proximal development) by writing and responding casually online as digital natives. It doesn’t require long commitments of time for response by the instructor, but rather uses the class community itself as a source of questions and provocations about student ideas, authentically requiring reflection and response.

Perhaps most significantly and most importantly, in my opinion, out of their time in our community of practice, the students express that they experienced and perceived their participation in the assignment as leading them to become active contributors to the philosophical inquiries that are the focus of our class. They describe their roles in the class as philosophers, as thinkers, and as contributors who are comfortable enough to make jokes!

In particular, and perhaps most importantly, although outside the scope of my research questions, I think that CC and the practice of the commentary has become a very important part of how they make sense of the world. This is what I mean when I talk about the goal of liberal arts education as enabling students to become citizens prepared for a thoughtful life of participation in the project of democratic engagement. Rooted in the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Montaigne, a course that uses the commentary to create a community of practice seems to help all students experience what it means to be a contributing member of a community within and beyond the university, as part of living a philosophical life.

I’ll use Steve here as an example. He’s that ethical-engineer who was born in India. He comes to office hours frequently to talk with me about the ways the readings help him make sense of his life, but also make him question decisions he has made, and feel more conflicted about his decisions. He wrote in his interview response about the commentary as a kind of
academic therapy. One day in office hours I explained to him that I was curious about what he meant by that memorable phrase, and he explored it in an email to me recently:

“So then what is academic therapy? Why did I coin a phrase I couldn’t actually define? Academic therapy is just the regular struggling we do day to day when something of great meaning comes up in our lives and we figure out how to manage it. Academic therapy gives us a way to process what we care about and make sense of it… This requires us to wrestle with our pasts. It requires us to question our presents. It forces us to be less anxious of our futures. This process requires us to converse… There I see the struggle. There I see the pain. There I see Kierkegaard… a man wrangling with his ideas. He’s engaging in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy without a therapist. The therapist helps us 21st century teenagers do what philosophers have been doing for years. He helps us make sense of an amazingly complex world… Kierkegaard’s criticism of one small passage of the bible is him battling the confusion in his brain. My friend calls some of these moments ‘emotional constipation’. I couldn’t agree more. The weight of the world is on your shoulders, and no matter how much you want to put things to the side for a moment to focus and learn more about yourself and your feelings - you just can’t. So the emotions pile up and you never process them. You can’t process your inner thoughts like Kierkegaard. Then you end up paying at a therapist’s office, when really all you needed to learn to do is find a way to work through your emotions with yourself.”

This is the practice of Philosophy. Steve is in the great company of Montaigne, Petrarch, Kierkegaard, and Socrates when he says that the commentary is a kind of academic therapy because it asks you to “engage with your mind. To struggle and be okay with it. To be able to say, Hey, I think that was messed up and I want to know why? It’s taking that time.”

Wolfgang Iser describes this same process, applying it to the practice of interpretation in literature. When we perform hermeneutic inquiry into any text, be it a philosophical polemic or a novel or a painting or our own emotions, this process of deciphering meaning also “gives us the

57 The full email from Steve is in Appendix I
chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity… [this] does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness… to formulate the unformulated” (Iser 456).

The students use the commentary to construct knowledge in a powerful, conversational, and communal way, with humor and insight and vulnerability. They also use it as a place to construct themselves as legitimate knowledge-makers. The students moved from the margins toward the center of the culture of an academic community and toward stronger identities as contributing members of an intellectual community, also moving, in the words of John Dewey, from thinking to thinking-well.

But then again, que sçais-je?
4.7: Epilogue: Last Essays, Excursions, and Explorations in the Montaigne Tradition

4.7.1 Transforming Composing and Revising into Methods of Inquiry

One area in which the synthesis of Quintilian and Cicero and Montaigne and Stafford and Dewey into a theory of practical writing and the commentary as a way of testing that practice can perhaps be most helpful in the reformation and radicalization of the way we teach writing is the concept of writing as a method of inquiry. Rather than just as a form for presentation of falsely-authoritative findings, the argumentative academic essay (often taught in high school as the five-paragraph essay) could itself be a method for student writers to look into and write into their subjects and themselves.

Let me try out a concrete application of this idea of freedom and inquiry in writing here for a moment. One of the accepted tenets of writing instruction in academe is the length requirement. Any time I assign a piece of writing, one of the first questions to be asked is “How long does it have to be?” I have friends, colleagues, and students who admit to finishing an assignment by pouring extra verbiage and long quotations into their papers just to swell them to the required maximum length, thinking that only meeting the minimum makes them seem lazy or inadequate. Like some of Montaigne’s bloated letters, they cost too much and so are worth much less: “as soon as I begin to drag them out, it is a sign that I am not there” (Montaigne 186).

In my personal writing experience, however, having a paper that is long enough is never a problem (and sometimes editing and removing is the hardest part…!). Although I know this isn’t the usual experience of most of my students, I have faith in my ability to produce, thanks in large part to my devotion to the commentary, which creates a lovely liquid loop of results. I understand and agree with the human impulse to delineate a boundary, with floodgates and sandbags, before unleashing what might be a torrential flow of writing. Other times, though, the limits on length cause the creative rush to slow to a drip, and restricted by expectations, the
fount dries up. In the past, I would have that limit in mind from the first moment I sat down to write, and as my paper grew longer and longer and the end grew closer and closer, I grew more and more anxious. I may have bravely waded into the river of my argument and begun the journey downstream, but when I see the deadline of the water dropping off ahead, and hear the sound of the terrifying cataract, I stop writing and therefore I stop thinking. My arguments could have been pushed farther, my thinking could have been deeper and clearer, but because I have such anxiety about my swelling document and the fast approaching conclusion of my journey, I stop.

What I wish I had learned sooner (and am grateful to be practicing now) is that I should just allow myself the freedom to write as long as I need to, both in time and in pages. I think this is true whether you worry about too much writing or not enough. What is important, perhaps is for the writer to give herself license “to begin without a plan; the first remark brings on the second” (Montaigne 186). Montaigne used writing as a way of ordering his thinking, bringing direction and cohesion to the entropy, and, finally and fortunately, I have begun to do the same. He found that, unchecked, his mind runs “like a runaway horse, [and] gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after the other, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at [his] pleasure, [he began] to put them in writing” (Montaigne 21). By allowing my wild and turbulent thoughts onto the page, I can journey up and down the river, dipping in and out of the water when it feels right; the journey does not have to be only in one direction, gathering terrifying momentum as my small boat nears the falls.

Peter, one of my case study participants, sent me an email a few years ago, as he was trying to figure out what to cover in a paper for our class, that I think illustrates this shift from writing as a place to prove ideas to composing a paper as a simultaneous practice of composing thinking. On an afternoon in March, he wrote: “Hi Nicole, I'm working on paper ideas, and was hoping if I sent you my plans so far, that you could shoot me some feedback when you get a
chance, I can also come meet with you.... I am going to apologize in advance for how long and possibly convoluted this is, but even typing it out to you is helping me understand and make sense of my own argument. Here is where I think my paper will be going: [he then writes 616 words on Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Mill and his ideas about how he might weave them together58]... Ok, that's all my thoughts for right now. If nothing else, thanks for at least letting me put all my thoughts down.”

Like Montaigne, Peter has learned that he needs to get his ideas down on paper in order to clarify them, evaluate them, and then expand them. Like I did with Berthoff in 1.8.1, he has learned that he shouldn’t wait to start writing until he knows what he wants to say, but that he has to start writing, even in just a long email to teacher who might not respond very quickly, in order to find out what he wants to say.

By looking down into my own practice and by looking back at the methods of Montaigne and Erasmus, I also begin to see that the composing and editing processes need not be so distinct. Rather than writing in one huge flood until I get to the pre-determined limit and then going back and trying to perfect the mechanics, I should write myself into understanding, write until I get to my point, write until I find my thesis and my argument and my angle, spiraling and circling, and then go back and filter out all the writing and thinking that got me there, but is perhaps now not necessary. Rather than subjecting my thinking to the dictates of strict rules and limits, I can allow my judgment to play “its part by choosing the way that seems best to it[; if] of a thousand paths it says that this one or that was the most wisely chosen” (Montaigne 219), then I can follow that path and see where it goes, worrying about word counts later. “I take one [subject], sometimes only to lick it, sometimes to brush the surface, sometimes to pinch it to the bone. I give it a stab, not as wide but as deep as I know how” (Montaigne 219). My thinking and my writing can have real depth, can be cyclical, recursive, reflexive, and looping.

58 His complete email is Appendix J
This process can continue on for years, in the spirit of Montaigne’s quarter century of edits and additions and editions; I can adopt Erasmus’ belief that we “shall not cease to make our writings more polished and more complete until we cease to breathe” (Erasmus’ *Letter to Johann von Botzheim* in Barker xxi).

Let me just add, in a tributary gesture at an argument on another side, that I also have some thoughts about why it is that we feel the need to remove the early thinking, leaving in only the clear, directed, authoritative writing. But perhaps I’m wrong to branch off too distinctly, so I’ll correct myself now, as I realize that is an argument for another section and another voyage (Petrarch 176). For now, I'll continue on along the main waterway, trying to swim straight, attempting to edit out the tangential thoughts and mixed and missed metaphors as I make this essay.

As I realized earlier, when I was in bed with Berthoff in 1.8.1, my process was backwards for so many years: I started with my chosen thesis and then just tried swim forward, clinging onto floating bits of wood and river detritus as I tried desperately to reach the other bank. I essentially wrote from the end back, starting with this answer I was told I had to have, and had to support by adopting some false tone of intellectual authority I certainly did not deserve, and supporting it with evidence of dubious utility and clarity. I spent my allotted pages skimming the surface of my argument, and so my papers consisted “more in embroideries and preambles than in substance” (Montaigne 186). Rather, to shift metaphors, I should have been combing the field for tinder, assembling bits of twigs and sticks, and then when I thought I had the smallest spark, sheltering it and breathing on it, carefully adding larger and larger pieces of wood until it blazed seemingly on its own, only adding more fuel when the flames began to cool. By the time the fire roars shoulder-high, perhaps those tiny bits of bark and grass and twigs have burned up, vanished, and been forgotten, but they were essential along the way.

What I have come to see is that the early pages of writing, the sentence fragments, the abandoned lines of inquiry, the failed digressions— all of these are important pieces of the
process that get me to where I want to go, and when I start to get there I can forget and even
delete the early work. “I take the first subject that chance offers. They are all equally good to
me. And I never plan to develop them completely. For I do not see the whole of anything; nor do
those who promise to show it to us… And most often I like to take them from some
unaccustomed point of view. I would venture to treat some matter thoroughly, if I knew myself
less well. Scattering a word here, there another, samples separate from their context,
dispersed, without a plan and without a promise, I am not bound to make something of them or
to adhere to them myself without varying when I please and giving myself up to doubt and
uncertainty and my ruling quality, which is ignorance” (Montaigne 219).

In a class a couple of years ago, while I was reading articles on (deferent and missed
and literate) reading, I was reading a lot of William Stafford’s poetry, and his auto-ethnography
about his writing methods and style. I was struck by so many parallels (or actually, perhaps they
were perfectly parallel contradictions) between how he identified his own writing methods and
the identification of the “deferent” writing and reading methods of basic writers in Cheryl Hogue
Smith’s article “Interrogating Texts: from Deferent to Efferent and Aesthetic Reading.”

Mid-way through the piece, discussing the difficulty of persuading students to persist in
transacting with and making meaning out of and interrogating difficult texts, Hogue Smith quotes
Blau: “the only texts worth reading are texts you don’t understand” (Blau, in Hogue Smith). This
small (but huge) sentence is one that I have long loved and found provocative and important. So
much about schools and testing and the educational climate now is set against this, and yet, all
real readers and writers (transactors and meaning-makers) of real academic texts (which is still
something that I am uncomfortable writing, and utterly incapable of adequately defining, see
1.7.3) would agree. If it doesn’t push you to think, to question, to make new connections, if it
doesn’t help you to make meaning you didn’t already have, why waste the time to read or write
it?
And I think Stafford would agree with Blau, and, as Hogue Smith does, apply the ideas of reading to writing. Just as Blau argues that the only texts worth a real transactional reading are the ones that ask you to actively construct new meaning, Stafford, I think, would argue that the only texts worth writing are also the ones that are about things you don’t yet understand, the ones you don’t know yet, the ones that are exploratory: “A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them. That is, he does not draw on a reservoir; instead, he engages in an activity that brings him to a whole succession of unforeseen stories, poems, essays, plays, laws, philosophies, religions…” (William Stafford, “A Way of Writing”).

What about this definition of a writer, then? Just like Blau’s idea about reading, I find that this definition of writing is in direct contradiction (or perfect parallel contradiction) with the way most writing is taught in schools. We don’t ask students to write before they know what to write about. We don’t ask students to just start writing and hope that it ends up with 5 paragraphs and begins with a thesis… We ask them to write to show what they learned, to prove an argument they already believe (or that we have told them to believe). But, then again, Que sçais-je?

Then, I started thinking about the editing process and how we teach it. Hogue Smith argues that we have to think about the writing and reading of a student at the same time, rather than splitting it up into different classes, because “students can never outwrite their reading ability.” That is, if a student has never been taught to really engage with an academic text, to question and to make meaning and to re-make meaning, how can we expect that a student would have the skills to engage in the same process with their own writing? So, in this parallel between rereading strategies (and their importance in transactional, meaning-making encounters with texts) and the re-writing process as a kind of re-reading, re-meaning-making, Hogue Smith identifies the problem in helping these basic writers/readers to move beyond their deferent status: “Ironically for basic writers, the very things that can help all students succeed
[writing tutors, rereading, rewriting] are typically seen as forms of punishment and evidence of failure. Thus, the need for rereading seems to trigger in basic writers all the feelings of inferiority and failure” (Hogue Smith).

I turned again to Stafford at this moment, to find again where I’d read him writing about the editing process (although that isn’t what he calls it, and I think the word he chooses is incredibly important for the larger metaphor). But I have to back up and start earlier, closer to the beginning, in the composing process. Stafford writes: “When I’m writing, the satisfactions in the process of writing are my satisfactions in dealing with the language, in being surprised by phrasings that occur to me, in finding that this miraculous kind of convergent focus begins to happen” (Stafford in David Cicotello’s “The Act of Writing: An Interview with William Stafford”). It’s a kind of discovery, a satisfying play with surprises and miracles.

Then when it comes time to consider changes, or what we might call “editing,” he writes: “I look at it again. I mean, anything that interests me enough to juggle some more, I juggle some more. I may juggle it an awful lot to a degree that would be unbelievable to someone who isn’t in the arts, but it’s because of love, it’s because of those satisfactions I talked about. You keep getting those satisfactions as you try this and that and the other. You look back over it; you turn it around; you do it from a different point of view. All sorts of things are possible (or the other way around) and it’s fun” (Stafford in David Cicotello’s “The Act of Writing: An Interview with William Stafford”), which takes me back to the idea of play in writing I explored in 2.4.2. Rather than “editing” or “correcting,” this process for Stafford, is described with the playful word “juggling,” and he uses “love” and “fun” to talk about the process.

I think what struck me here (which is something I have been struck by before, but perhaps not quite so hard or with such a jostle) is that the way writers write and the way we teach students to write could not be on more opposite ends of the spectra of both inquiry and of fun. And that’s a huge problem, which I am inclined to blame mostly on the testing, positivist,
answer-driven climate of schools, but a problem for which I am, at the moment, lacking in concrete answers. But I’ll keep essaying away.

4.7.2 Responding: Commentaries and Conversations as Conferences

In addition to opening up the topics we ask students to write on, or perhaps allowing students to choose topics for themselves, I also believe that we need to significantly alter our manner of responding to student writing. Of course skills in reading and writing are inextricably linked (Rosenblatt, 1988): good readers make better writers, and writers cannot write any better than they can read their own work or anyone else’s (Hogue Smith, 2012), but it is rare that we ask a student to really read and evaluate her own work. Not only do students need to learn how to behave like writers, they also need to learn “how to read a draft so its revision will improve” (Murray, 2004, 139), and conferencing is perhaps a way towards helping students become better readers of their own work. What I do not mean are conferences of the kind where a student comes in to meet with a teacher about a paper that has already been read, commented on, and evaluated by the teacher, the kind of conference that a student approaches with shaking hands and a nervous stomach. I do not mean a conference where the teacher tells the student about the mistakes and logical errors of the paper with a student and the student walks away feeling demoralized and eviscerated. This is the kind of conference I suffered through as a student: I know this humiliation and what it does to a desire to write.

What I mean when I write “conference,” is the kind Donald Murray advocates: a conference where the teacher reads for the first time in front of the writer, no pen in hand, no desk between them, not as evaluator but as fellow-writer, working side by side. “The writer and the teacher-editor-colleague-helper read the text together to see what it is saying, what it cannot say, what it may be able to say. The text is the focal point of the conference. The student speaks first, but the student speaks of the text. The teacher listens to what the writer says of the text and checks it with the text” (Murray, 2004, 150). Of course, finding time for individual
student conferences might seem laughable for teachers with fifty-minute periods and over one hundred students each day, but even small shifts in the power structure of writing assessment can make big differences.

Let me step back eight years anwest by 3000 miles and remember building one of these communities of practice on the secondary level. When I was teaching high school, I found that the practice of the commentary was incredibly difficult for my students. They had trouble writing about their questions and confusions, rather than writing to report their answers. Answering is their native tongue and questioning is a foreign language, strange and scary and potentially embarrassing. Inspired by Sheridan Blau’s use and support of the commentary in his university-level classes, I used to use this same commentary exercise in my own high school classroom, but in order to make this writing about their uncertainties less daunting, we never posted commentaries online in a class forum. I felt that the pressure of that whole-class audience was too much for my students, and I felt that they could be more free to write how they were thinking (and include their questions and confusions and uncertainties) when the audience was smaller. Also, in order to preserve as much thinking-writing as I could, I encouraged them to handwrite the commentaries and to write them in pen, and to only lightly strike through things they wanted to edit out: I felt the process of handwriting preserved so much more of the thinking.

The way we shared commentaries was, for a long time, just in groups of three. Often, their homework would be reading of some kind (frequently a poem, but I found that commentaries worked also with longer readings, a chapter of Frankenstein or a few scenes of Macbeth—although the shorter the text, the better they seemed to manage the commentary and find something small to write their way into) and then writing a commentary. The first thing we would do in class many days was to share the commentaries in these small groups. The way we formed the groups was by proximity (you know, the old “turn to two neighbors”) but I didn’t assign seats in my class (the rule was that if they showed me that I needed to move them away from a friend I would, and I rarely needed to do that), so the groups they ended up in were
usually friends they chose to sit near, and therefore a pretty safe and known audience. I would encourage them to drastically change seats every month or so (a new place in the room and near a new person), so the groups did shift every so often. I would always write a commentary also, and then join a group that was smaller because of an absent student, or just randomly join a group and share along with them. As they became more comfortable with the commentaries, we did more sharing; often, after sharing in groups, I would ask the groups to nominate a member whose commentary provoked some new thinking or some new questions for them. I think this was helpful because often students would hesitate to volunteer themselves (whether out of fear of seeming egotistical or just because it was too risky), but students often felt proud of their work and ready to share when they were validated by being nominated by their group members. I think that it changed how they felt about writing, in terms of seeing it as a way into deeper and clearer thinking, but I think I also undid a lot of that progress when I then had them turn all those useful questions into answers (and often false answers) in their formulaic five paragraph essays.

So to come back to these teenage girls and the conference, once they were used to talking to each other about their ideas, I thought they’d be more comfortable talking with me about their ideas. So I used to do what I called “side-by-side” conferences with students. We would take a full class period for students to just write, to work on whatever we were writing into at the time. The room would be quiet, but filled with the soft sounds of pens on paper or fingers on keyboards; the concentration and the productivity would be contagious, and a spell would fall. One at a time, students would come out into the hall with me, and for two minutes, as we sat on the floor next to each other, they’d talk to me about their paper. I would not hold a pen; I would ask them to read to me aloud, ask them how it was going, what they liked about their work, what they wanted to work on, and what they thought they might do next. They they’d go back inside and resume writing.
I could get through a full class of students each period, and although they weren’t the uninterrupted quiet fifteen minutes in an office that Murray argues for, I think they made a difference. Students no longer came to me holding papers like sacrificial lambs. They were less afraid of me as evaluator and could see me as a collaborator, a fellow writer working and playing and trying and sometimes failing. They even got better at reading their own work critically, because they knew I was not going to tell them what I thought was wrong with a sentence or a paragraph, but rather that I was going to ask what they thought and that I expected a real answer. In addition to becoming stronger readers of their own work, they also became stronger readers of all texts, including those of their classroom peers, but also of published authors, because they had begun the process of learning to read everything with a writerly eye.
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Appendix A: Course Writing Assignments

Class participation: 40% (Including possible presentations, attendance, and active participation in discussion.)
Weekly Commentaries and Replies: 10%
Paraphrases: 10%
Longer Papers: 20%
Midterm: 10%
Final exam: 10%

Written Assignments: The required written assignments take on different forms, and will total around 20 pages for the semester. All work should be typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins all around, and in reasonable 12-point font. Extensions are not granted unless in case of extreme situations, and requested well in advance. Please proofread all of your written work. I will grade it both in terms of coherence and elegance, as well as content. Papers must be submitted printed, stapled, and in the Core Office (202 Hamilton) by the date and time specified.

1) Two 1-2 page Short Writing Assignments: Each of these should seek to reconstruct conceptually the main argument of a chosen passage. This exercise would be helpful for you to continue on your own for all of the subsequent readings on the syllabus, but I require and will collect only the first two.

2) Weekly reading commentaries. The commentaries can be meditations on the (usually) provided study questions, further questioning of your own, or other ideas you find interesting and/or problematic in the text. They are intended to enhance class discussion, and will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. They should take about 10 minutes to write. You are responsible for one commentary each week, posted either by Sunday at midnight or by Tuesday at midnight. In the classes for which you do not write a commentary, you are expected to reply to a colleague (by Monday at midnight or by Wednesday at midnight) and to think through the study questions while preparing that day's reading. While you do not have to present your commentaries in class formally, this is a way you can communicate to me and to each other what class discussion should be about even before it gets started. Your commentary can relate the present work to other texts on the syllabus, concentrate on a particular passage in a close reading, or simply bring up any issue that you find most important or interesting in the assigned reading.

3) Two 5-8 page papers. Due dates for these papers are indicated on the syllabus. I welcome students to meet with me (during office hours or in other arranged times) at any point in the writing process- to discuss possible thesis statements, to develop arguments, to polish final drafts, etc. However, I will not meet with students or answer emails about the paper starting 48 hours before the paper deadline. Late papers are penalized a fraction of a grade per day (A to A-). A “day” counts as 1 minute 23 hours and 59 minutes. A second day is 24 hours until 47 hours and 59 minutes, etc. Submit it in the directed manner; if I have trouble accessing the paper, it will be penalized as late until I can access it.
Polemarchus said: It looks to me, Socrates, as if you two are starting off for Athens. It looks the way it is, then, I said. Do you see how many we are? he said. I do. Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here. Isn't there another alternative, namely, that we persuade you to let us go? But could you persuade us, if we won't listen? (327c-d)

Indeed, I was once present when someone asked the poet Sophocles: “How are you as far as sex goes, Sophocles? Can you still make love with a woman?” “Quiet man,” the poet replied, “I am very glad to have escaped from all that, like a slave who has escaped from a savage and tyrannical master.” I thought at the time that he was right, and I still do, for old age brings peace and freedom from all such things. When the appetites relax and cease to importune us, everything Sophocles said comes to pass, and we escape from many mad masters. In these matters and in those concerning relatives, the real cause isn’t old age, Socrates, but the way people live. If they are moderate and contented, old age, too, is only moderately onerous; if they aren’t, both old age and youth are hard to bear. (329c-d)

Polemarchus and I were frightened and flustered as he roared into our midst: What nonsense have you two been talking, Socrates? Why do you act like idiots by giving way to one another? If you truly want to know what justice is, don’t just ask questions and then refute the answers simply to satisfy your competitiveness or love of honor. You know very well that it is easier to ask questions than answer them. Give an answer yourself, and tell us what you say the just is. And don’t tell me that it’s the right, the beneficial, the profitable, the gainful, or the advantageous, but tell me clearly and exactly what you mean; for I won’t accept such nonsense from you. (336c-d)

If we’re to persuade our people that no citizen has ever hated another and that it’s impious to do so, then that’s what should be told to children from the beginning by old men and women, and as these children grow older, poets should be compelled to tell them the same sort of thing... The young can’t distinguish what is allegorical from what isn’t, and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable. For these reasons, then, we should probably take the utmost care to insure that the first stories they hear about virtue are the best ones for them to hear. (379e)

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This first class session is the only time in the whole year where I dictate or limit their choices as to what passage they might write on- this is simply for the sake of time in the first class, and to give them a little bit more guidance in this new assignment. However, all subsequent commentaries are totally open to student choice from the required reading.
Appendix C: Course Syllabus Fall 2016

CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION: Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West
C1101, Section 34 Fall Semester 2016
Room: 401 Hamilton
Time: TR 8:10am-10:00am
Instructor: Nicole Callahan (nac2003@columbia.edu)
Office: 329D Horace Mann (at Teachers College)
Office Hours: Tuesday 10:15am-12:15pm, & by appt.

“Let no man imagine that I hold justice can be taught. On the contrary I am convinced that there is no art capable of implanting justice and temperance in the hearts of those who are not naturally inclined to virtue. But I do believe that nothing helps so much towards the practice of virtue as the study of political wisdom and eloquence” - Isocrates

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Created in 1919 as a War and Peace Issues course, CC is now seen as introducing students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities – political, social, moral, and religious – that human beings construct for themselves and the values that inform and define such communities. Still intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens, CC is also meant to instruct them in crafting well-constructed arguments in speech and writing alike. In the first semester of “Contemporary Civilization” we will encounter political, ethical, and religious visions of real and possible social communities that span different times and cultures. Many of the texts we will be reading are deemed to be somehow foundational to our contemporary civilization. While they may help us understand aspects of the current “civilized” order, the texts also contain conceptual and imaginative resources that can be used to confront the present organization of society critically. My aim this semester is not so much to justify contemporary civilization as it is or appears, but rather to review and engage with texts of the past that offer a view of missed opportunities and of alternative civilizations that never came to be. From Plato’s apparent hostility to democracy in the Republic to John Locke’s appeal to the rights of the demos in Second Treatise of Government, this encounter provides an index that can then be employed to challenge the age in which we find ourselves today.

One of the historical and ongoing controversies around the content of the course is that there is a perceived absence of diversity in the texts chosen for the syllabus. The authors are mostly male, mostly Western, mostly white. I would encourage you to view the absence of diversity as kind of the point: there are few women writers on the syllabus because women didn't have the tools to participate in the conversations of that time: from Aristotle’s first description of his ideal reader as a young man, women are largely left out as readers and writers in the course. Were we to make the effort to add in an equal number of female writers, it would falsely appear that women have been as present as men in the intellectual and philosophical conversations of western civilization for the past 3,000 years. Similarly, race isn't in most of the texts explicitly because it isn’t a term that existed at the time most of these texts were written. The idea of the course is that we have to look back to the beginning to be able to see where we came from: the debates are embedded within the chosen texts- selection and omission are, here as in many other places, significant and not accidental. We go chronologically and we see the changes as we go; through the lens of the syllabus, we witness the history of violence and oppression and subjugation through the absence of diverse voices: the absence is crucially important.
TEXTS
Plato, Republic (Hackett)
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (Oxford)
Aristotle, Politics (Hackett)
New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha (Oxford)
Augustine, City of God (Penguin)
The Qur’an, Abdel Haleem ed. (Oxford)
Machiavelli, The Prince (Hackett)
More, Utopia (Hackett) *(n.b. This is not on the standard CC list)*
The Protestant Reformation (Harper & Row)
Hobbes, Leviathan (Oxford)
Locke, Political Writings, Wootton, ed. (Hackett)
Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy (Hackett)

You can buy a substantially discounted package deal on all the Oxford texts from Book Culture. You can also buy the rest of the books at Book Culture (new or used, which will save you money- but, if you buy used, **YOU NEED TO HAVE THE RIGHT EDITION**. Not just page numbers but translations might be different.). You'll be supporting an independent academic bookstore in the neighborhood, which is good. Of course, you can also get them online through retailers like Amazon. **Please take care to purchase the correct translations and editions.** All others are online in the [CC reader](https://class.columbia.edu/1218-cc-reader) or linked in the “Files and Resources” section of Courseworks. All book titles have also been placed on Butler Reserves. **You are required to have a hard copy (book or print out) of all the texts in class on the assigned day.**

CLASS SCHEDULE *(this is, of course, provisional, and WILL BE adjusted as needed. Things highlighted in *yellow* are things I am still making decisions about).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Text/Theme</th>
<th>Required Selection/Pages Done Before Class</th>
<th>Supplements: Lectures, Articles, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9/6   | Plato, *Republic* | “What is Contemporary Civilization?”; I, II, III and IV up to page 121 | Tufts Perseus [online resource library](https://class.columbia.edu/1218-cc-reader)  
Core Lecture: Transition from Lit Hum to CC  
Open Yale: Steven Smith on *Republic I-II* |
| 9/8   | Plato, *Republic* | I, II, III and IV (to page 121) | Core Lecture: *Why Care About this “Canon”?*  
Open Yale: *Republic III-IV* |
| 9/13  | Plato, *Republic* | IV, V, VI and VII | Core Lecture: *Ancient Greeks Up Close and Personal*  
Open Yale: *Republic V* |
| 9/15  | Plato, *Republic* | VIII, IX and X | Core Lecture: *Culture, Art, and Poetry in the Republic*  
BBC: *Socrates* |
<p>| 9/19  | PAPER 1 | <strong>MONDAY 9/19 by 5pm to Christine in</strong> | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>DUE</th>
<th>202 Ham</th>
<th>Open Yale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/20</td>
<td>Aristotle, NE</td>
<td>I-II, III: 1-5</td>
<td><strong>School of Athens</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>NE 1-5 and NE II</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Food Ethics from Prof. Vogt</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>Aristotle, NE</td>
<td>V: 1-7; VI: 5-8, 12-13; VII:1-3; VIII: 1-3; X</td>
<td><strong>Weakness of Will</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>Aristotle, Politics</td>
<td>I; III: 6-13; IV: 1-2, 11; VII:1-3; VIII: 1-3</td>
<td><strong>Politics I-III ; Politics IV ; Politics VII</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Politics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>TaNaKh; Hebrew Bible</td>
<td>Exodus 1-34</td>
<td><strong>Issues of translation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Hebrew Bible, Context, Exodus</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The Talmud</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/4</td>
<td>Christian Bible</td>
<td><em>Matthew, Romans, and Galatians</em> entire</td>
<td><strong>Elaine Pagels: Which Jesus?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Why Study This?, Gospel of Matthew, Paul and the Romans, Paul as Missionary</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/6</td>
<td><em>al-Qur'an</em></td>
<td>Suras 1, 114, 92, 81-88, 75-79, 72, 63, 62, 57, 48, 24, 19, 12, 9, 5, 4, 3, 2 [sic: read in the order listed here]</td>
<td><strong>Islamic Conquests</strong></td>
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<td>Paper 1 returned</td>
<td><strong>Origins of Islamic Law ; Arab Conquests</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>PAPER 2 DUE</td>
<td><strong>MONDAY 10/10 by 5pm to Christine in 202 Ham</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>Augustine, <em>City of God</em></td>
<td>I. Pref-11, 16-22, 25, 28-36; II.2; IV.1-4, 15, 33; V.Pref., 1, 8-24; VI.Pref; X.32</td>
<td><strong>From Jesus to Christ</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Evil to the Core</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/13</td>
<td>Augustine, <em>City of God</em></td>
<td>XI.1-8; XII.1-8, 22-24, 28; XIV. 1-4, 6, 8-19, 21-28; XIX.1, 4-8, 10-17, 19, 21, 24, 26-28; XXII. 6, 23-24, 28-30</td>
<td><strong>Pre-Modern Interpreters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Pelagian Controversy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/18</td>
<td>Medieval Islamic Philosophers In <em>CC Reader</em></td>
<td>Al-Ghazali, <em>The Rescuer from Error</em> (59-98)</td>
<td><strong>We Are What We Remember</strong></td>
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<td>Ibn Tufayl <em>Hayy Ibn Yaqzān</em> (109-166)</td>
<td><strong>Abbasid Period</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Al Ghazali</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Avicenna</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Translation Movement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>St. Thomas Aquinas</td>
<td>&quot;The Summa Against the Gentiles,&quot; (entire)</td>
<td><strong>Aquinas</strong></td>
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<td>&quot;On Kingship,&quot; (entire)</td>
<td><strong>Averroes</strong></td>
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<td>&quot;The Summa of Theology (p30-56)</td>
<td><strong>Abelard and Heloise</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Dante</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Reading and Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/25</td>
<td></td>
<td>Machiavelli</td>
<td><em>The Prince</em> (entire, including Letter to Vettori in The Prince, in the beginning)</td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Renaissance Paganism</em></td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Machiavelli</em></td>
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<td>Open Yale: <em>Machiavelli</em> 1-12</td>
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<td>Open Yale: <em>Machiavelli</em> 13-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/27</td>
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<td>Machiavelli Cont’d</td>
<td><em>The Prince</em> (entire, including Letter to Vettori in The Prince, in the beginning)</td>
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<td>What is the project of CC?</td>
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<td>Machiavelli- <em>Devil or Democrat</em></td>
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<td>BBC: The <em>Medici</em></td>
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<td>10/28</td>
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<td>MIDTERM REV.</td>
<td>10am: Meet in Nicole’s office (329D Horace Mann)</td>
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<td>11/1</td>
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<td>Mid-term exam</td>
<td>HM 424 at TC (one floor above Nicole’s office) Distributed <em>Paper 1 TOPICS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas More</td>
<td><em>Utopia</em> (p39-89, including title page, all letters, &amp; Book 1)</td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Utopia</em></td>
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<td>11/8</td>
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<td>Election Holiday</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas More</td>
<td><em>Utopia</em> (p90-168, Book 2 plus letters AND p196-198)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/15</td>
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<td>Luther and the Protestant Reformation</td>
<td>Luther “Preface to the First Volume of Latin Writing” &amp; “The Freedom of a Christian Man”</td>
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<td>Luther “On Government Authority”</td>
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<td>Luther, ”The Twelve Articles of the Peasants” [all in Hillerbrand]</td>
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<td>Open Yale: <em>Weber and the Protestant Ethic</em></td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Diet of Worms</em></td>
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<td>In <em>CC Reader</em></td>
<td>BBC: <em>Cultural Imperialism</em></td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Human Rights</em></td>
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<td>11/21</td>
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<td><strong>PAPER 1 DUE</strong></td>
<td><strong>MONDAY 5pm DIGITALLY SUBMITTED (uploaded to Gdrive and shared with <a href="mailto:nac2003@columbia.edu">nac2003@columbia.edu</a>)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11/22</td>
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<td>New World In <em>CC Reader</em></td>
<td>Sepulveda, <em>Democrats Alter</em> De Las Casas, 30 <em>Juridical</em> and <em>Apologetic History</em></td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Aztec Empire</em></td>
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<td>BBC: <em>Maya Empire</em></td>
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<td>BBC: <em>The Siege of Tenochtitlan</em></td>
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<td>FILM: <em>Controversy at Valladolid</em></td>
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<td>11/24</td>
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<td>THANKSGIVING</td>
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<td>11/29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Descartes</td>
<td><em>Discourse on Method</em> (all, but skip p27)</td>
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<td>BBC: <em>The Cogito</em></td>
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</table>
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation: I (aspire to) conduct Contemporary Civilization as a seminar, not a lecture. This means that the quality of the course depends directly on your participation and involvement. Attendance at each session is mandatory. Arrive punctually. Do not ask to leave early. Unexcused absences or tardy arrivals will have a serious effect on your grade. If you must miss class due to a health problem, family emergency, or observance of a religious holiday, you must contact the instructor in advance. Despite popular belief, there is no policy of two or three or whatever # of “free” missed classes. Missing class for an illness or injury will require a note from your doctor explaining that you needed to miss class (not just a note saying you saw the doctor on the day of class). If you have an excused absence then you are able to make up the lost participation points through an additional assignment. It is your responsibility to contact me for the prompt for the make-up assignment in the case of an excused absence. I will not pursue you for make-up work. Depending on the duration of the illness, you will typically have one week to turn in the make-up assignment.

Students are expected to attend every session of their Core classes. In the event that a student must miss class due to religious observance, illness, or family emergency, instructors are expected to provide students with the opportunity to make up any missed work. Instructors may also encourage (though not require) that students complete additional assignments to help make up for lost class participation. Whenever possible (in the case of religious holidays, for example), students should provide advance notification of absence. Students who miss class without instructor’s permission should expect to have their grade lowered.

Thorough Preparation: The texts we will be encountering are challenging and demand careful, attentive reading. You will be expected to come to class having read the assignments before the class date on which they will be discussed. You are expected to be thoroughly prepared and actively participate in each class session. In-class activities will occasionally require a written response, so please be prepared with paper and pen at each class. Short take-home assignments will be assigned at the discretion of the
instructor and will be included in the participation grade. There is also the possibility of occasional pop-
quizzes, if the instructor deems them needed. Work ahead if you need to. Set aside ample time to
concentrate on the readings, note and define the authors’ main concepts and how they work in the
arguments, write down questions about what you find compelling, confusing, strong or weak in the texts.
Please note, laptops are not allowed in class, for many reasons (unless you have dispensation
from ODS to take notes on a computer). Here’s one reason I prefer you take notes by hand.

WEB RESOURCES
The course homepage that you can access through Courseworks (www.courseworks.columbia.edu)
contains course information, the syllabus with links to on-line texts, and a class discussion board. I will
also post study questions for readings and you will post your own commentaries and replies.

DISABILITY SERVICES
Columbia University’s Office of Disability Services facilitates equal access for students with disabilities by
coordinating accommodations and support services, cultivating a campus culture that is sensitive and
responsive to the needs of students. Students seeking accommodations or support services from
Disability Services are required to register with the office, and provide evidence of registration, PRIOR to
receiving accommodations from instructors.

Principles of Academic Honesty
Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Literature
Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will
be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the
case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of “F” in the
course and be referred to dean’s discipline for further institutional action.

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:
1. Plagiarism: Failure to cite or otherwise acknowledge ideas or phrases used in any paper, exercise, or
   project submitted in a course but gained from another source, such as a published text, another person’s
   work, materials on the Web.
2. Self-plagiarism: The submission of one piece of work in more than one course without the explicit
   permission of the instructors involved.
3. The submission of work as one’s own which has been prepared by or purchased from another.
4. Cheating on examinations or tests: To give or receive assistance from written material, another person,
   his or her paper, or any other source during an examination or test.
5. Falsification or misrepresentation of data in any course work.
6. Violating the limits of acceptable collaboration in course work set by a faculty member or department.
7. Removing, hiding, or altering library materials so as to hinder the research of other students.
8. Facilitating academic dishonesty by enabling another to engage in such behavior.

Ignorance of College policy shall not be a defense in any disciplinary proceedings. The College holds
each member of the community responsible for understanding these principles and for abiding by them.
Appendix D: Course Syllabus Spring 2017

CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION: Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West
C1101, Section 34 Spring Semester 2017
Room: 401 Hamilton
Time: TR 8:10am-10:00am
Instructor: Nicole Callahan (nac2003@columbia.edu)
Office: 329D Horace Mann (at Teachers College)
Office Hours: Tuesday 10:15am-12:15pm, & by appt.

“Men live upon trust, and their knowledge is nothing but opinion moulded up between custom and interest, the two great luminaries of the world, the only lights they walk by. Since, therefore, we are left to the uncertainty of two such fickle guides, let the examples of the bravest men direct our opinions and actions; if custom must guide us, let us tread in those steps that lead to virtue and honour. Let us make it our interest to honour our maker, and be useful to our fellows, and content with ourselves. This, if it will not secure us from error, will keep us from losing ourselves. If we walk not directly straight we shall not be altogether in a maze, and since ‘tis not agreed where and what reason is, let us content ourselves with the most beautiful and useful opinions.” -- John Locke, “Letter to Tom”

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Created in 1919 as a War and Peace Issues course, CC is now seen as introducing students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities – political, social, moral, and religious – that human beings construct for themselves and the values that inform and define such communities. Still intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens, CC is also meant to instruct them in crafting well-constructed arguments in speech and writing alike. In the second semester of “Contemporary Civilization” we will, as in the first, encounter political, ethical, and religious visions of real and possible social communities that span different times and cultures. Many of the texts we will be reading are deemed to be somehow foundational to our contemporary civilization. While they may help us understand aspects of the current “civilized” order, the texts also contain conceptual and imaginative resources that can be used to confront the present organization of society critically. My aim this semester is not so much to justify Contemporary Civilization as it is or appears, but rather to review and engage with texts of the less-distant-past that offer a view of missed opportunities and of alternative civilizations that never came to be, and encounter which, I hope, provides an index that can then be employed to challenge the age in which we find ourselves today.

One of the historical and ongoing controversies around the content of the course is that there is a perceived absence of diversity in the texts chosen for the syllabus. The authors are mostly male, mostly Western, mostly white. I would encourage you to view the absence of diversity as kind of the point: there are few women writers on the syllabus because few women had the tools to participate in the conversations of these times: beginning with Aristotle’s first description of his ideal reader as a young man, women are largely left out as readers and writers in the course. Were we to make the effort to add in an equal number of female writers, it would falsely appear that women have been as present as men in the intellectual and philosophical conversations of western civilization for the past 3,000 years. Similarly, race isn’t in most of the texts explicitly because it isn’t a term that existed at the time most of these texts were written. The idea of the course is that we have to look back to the beginning to be able to see where we came from: the debates are embedded within the chosen texts- selection and omission are, here as in
many other places, significant and not accidental. We go chronologically and we see the changes as we go; through the lens of the syllabus, we witness the history of violence and oppression and subjugation through the absence of diverse voices: the absence is crucially important.

TEXTS: Buy the books at Book Culture (new or used, which will save you money- but, if you buy used, YOU NEED TO HAVE THE RIGHT EDITION. Not just page numbers but translations might be different.). You'll be supporting an independent academic bookstore in the neighborhood, which is good. Of course, you can also get them online through retailers like Amazon. Please take care to purchase the correct translations and editions. All others are online in the CC reader http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/ or linked in the “Files and Resources” section of Courseworks. All book titles have also been placed on Butler Reserves. You are required to have a hard copy (book or print out) of all the texts in class on the assigned day.

Rousseau, The Basic Political Writings (Hackett) Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals / Ecce
Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (Cambridge) Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Grove)
Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Dover) George Orwell, Animal Farm (Signet)
Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Penguin) Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (Vintage)
Marx-Engels Reader (Norton)
Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (Cambridge)

CLASS SCHEDULE (this is provisional, and WILL BE adjusted and rearranged - things highlighted in yellow are provisional or TBD.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Selections</th>
<th>Optional Supplementary Talks and Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/17</td>
<td>Rousseau (1755)</td>
<td>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (entire- with Dedication and Preface)</td>
<td>Yale: Discourse I, Discourse II</td>
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<td>1/24</td>
<td>Kant (1785)</td>
<td>What is Enlightenment? GW of the MP of Morals (Preface, Section I and Section II, through 4:424, p. 36)</td>
<td>BBC: Common Sense Philosophy Yale: Deontology Kantian Ethics in Driverless Cars</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/26</td>
<td>Kant (1785)</td>
<td>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (finish Section II, to p. 55)</td>
<td>BBC: David Hume Yale: The Trolley Problem The Atlantic: The Trolley Problem Trolley Quiz, ANother trolley quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Reading/Resource</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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| 1/31 AND 2/2 | Smith  
Theory of Moral Sentiments (selections in PDF) | MONDAY 5pm in the CC Office | BBC: Enlightenment in Scotland, Adam Smith  
Bloom Reasoned Empathy, Bloom Video, Bloom and Pinker in Conversation |
| 2/7       | Swift (1729)  
Smith (1776)  
Modest Proposal  
Wealth of Nations: Intro and Plan of the Work; Book I (Ch 1-4, 7-8), Book II (Ch 3), Book IV (Ch 1-2 and last 2 pages), Book V (I.3, Article 2 on ED) |            | BBC: Swift Modest Proposal  
Pencil  
BBC: Wealth of Nations  
Yale: Invisible Hand |
| 2/9       | Snowpocalypse |            |                                                                      |
| 2/14      | Revolutions  
Douglass (1852)  
Sieyes  
Smith  
Dec of Ind (with drafts)  
“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”  
What is the Third Estate?  
On Education (Book V, Article 2, p. 819-846) |            | BBC: Republicanism, Washington and the American Rev, Frederick Douglass in Scotland  
Yale: Independence, Confederation, Union Without Power, Constitutional Convention, Constitution, Nation Building |
| 2/16      | Burke (1789)  
Reflections on the Revolution in France (PDF in CW Files and Resources) |            | BBC: Burke  
BBC: Legacy of French Rev |
| 2/20      | REVIEW SESSION  
Midterm review session, Monday afternoon 2-4 |            | Meet Nicole’s Office |
| 2/21      | Defoe (1719)  
Rousseau (1762)  
On The Education of Women  
Sophie (pdf posted in courseworks)  
RBML visit: 6th Floor E Butler |            | BBC: Bluestockings  
NY Times on Gender of professors  
NPR on Gender of professors |
| 2/23      | Mid-term exam  
Mid-term exam 433 HORACE MANN @ TC |            |                                                                      |
| 2/28      | Wollstonecraft (1792)  
Woolf  
Vindication (Start at p. 65 with Dedication, Advertisement, Intro, Chs 1,2,4,5,9,12)  
Woolf on Wollstonecraft |            | BBC: Wollstonecraft |
| 3/2       | Tocqueville (1835)  
Democracy in America (Author’s Introduction, Vol. 1, Part 1, Ch. 3-4; Part 2, Ch. 1, 6; Vol. 2, Author’s Note, Part 1, Ch. 1-2, 5; Part 2, Ch 1; Part 3, 12; Part 4, Ch. 6) |            | BBC: The Statue of Liberty  
Yale: Tocqueville I, Tocqueville II, Tocqueville III |
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author (Year)</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
<th>BBC:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>Mill (1859)</td>
<td>“On Liberty” (I-IV) &lt;br&gt;Paper 1 TOPICS DISTRIBUTED</td>
<td>Utilitarianism, Utilitarianism</td>
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<td>3/9</td>
<td>Mill &amp; Taylor (1861)</td>
<td>“Subjection of Women,” (Chs 1,3,4); “On Marriage” (ALL of PDF on cw)</td>
<td>The Nanny State: It’s For Your Own Good!</td>
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<td><strong>Spring Break</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3/21</td>
<td>Kierkegaard (1843)</td>
<td>Fear and Trembling (all)</td>
<td>Kierkegaard, Belief, Truth, and False Knowledge</td>
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<td>3/23</td>
<td>Marx (1843)</td>
<td>Read them in THIS ORDER, all in Marx-Engels Reader; Manifesto of the Communist Party (469-500); Capital: On Commodities (302-12, 319-29), Production of Surplus Value (344-361)</td>
<td>Marx, Capitalism, Marx Challenge, Marx’s Theory, Marxian Exploitation, Marxian Legacy, Exploitative Gig Economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/2</td>
<td><strong>Paper 1 Due</strong></td>
<td>Sunday MIDNIGHT shared with Nicole (<a href="mailto:nicoleacallahan@gmail.com">nicoleacallahan@gmail.com</a>) as Google Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/6</td>
<td>Darwin (1859)</td>
<td>Origin of Species: Intro, 3, 4, 14; Descent of Man: 2-3, 6, 21 (91 pages total), “Retch All Night” (PDF on Courseworks);</td>
<td>Voyages of Cook, Origin of Darwin, Voyage of the Beagle, Origin of Species, Darwin after Origins, Malthus</td>
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<td>Texts/Assignments</td>
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<td>4/13</td>
<td>Freud (c. 1888-1938)</td>
<td>Civilization and Discontents (p. 722-772) BBC: <em>Psychoanalysis and Democracy</em></td>
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<td>4/20</td>
<td>Gandhi (1933)</td>
<td>Hind Swaraj <em>PDF in Files and Resources</em> (If you want to get the book, it’s this one) (Preface, Intro, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11-14, 16-18) Letter from Birmingham Yale: <em>Little Rock, Sit-Ins and Civil Rights, There is No Such Thing as Western Civilization</em></td>
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<td>4/20</td>
<td>Fanon (1961) Tocqueville (1835)</td>
<td><em>Wretched of the Earth</em> (Ch 1, 5) <em>Excerpts from Algerian Writings</em> (PDF on Courseworks) The Algerian Question (PDF on Courseworks) BBC: <em>Haitian Revolution</em></td>
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<td>de Beauvoir (1949)</td>
<td><em>The Second Sex</em> (PDF) BBC: <em>De Beauvoir, Sartre</em></td>
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<td>4/27</td>
<td>Orwell (1945)</td>
<td>Animal Farm (incl Preface and Intro) BBC: <em>Animal Farm</em> BBC: <em>Consolations of Philosophy</em></td>
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<td>5/5</td>
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<td><strong>FINAL EXAM 1:00-4:00 Location TBD</strong></td>
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**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Attendance and Participation:** I (aspire to) conduct Contemporary Civilization as a seminar, not a lecture. This means that the quality of the course depends directly on your participation and involvement. Attendance at each session is **mandatory**. Arrive punctually. Do not ask to leave early. Absences or tardy arrivals will have a serious effect on your grade. If you must miss class due to a health problem, family emergency, or observance of a religious holiday, you must contact the instructor in advance.

Despite popular belief, there is no policy of two free missed classes. Missing class for an illness or injury will require a note from your doctor explaining that you needed to miss class (not just a note saying you saw the doctor on the day of class). If you have an excused absence then you are able to make up the lost participation points through an additional assignment. It is your responsibility to contact me for the prompt for the make-up assignment in the case of an excused absence. I will not pursue you for make-up work. Depending on the duration of the illness, you will typically have one week to turn in the make-up assignment.

**Thorough Preparation:** The texts we will be encountering are challenging and demand careful, attentive reading. You will be expected to come to class having read the assignments before the class date on which they will be discussed. You are expected to be thoroughly prepared and actively participate in each class session. In-class activities will occasionally require a written response, so please be prepared with paper and pen at each class. Short take-home assignments will be assigned at the discretion of the
instructor and will be included in the participation grade. There is also the possibility of occasional pop-quizzes, if the instructor deems them needed. Work ahead if you need to. Set aside ample time to concentrate on the readings, note and define the authors’ main concepts and how they work in the arguments, write down questions about what you find compelling, confusing, strong or weak in the texts. **PLEASE NOTE, LAPTOPS ARE NOT ALLOWED IN CLASS, FOR MANY REASONS. HERE'S ONE. FOR ALL ONLINE READINGS, YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAVE A PRINTED COPY IN CLASS.**

**WEB RESOURCES**
The course homepage that you can access through Courseworks (www.courseworks.columbia.edu) contains course information, the syllabus with links to on-line texts, and a class discussion board. I will also post study questions for readings and you will post your own commentaries and replies.

**DISABILITY SERVICES**
Columbia University's Office of Disability Services facilitates equal access for students with disabilities by coordinating accommodations and support services, cultivating a campus culture that is sensitive and responsive to the needs of students. Students seeking accommodations or support services from Disability Services are required to register with the office, and provide evidence of registration, PRIOR to receiving accommodations from instructors.

**Daily Note Taker:** Students will sign up to be the note taker for each class. Notes will be posted in the shared Google doc. The instructor will not be checking these notes, or making sure that they are correct or completed. This is a project that benefits everyone, firstly as a record of the class, secondly as a place for absent students to catch up, and thirdly as a review aid (you will see at Midterms and Finals just how valuable this is). There are many other reasons I do this that I won’t go into here. BUT- you all are responsible for this, and if you drop the ball, that’s your bad.

**Principles of Academic Honesty**
Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of “F” in the course and be referred to dean’s discipline for further institutional action.

**Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:**
1. Plagiarism: Failure to cite or otherwise acknowledge ideas or phrases used in any paper, exercise, or project submitted in a course but gained from another source, such as a published text, another person’s work, materials on the Web.
2. Self-plagiarism: The submission of one piece of work in more than one course without the explicit permission of the instructors involved.
3. The submission of work as one’s own which has been prepared by or purchased from another.
4. Cheating on examinations or tests: To give or receive assistance from written material, another person, his or her paper, or any other source during an examination or test.
5. Falsification or misrepresentation of data in any course work.
6. Violating the limits of acceptable collaboration in course work set by a faculty member or department.
7. Removing, hiding, or altering library materials so as to hinder the research of other students.
8. Facilitating academic dishonesty by enabling another to engage in such behavior.

Ignorance of College policy shall not be a defense in any disciplinary proceedings. The College holds each member of the community responsible for understanding these principles and for abiding by them.
INFORMED CONSENT

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: RADICAL WRITING: APPRENTICES ESSAYING WAYS INTO PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY
Principal Investigator: Nicole Callahan nac2003@columbia.edu 805-284-8275

INTRODUCTION
You are being invited to participate in this research study called “RADICAL WRITING: APPRENTICES ESSAYING WAYS INTO PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are a student in Nicole Callahan’s section of Contemporary Civilization. Approximately twenty people will participate in this study and it will take no extra time beyond what you would usual dedicate to the course to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
This study is being done to determine whether the commentary assignment is effective in introducing students to participating in an academic community of writers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:
I am seeking your consent for you to be involved in a dissertation study related to writing assignment, response, and assessment, and writing identities that I am carrying out at Teachers College, Columbia University. The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of this shift in writing behaviors on the quality of student writing and students’ perception of themselves as writers. Information collected in this study will appear in my doctoral dissertation, supervised by Prof. Sheridan Blau. The study is an inquiry into the use and effects of the “Commentary” assignment. It will use my field notes from our class (which may include paraphrases of your comments), and passages from your posted and handed in assignments. Students will not be asked to do any special activities or do behave differently. Students will be asked on a case-by-case basis for permission to excerpt from their work.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to participate, your commentaries from the course may be used as data for analysis. A pseudonym will be used and all identifying information will be changed.

You may also, at some point, be interviewed by the principal investigator. During the interview you may be asked to discuss your experience with the commentary in the course. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is written down the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be asked to participate. The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential.

Finally, you will be filling out the usual Columbia University course evaluation. As with all courses, this will take about fifteen minutes and will be done online at your leisure. This information is, as with all course evaluations, anonymous and will be used anonymously.
WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in any other course at Columbia University. The normal risks of participating in this course are not increased by your participation in this study. You self-select what you submit online in the regular commentaries and can therefore choose to share as little or as much as you want. To reduce any risks, you will have the freedom to opt out of answering any evaluations questions that make you feel uncomfortable and can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

As part of an ethical approach to this study I assure you that:
· Students will be completing their everyday learning activities in the usual way.
· The study will not interfere with learning.
· Individual students will not be identified or named.
· Individual students will not be assessed or tested or graded as part of the study.
· Their participation (or not) will not affect your grade in the course.
· You may choose not to participate.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit future students because the results of this study may be used to inform and improve the fields of teacher preparation, English education, and education policy. There will be no consequences if at any time you choose not to participate in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when you have completed the course. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven’t finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years. That being said, since this is a relatively small case study site, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and there is some risk that you may be identifiable by others within the site by reading my dissertation. You have the option of withdrawing from the research study at any time without benefit or consequence.

I will be using some of your responses to the anonymous course evaluations, both the official one through the university, and the Google Form Survey that I designed. I will not be able to match your responses to your names for any of these data. All data will be stored in on my password-protected computers or in a locked file cabinet in my home, to which no one else will have access.

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To assure confidentiality and protection for you, I promise that:

- Data will only be used for educational and research purposes.
- You may ask to see and/or review my use of your data at any point.
- You may request that your work not be shown to any others.
- You may request that your work not be used in the study.

**HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?**
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

**CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING**
Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, (choose the correct sentence) you will still be able to participate in this study or you will not be able to participate in this research study.

- I give my consent to be recorded ________________________________ Signature
- I do not consent to be recorded ________________________________ Signature

**WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY**

- I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College ________________________________ Signature
- I do not consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University ________________________________ Signature

**OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT**
The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

- Yes ___________________________  No ___________________________
  Initial  Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

- Yes ___________________________  No ___________________________
  Initial  Initial

**WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**
If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Nicole Callahan, at 805-284-8275 or at nac2003@columbia.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Sheridan Blau at 212-678-7430.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th
PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

● I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
● I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades.
● The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
● If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
● Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
● If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (805) 284-8275 and email is nac2003@columbia.edu.
● If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
● I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent and this Participant's Rights document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: ______________________________________ Date: ______________________
Signature: ______________________________________

Investigator’s Verification of Explanation
I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to ____________________ (participant’s name) in age-appropriate language.

He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e. assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________________
Appendix F: All Three Cohorts’ Commentary Data

Starting on the left, the second column is their identifying code, then the number of commentaries completed in the fall, followed by the total number of words they wrote in all of their commentaries (which includes replies) for that semester. Next is their grade in the course (out of 100). Then to the right of that the same categories repeat for spring. The last two columns on the right are the approximate change in number of words from fall to spring, and the change in their grade from fall to spring, which is not a category I have for 2016-2017. The study participants are highlighted.

### 2014-2015

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<th>Fall Grade</th>
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### 2015-2016

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<th>Spring Grade</th>
<th>F-&gt;S Words Change</th>
<th>F-&gt;S Grade Change</th>
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The number of commentaries in each semester is not exactly the same number for each cohort, for various reasons: for example, 2014-2015 had 26 in fall and 20 in spring, which is noted at the top of the column for each cohort.
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2016-2017

<table>
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<tr>
<td>(Steve)</td>
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<td>97</td>
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</table>
I have here sorted all the data for all classes in descending order by number of commentaries and then by number of words, both in Fall and Spring, taking note of the top three and bottom three (or two or four) in each, and noticing connections between those numbers and their course grades, as well as students who appear in multiple groups over semesters and students who significantly change.

Sorted by number of commentaries written in Fall

2014-2015 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who completed the fewest commentaries also had the three lowest grades in the class: (20148:14:87, 20147:15:88, 201411:21:89)\(^6\). The four students who completed the most commentaries had high grades but not the highest in the course, particularly 201415, who completed the second highest number of commentaries, but had only a 93: (20143:27:100, yc2895:27:97, 201415:28:93, Ben:29:95).

2015-2016 Observations: In this cohort, the four students who completed the fewest commentaries had some of the lowest grades in the class: (20154:18:91, Peter:19:92, 201512:22:86, 201513:22:92). The two students who completed the most commentaries were among the four highest grades in the course: (20157:26:100, 20151:36:97).

2016-2017 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who completed the fewest commentaries also had among the six lowest grades in the class: (201614:19:84, 201610:20:78, 201612:21:90). The three students who completed the most commentaries had among the four highest grades in the course: (Steve:26:97, 20162:27:99, 20168:32:99).

Sorted by number of commentaries written in Spring: Completion of the required number of commentaries is 20% of their final grade in the course for the Spring, 10% more than in the Fall, as a way of emphasizing the importance of commentaries in my conception of their engagement in the course.

2014-2015 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who completed the fewest commentaries also had among the five lowest grades in the class: (20147:10:89, 20148:12:88, 201415:12:90), and two of the three were the same low grades and commentaries from the Fall. The three students who completed the most commentaries had among the eight highest grades in the course: (Jane:22:98, 201411:23:96, 20143:24:100). Patterns and Changes from Fall: 20148 and 20147 were in the low group for Fall as well. Interestingly, 201415 went from a top frequency commenter to a bottom frequency commenter, but her grade didn’t change at all. 20143 was also in the top group for Fall. Interestingly, 201411 went from a bottom commenter to a top, and her grade went up eight percentage points.

2015-2016 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who completed the fewest commentaries also had among the five lowest grades in the class: (201513:23:83, 20152:24:89, 20154:24:90). The three students who completed the most commentaries had grades almost at the median (83 86 87 89 89 90 91 92 92 93 94 95 96 97 97 98 99) in the course: (Kyle:28:93, 20158:28:97, 201512:29:87). Interestingly, 201512 went from a bottom commenter in frequency to the top, although his grade increased only by one percentage point. Patterns and Changes from Fall: Two of the three were the same low grades and commentaries from the Fall (201513:and 20154). None of these three were in the highest group in the Fall.

61 (CODE:# of commentaries:course grade)
Sorted by number of words written in Fall: remember, they are simply given points for having completed the required number of commentaries at 10% of their final grade.

2014-2015 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who wrote the fewest words also had among the lowest grades in the class, and were two of the three students who also wrote the fewest commentaries (20148 and 20147): (20148:2982:87, 201414:4649:98, 20147:4928:88). The three students who wrote the highest number of words also had the top three highest grades in the course: (20146:8358:99, 201412:8863:100, 20143:15649:100). 20143 was also in the top three for number of commentaries written in the Fall. Patterns and Changes: 20148 and 20147 were in the group of the lowest number of commentaries from both Fall and Spring, as well as having written the fewest words. 20143 was in the top group for number of commentaries for both Fall and Spring.

2015-2016 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who wrote the fewest words also had low grades in the class, but not the lowest: (Peter:3411:92, 201510:4544:95, 20159:4612:89). Only Peter was also in the Fall group who wrote the fewest number of commentaries in the class. The three students who wrote the highest number of words also had the top three highest grades in the course: (Rose:7603:96, 20155:7731:97, 20157:8038:100). Alex was also in the group who wrote the highest number of commentaries in the Fall. Patterns and Changes: None of the three bottom group here were in the bottom in the Fall or Spring for number of commentaries. None of the top three here were in the top for number of commentaries in the Fall or Spring.

2016-2017 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who wrote the fewest words had the three lowest grades in the course (201610:4864:78, 20167:5307:84, 20165:5356:87). 201610 is the only one who was also in the category of fewest number of commentaries written in Fall. The three students who wrote the most words have among the five highest grades in the course (20168:11865:99, Ashley:11946:97, 20162:15006:99). Both 20168 and 20162 were in the most commentaries written group in the Fall. Patterns and Changes: 201610 was in the lowest number of commentaries as well. Both 20168 and 20162 also completed the highest number of commentaries.

Sorted by number of words written in Spring

2014-2015 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who completed the fewest number of words have two of the lowest grades in the class and one of the highest: (20148:2127:88, 20147:3004:89, 201414:3688:98). The three students who wrote the highest number of words also had among the six highest grades in the class: (201412:5935:100, Jane:6208:98, 20143:12056:100). Patterns and Changes: 20148 and 20147 were in the group of the lowest number of commentaries from both Fall and Spring, as well as having written the fewest words in Fall and Spring. They also have two out of the three lowest grades in the course. 20143 was in the top group for number of commentaries for both Fall and Spring. 20162 was in the highest number of words in the Fall as well, and Jane was in the highest number of commentaries in the Spring.

2015-2016 Observations: In this cohort, the three students who wrote the fewest words in the Spring had about average grades for the course: (Peter:4789:95, 201510:4820:91, 20153:5291:92). In this cohort, the three students who wrote the most words in the Spring had two of the three highest grades in the class: (20155:8940:99, Kyle:9269:93, Rose:10976:97). Patterns and Changes: Peter and 201510 both were in the fewest words written group in the Fall. None of the three bottom group here were in the bottom in the Fall or Spring for number of commentaries. 20155 and Rose also had written the highest number of words in the Fall. Kyle was in both the top number of commentaries and words in the Spring.

Appendix G: Commentary Statistics of Nine Case Studies

Range of commentary length, in words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>MAX</th>
<th>MIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>240.5</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>210.2</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CODE: #of words written: course grade).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1st Column</th>
<th>2nd Column</th>
<th>3rd Column</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>250.0</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>173.5</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>301.3</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>368.4</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>393.7</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>476.0</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>289.4</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
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Appendix H: Full Interview Responses

1. What are your general feelings about your abilities in humanities classes? (English, Philosophy, etc)?

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I am confident in my abilities to discuss and draw ideas from my humanities classes, particularly philosophy and art. I feel that my engagement in the several humanities classes had a direct correlation with how I did and felt about the class; Contemporary Civilization and Art Humanities were two humanities classes that I not only did the best on, but also learned the most and felt rewarded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>I have generally considered myself to be more of an analytical thinker, so I have never been completely confident in my abilities in a humanities class. The need to look for a correct answer can often times put me into a tunnel vision that isn’t very conducive to a humanities class that demands an open mind. I’ve also noticed this to be the case when I examine two arguments or ideas of philosophy that seem to contradict each other. My natural inclination is to look for a winner by trying to evaluate which argument is truthful. It took me some time of doing this same type of thinking before I came to realize that humanities answers and responses often require a level of nuance that can frustrate the average analytical thinker who is looking for the correct answer. There may not be a clear cut victor, and acknowledging validity and substance in contradicting ideas is often the most appropriate response. The more comfort I’ve developed with this notion, the better I’ve become at discussing ideas of humanities type courses. My writing has always been strong, but I still feel that I lose my own sense of direction at times, and get lost in my own arguments, which has made humanities classes difficult for me in the past. I often have a hard time analyzing arguments from a text and making them into a presentable concept in a paper. But what gives me hope about my abilities in humanities classes is that these difficulties that I have are mostly self-inflicted. Most of my struggles are a direct result of me being unprepared, or not reading thoroughly enough, or taking the necessary time to just consider my ideas and the ideas of the text and how they relate. When I put in the adequate time, I have much greater confidence in myself in humanities classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I think I have strong abilities in humanities to read, watch, and listen critically to different perspectives, summarize arguments, and restate the information or connect the knowledge to real-world problems. My ability to craft new and original arguments is weak. I struggle with putting my thoughts into academic prose and expressing myself clearly when I have a lot of jumbled ideas about texts in my head. Ultimately, I think this inability and fear to express my original ideas about the humanities prevents me from publishing my personal ideas in a blog or putting it out in the public. I am a very strong speaker, and it’s easy for me to talk about my ideas from humanities classes with friends, when people are less critical compared to the written word. I think I ask good, relevant questions in humanities courses and I help others see the world differently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Compared to my other skills, I honestly don’t feel too confident about my abilities in humanity classes, such as reading comprehension, writing, speaking and listening on both academic and conversational level. Being a non-native and a science student, I don’t commit as much time in developing those skills as I would for quantitative skills like math. I don’t necessarily feel like I am innately bad at these humanities-related skills, but I do feel more uncomfortable/fear whenever I have a reading or writing assignment. (They tend to overwhelm me even before I start on working on them.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>I never considered myself as having really strong abilities in the Humanities areas. In High School I took &quot;accelerated&quot; and &quot;advanced placement&quot; courses in Science and Math, but mostly stuck to &quot;normal&quot; English classes. I was probably above average there, I never really had many problems providing acceptable work but I think I didn’t develop much over time. I was never really a frequent reader; usually I would only read books that were assigned to me in school. So coming into my first year at Columbia I guess had the humanities skills to do well in an average public high school but I never really pushed myself beyond the minimum of what was required to graduate. Columbia has really pushed me to grow and develop my Humanities skills. I was asked to read more and discuss with classmates much more. I have gotten much better at connecting with the texts I am reading and connecting different texts together. I probably grew the most last year during CC. I feel like writing twice a week discussion posts played a big part of that. Working in small groups also helped me talk to peers without worrying as much about making mistakes. I have ended up feeling more confident in my ability to explain what I am thinking, and at trying to understand what others are saying by asking questions and analyzing their words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>While I am proud of a certain degree of empathy and understanding, I do not feel as if I am exceptionally capable in Humanities classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>They are my core abilities that I focus my energies on the most and have grown in the most and feel most proud of. I will depend on these abilities no matter what I do in life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>I think humanities classes are classes that everyone can excel if there's effort, and I not only try my best to...</td>
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complete all of the assignments at their best, but also enjoy the subjects of humanities, because I think they construct the very foundation of our understanding of ourselves and our world.

Alex
In general, I feel like my "natural" or innate abilities in humanities classes aren't quite as strong as those of many of my peers at Columbia. It often seems like it takes me longer to process concepts and grasp ideas than it does for other students. However, I believe I make up for this (slight) shortcoming by putting in a relatively greater amount of work towards mastering the course material. I probably spend more time reading and thinking about course concepts than other students, and this allows me to ultimately perform better than average despite other students' superior natural abilities.

Greg
Prior to taking CC with Nicole I felt as though my abilities in humanities classes were far below average. My freshman year I was told by my literature humanities professor that my writing was "not up to Columbia standards", which as a first-year student was something that could've ruined my outlook on Columbia as a whole. Going into the first semester of CC I was worried and unsure what to expect, but Nicole's teaching style and effort she put into her class made me enjoy writing and I believe that this was reflected in my work.

2. What concerns do you have about your success in humanities classes? (English, Philosophy, etc)?

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>The biggest concern that I have about my success in humanities classes is distinguishing works after a certain period of time. I feel as if when I am in the moment, whether it be while I am reading or discussing a certain author, I can recall various key points and ideas. However, after a certain amount of time I feel as if the knowledge leaves my mind. I understand that this is so-called normal, but my concern is needing/wanting to discuss or draw on ideas from certain philosophers or authors, and not being able to properly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>My two biggest concerns are my own preparation for discussions and papers, and being able to set aside the more analytical part of my brain to activate the more human part of my brain. As I mentioned in the previous answer, almost all of my struggles in classes like these are a product of my own failures to adequately prepare, and take the necessary time to just read and reflect. Because I am a slow reader, I have to carve out a lot of time to do the reading and be prepared, which has demanded a serious commitment from myself to engage with the texts. Aside from my own preparation, my biggest concern is being able to set aside the more analytical part of my brain in exchange for the human side. The analytical side of my brain is quick to reject any opposing ideas or suggestions different from my own because it is constantly measuring the validity of arguments. The human side of my brain tries to allow myself to see an issue or an idea from someone else's perspective, and be open minded to consider why they came to that conclusion, and why it might be interesting. Being able to activate that line of thinking is very important to my success in humanities classes.</td>
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| Steve | I'm concerned that the strong sense of laziness I feel when actually writing a long paper for a humanities class shows that I'm not cut out for further studies in the humanities. I feel like this laziness will be recognized by my professors and peers, and they will consider me "all talk" and "no skill". If I were to take more humanities classes that were in a lecture style setting, I would be concerned that I would feel left out and "behind" the class if I didn't understand what the professor was talking about. Because there aren't clear distinctions between right and wrong in humanities classes compared to engineering classes. I also feel that major setbacks in humanities classes would be indicative of me not belonging in the course, and I would ultimately drop out. Also, I feel like I can never truly devote myself to any humanities course, because every engineering professor demands that we finish their problem set and I don't get time to finish all the readings in a timely manner. I think this separation in my mind between engineering and humanities and the fact that I have to prioritize the problem sets, leads to me not giving my all in humanities courses and that would ultimately lead to failure within the humanities course. Something that I've recently started to feel is a strong sense of isolation in non-CC friend circles that I think might affect my success in humanities classes. A theatre studies major I work with in residential life scoffs at ways I try to make meetings more efficient with slideshows and technological solutions. Also, my residence hall director who has been my boss this semester describes me as two parts, technical and compassionate. She told me, "Gosh Steve you use your technical part of your brain so much, but I don't feel like you see your compassionate side enough." It's kind of infuriating when non-technical people look at me as if I'm a different species of person, because I'm an engineer who also wants to think ethics or justice. I think people like this, who aren't as open to a person with a more technical way of thinking, kind of dissuade me from wanting to pursue humanities classes. Even more broadly, thinking about ways to allocate resources in a residence hall meeting, I might think more conservatively or agree with a Republican policy or maybe even support a few ideas by Donald Trump, but I couldn't imagine myself talking about those things with a lot of humanities students at Columbia. I would just feel shunned and my ideas, disrespected. I gave a slightly more conservative viewpoint once to an anthropology major I work with, and she said, "that's so fucking annoying, why the hell would you even think that." That amount of anger and aggression towards my ideas that I see in some humanities students also keeps me away from discussion based humanities courses. I like to talk to learn, and I think humanities is really reliant on talking, but I don't feel like some of my conservative viewpoints are safe to say, so I stay quiet. I think my inability to clearly connect ideas on paper...
What do you think it means to be a “Philosopher” or to "do philosophy"?

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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>When I think of a philosopher, I think of ‘question’. To me, being a philosopher means questioning various aspects of life, whether it be about civilization, the need for sacrifices, or how best to form a democracy. To ‘do philosophy’ is to call into question preconceived notions on quite literally anything, so long as it has merit. You think of philosophers, you think of the greatest works throughout human history: Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil, and so on. These philosophers were able to shed light on society, ethics, good and evil, merely by thinking and questioning.</td>
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Pat

I think that philosophers are tasked with the awesome task of examining the human experience. The biggest question anybody can ask is “what makes us all human?” What do we all share in this experience? In spite of all of the differences that are constantly highlighted in people, thinking about what shared experiences and shared feelings that all people share is noble work. A consideration of the principles we all admire in a society, and what we all hope for in a government is worthwhile work. Many might argue that philosophers are disengaged or idealists or not practical thinkers, a consideration of our values and an application of those to today’s world is more important than ever.

Steve

I think “doing philosophy” involves looking at the world as it is and asking why everything is the way it is, not just the physical properties of matter or energy, but the human properties. After looking at the world, a philosopher then studies what people have had to say in the past about why the world works in the way that it does and then add on to the discussion with their own thoughts. Most importantly, I think being a philosopher requires asking a lot of questions, suggesting ideas to a broader discussion, and acknowledging where your ideas might fall through. I also don’t think being a philosopher requires a college degree. I think it just requires a lot of curiosity. I would say after taking CC, my definition of a philosopher expanded from Kant and Plato to now include artists like Lin Manuel Miranda, technologists like Elon Musk, and even President Trump. Lin Manuel Miranda thought about race relations, the creation of a new government, and the way in which revolutions start and took his ideas and added to the conversation via a musical. Elon Musk sees the way we allocate resources and distribute energy to different parts of the world and added to the conversation by building a company that develops energy efficient vehicles. Donald Trump sees the struggles of a steel-worker or coal-miner wonders why the world is screwed up and adds to the conversation via colorful tweets. All of these people are actually philosophizing - they’re just adding the conversation in new and exciting ways never been done before.

Jane

For me, it is to think about things that are mentally and emotionally uncomfortable and challenging to me. It is different from thinking about trivial tasks that are given to me, such as solving problem sets or doing chores. Philosophy could be considered as a "waste of time", because it doesn’t necessarily solve the immediate task I need to do. Instead, it is about matters that has effect on bigger scale of things, such as my morale or way of life. It is not strategic and logical thinking of what I should do to deal with the everyday tasks, but to do thought experiments on the directions of my life. It can be uncomfortable and scary: it could mean that I would have to judge how I have been living and realizing that it has been wrong: it could also mean that I would have to make decisions that will be physically and mentally challenging to achieve. Overall, it is the type of thinking that shapes my life into a more meaningful one, but not necessarily the most comfortable or optimized one.

Matt

One example of philosophy I can think of is considering a question that relates to the general ideas of why we exist and what the best way to make use of our existence is. A lot of authors that we read were concerned with figuring out how we should live. Even if no definitive answers arise from the questions or topics that were considered, just the act of grappling with the questions is an act of philosophy. To put it more generally maybe it’s a search for knowledge, using critical thinking in order to gain some sort of new knowledge. Even after taking a philosophy course it’s hard for me to pin down.

Kyle

I think that being a Philosopher or ‘doing philosophy’ is very similar to being an attentive full-time student, except to the teachings of life. Every action and reaction is owed a certain level of discussion and thought, instead of simply being forgotten. ‘A Philosopher’ is not simply a title or a convenient way to describe a hobby. In action, philosophy is a drastically different way of looking at the world around you and receiving its lessons. This does not mean, however, that philosophy is exclusive. It is a practice that, like most things, takes diligence, but unlike many activities, is available to everyone.

Rose

I think to be a "Philosopher" means to think critically and to think about how the way we think and live as individuals and in a society. To "do Philosophy" means to actively engage in this project via writing or discourse.

Ashley

I believe that everyone can be a philosopher, because I consider the literal definition of "philosophy," love of wisdom, to capture what it truly is. To me, "doing philosophy," is simply asking questions about things that are often taken for granted and yearning to know more about ourselves and the world we live in.

Alex

I believe that to "do philosophy" is to question--and I'm sure Socrates would be pleased with this response as well. From my perspective, philosophy's project is to bring into question any and every concept that could possibly exist, and work to more clearly define it, its causes, and its consequences. Thus, I believe that anyone doing the act of questioning can be considered a philosopher in that moment. There are absolutely no restrictions on who can and who cannot be a "Philosopher": the only requirement is that one asks questions about concepts that they had not previously brought into question. However, when we refer to someone as a "philosopher," this title generally has a different meaning. It usually signifies that the person in question has produced a body of work that others consider to be "philosophy." This use of the title makes sense, for if we called anyone who asked novel questions a philosopher, there would be no distinctive title left to assign to those who spend their careers producing a body of "philosophical" work. However, the act of "doing philosophy," and therefore of being a "Philosopher," is--in my opinion--something that absolutely anyone can do for any length of time. As long as someone engages in the project of philosophy (which is to question), he or she is, for all intents and purposes, a "Philosopher."
4. **Did your experience in CC have any effect on your thinking about the role or use of philosophy?**

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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Yes. Although CC was the beginning of philosophy for me, it certainly had an effect on the way I perceived philosophy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Yes, but often times in frustrating ways. I thought that philosophy was intended to find answers, and explain why things that are true are true. The study of philosophy raised more questions in my mind and in my head than gave answers. This was often frustrating. We pondered the question of what the purpose of a class like CC is more than once, and never came to a concrete answer, which is frustrating to me. I know, however, that there probably isn’t a concrete answer; and that what might be the answer for me would be a very off the mark answer to encapsulate someone else’s experience in the class. Coming to this conclusion was work in and of itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>CC has made me more critical about the ways in which my professors in engineering teach. I actually feel more unhappy sometimes sitting in my engineering classes, because I feel like my professors and I are in two completely different universes. My professors just state rules and expect you to learn them, because the rules are the language that’s used to solve the problem. I think philosophy is best used when you first ask your professors, “What’s the problem in the first place? Why is it problematic? What did other people do to solve this problem before you came along?” I kind of see philosophy as a way to challenge others and make sense of why they see the world in whatever way they see it. I kind of see philosophy as a form of academic therapy. If something is making you unhappy, ask why it’s making you unhappy and think about moments in the past that also made you unhappy. Then figure out how they relate, and come up with a solution.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>Definitely. Although it has been two years since I took the class (I took the class in 2014-2015), CC provided me the framework of philosophical thinking. That is, it expanded the scope of matters that I thought about. Prior to CC, I had very limited knowledge on western Philosophy. CC class was the most helpful for me in the way it helped me understand the controversies and issues surrounding me in real life. During CC class, we covered the basics of each philosophical text and had active discussion in class and in the commentary assignments. I didn’t necessarily become the expert in philosophical history who can immediately recognize the difference between the big thinkers in the past, but now I have more ability to recognize the bigger significance behind the current issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Philosophy used to be such an abstract concept to me that I’m not sure I could even provide a definition for it. Now that I have practiced philosophy I have seen that it is a useful discipline that we often use in our daily lives without knowing. I have gained the confidence that my ideas may provide a new insight to someone and philosophy is not just reserved for old white dudes. If there is anything that I learned during CC, it is that everyone is qualified to do philosophy!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>My experience in CC changed my entire view of philosophy. The crux of philosophy is, in my opinion, discussion and debate of ideas; the wrestling and tinkering of thoughts and opinions which precede revelations. However, I did not appreciate the mental tug-of-war until later in the class. It was not until early in the second semester of CC that it hit me; the extent of the realizations and understanding I had developed over that semester were directly linked to how engaged I was in our class. Realizing the source of my realizations was quite profound, and realizing that philosophy was much more active and engaging than I had previously thought was equally shocking. This began the shift of theory to action, as I began to participate more often, voice my own thoughts more often, and engage in a friendly debate or discussion gleefully. I began to shift from being in the presence of philosophic ideas, to engaging in philosophic discussions, to creating my own philosophic assumptions and ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Philosophy used to be an intimidating and foreign subject in my life to which I thought I was relatively unrelated to, but my CC experience completely inverted this thinking and today I feel that CC is everywhere in my daily life, and there is not a moment that I would be unable to make CC relevant. It is truly essential and also very empowering in opening new potential for the way I live.</td>
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<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Through CC, I have definitely had a chance to gain more “tools” in my toolbox of philosophical thinking. By being exposed to more philosophers and being able to agree or reject their ideas, I am better able to develop my own philosophy. Also, before CC, I didn’t employ philosophy to politics as much. I used to be more focused on phenomenology, and now, I have a greater scope of where philosophy can be employed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Absolutely. The (relatively) chronological organization of the CC syllabus allowed my views on current political concepts to be completely transformed. Whereas I previously understood the concepts included in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights to be relatively fixed and universally accepted, CC forced me to witness the progression of these ideas over the immense canon of Western Philosophy. It showed me that our current ideas...</td>
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about politics and human nature are based on the same ideas that have been disputed, contested, and shaped by the works of countless philosophers throughout history. As a result of this, I now view our current ideas about political organization and humanity to be much less "set in stone" than I previously did. Therefore, I believe it is entirely possible that by using philosophy, further change can—and will—be made to our political system. These concepts have never been unchanging, and philosophy will remain a driving force behind their continuing transformation.

Greg

Absolutely! I credit a lot of my thoughts surrounding philosophy to Nicole. Prior to this course I hated the humanities, I thought they were ridiculous and to be honest a bit of waste to try and study. However, I still went into the year with an open mind and I was shocked at how much my ideas and feelings toward the subject changed. Nicole showed a true passion for what she did, and this translated to an incredible experience.

5. How do you feel about writing?

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<td>Ben</td>
<td>I enjoy writing when the topic of discussion is thought-provoking. Of course, nobody enjoys writing on a topic they do not enjoy, but I find the most satisfaction when writing about a certain issue or question that really makes me think; this is why I believe I enjoyed CC so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Ask me this question a few hours from now and you’ll probably get a different answer, but I’ve found writing to be a helpful exercise when I’m trying to flesh out an idea. I took up a New Year’s resolution this year that I wanted to write one “Op-Ed” type piece about something I am interested in, every night before going to bed. The idea was that it would be something of a word vomit, in which I could just spill my ideas onto a page and force myself to explain them in a reasonable way. I never planned to proofread these, or make them anything more than a running log of my thoughts. The pieces usually centered around politics, and what was happening in the news and in the media, and the resolution has been slowly weakened, as I now only write one probably once or twice a week. But nevertheless, I can tell that the exercise is helpful. It’s like exercising a specific part of your brain that helps you communicate. And though I didn’t really consciously recognize it at the time, I think this resolution and idea may have come from what I learned doing the commentaries that we did in class about the text. I learned how helpful it is to define your ideas by forcing yourself to explain them. So in this sense, writing has been a blessing for me. I have also found, however, the writing process to become more and more difficult as the tasks become more difficult. When I am tasked with a paper that really brings together different ideas from different works, and am constrained in how I can use those works, and which works I can use, and am tasked to make an argument in which my own voice is heard in a distinctly different and more authoritative voice while using the arguments of the texts as support, it is easy to get lost. It is for this reason, that I constantly have to come back to my central idea when I am writing, and force myself to remain focused, because it is very easy to become sloppy and let my work slip into disarray. I would imagine this is a challenge many if not all students confront, and I am hopeful that being in this class now will help me to hone that ability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I think writing is an exercise that works for some people and doesn’t work for others. I personally really enjoy writing when I’m able to just write down everything I’m thinking in a stream of consciousness manner and not worry about grading, being assessed, or being judged. Writing when I’m emotional or passionate about an issue is the most exciting and frankly easiest to accomplish. Writing as a graded assignment feels forced, challenging, and overall less interesting. Academic writing feels likes a different world than personal writing, and it’s really hard to make that jump between them. Also, writing is just plain annoying sometimes. Engineers want detailed technical papers that list things clearly with little to no emotion. Humanities teachers want clear, logical progression of ideas, but also a little personality and style. My brain tells me when I’m writing that I just want to get all the crazy things I’m thinking about onto a page so there’s a record as to how I feel and an easy way to share my ideas. I also think that because of social media, my writing has just inherently become more conversational. It’s not hard for me to write a multi-paragraph response to my friend going through a breakup or who’s suffering through some hurdle and quickly send the message via Facebook messenger. It’s really hard for me to write a multi-paragraph response towards Rousseau’s ideas on a social contracts and the state of nature. I think it feels kind of isolating and quiet to talk to a few old dead guys. Just feels kind of pointless, especially when your friends are messaging you at the same time on Facebook messenger asking for much needed responses to actual problems they face. Often, I like to prioritize those Facebook messenger paragraphs over the longer essays, because writing for my friends matters more than writing for my classes. At the same time, there’s just something really beautiful and uplifting when you write a well nuanced response worthy of a humanities class that a professor would love when talking to a friend. Unfortunately, peers I have conversation with tend to reply back with short, limited answers. Diving deep and writing about complexities of issues is sometimes most fun when there’s no one else on the other end, and you’re just writing a paper for class.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>I am not too confident in writing something to please the other people, but I enjoy writing about things I would like to express (when I actually WANT to express something). I may not know many vocabularies or literary techniques that could add finesse to my essays, but if there is a point I want to prove, I can logically illustrate that point step by step.</td>
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6. Do you think the ideas from this class will stay with you beyond the course? Why or why not?

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<td>Ben</td>
<td>Yes. The ideas that I have learned and developed from CC has stayed with my beyond sophomore year. I am two years out of the class, and I still find joy in contemplating Rousseau's work with contemporary issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>I do. Though there will be some aspects of certain texts that will stay with me for a long time, I doubt that in 10 years I will remember anything about Kant, or about the details of an argument Sophocles makes. But what I think will remain constant with me was what I learned from the class as a whole—the benefits of an exchange of ideas in a classroom environment like the one we had, the differences of opinion that it is very easy for students to have on the same text, and the value in challenging my assumptions and defending my ideas. These all tie into the discussions we have had about the value of the core, and I think those concepts and ideas will stay with me long after I forget what Plato meant by certain terms he used or other details of the texts. For someone like me, who wants to go into public service, these ideas are critical to understanding the human experience and relating to someone you may have nothing in common with, and that’s what public service is about to me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I definitely think the ideas from this class will stay with me beyond this course. Looking at my current situation, I’ve been thinking deeply about why I hate some of my engineering classes so much, and it’s mostly because instead of reasoning and questioning in a Socratic way, I feel like my professors are like Thrasymachus. They rely on their strength/position to advise others what to do and how to do it without bringing people to the conclusions themselves. These ideas kind of sit in my mind as I feel unhappy solving problems. Writing is truly the only way that I can be more confident of the fact that my thoughts are fully developed and less prone to contradictions and shortcomings. This being said, I still tend to view writing as a chore that requires a decent amount of effort to accomplish. Because of this, I’ll often forgo the potential benefits of truly writing out my thoughts and therefore ignore the gaps in my logic that in-depth writing requires me to resolve. This &quot;surface-level&quot; writing can still lead to fruitful conclusions about my thoughts. But it is only in &quot;true&quot; writing (which requires actual effort) that I actively resolve the gaps and contradictions exposed by it.</td>
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reason, and why do societies form are topics that will stay with me, especially given the current political climate. I just can’t see the news anymore without thinking about the social contracts or systems of ethics I prescribe to.

**Jane**

Yes. As explained in my previous answers, this class helped me the most by improving my skills of understanding the world I am living better. I remember in the commentary assignment, me and my classmates would mention news or books or movies that we could connect to the text we had covered. Having a basic knowledge about the most well-renowned philosophers like Plato, Machiavelli, Adam Smith, etc. will help me understand the matters I will encounter in the future.

**Matt**

Yes. I think that for me a large part of that is that I talk to Mitch, Kyle and Greg everyday so it’s inevitable that stuff from class comes up. Ideas from the class that I liked and related with the most will stick with me the longest. I think college is a very formative period in our lives because we are forced to develop. Just age-wise we grow older, but we are also exposed to so many new things. I’m sure a lot of the things I’ve experienced are very similar to other people’s experiences. I have though much more about what I will do after I finish formal education. Living so far away from my parents for the first time in my life, I have to decide what to do and figure out what is going to be important to me, not just do everything they tell me to. I have considered the scarcely complicated questions of why we are here, and how I am going to live instead of just being content to push them from my mind. Contemplating these questions has helped provide direction in my life and served as reminders of what I’m doing here at Columbia when I start to feel lost. It is also nice to know that humans have struggled to answer the same questions for our entire existence. Ideas from class have made me much quicker to ask question and much slower to reach conclusions. I have changed a lot during college and CC was a class that provided me a lot of ideas while I was changing. The incorporation of ideas in class into my own life makes me pretty sure the ideas will stick with for quite some time.

**Kyle**

Yes. I can say, with confidence, that these lessons will stay with me for the rest of my life because of the process through which these lessons were obtained. The lessons of thought, debate, morality, society, humanity, and more were all delivered through engagement. Verbal engagement. Physical engagement. And the lessons were not simply touched upon a single time, and then neglected. Each lesson was touched upon multiple times during the course, and intertwined into every text we read. And this was done in a way that prepared us to meet other situations with the ability to apply our knowledge. As said by John G. Hibben, a great philosopher and former president of Princeton University, “Education is the ability to meet life’s situations.” Through our open discussions and interweaving of thoughts through every text, I feel that CC has educated me in a way Hibben would deem ideal.

**Rose**

The ideas from this class and will continue to stay with me beyond the course because each day Professor Callahan and my section thought about how to make the reading and the course relevant to the present, and themes and projects and issues of each of the thinkers we touched upon infiltrate my studies in other areas and also the way I think about daily life.

**Ashley**

I strongly believe that what I learned in CC will stay beyond this course, because even now, I find CC concepts in our daily. While watching movies, people-watching, thinking about current political status...

**Alex**

Absolutely. This course has forced me to confront the many ways in which western philosophers’ ideas still exist in our modern conceptions of politics and humanity. There is no way that I'll be able to divorce my ideas about modern issues from the ideas that I read in the texts of CC. However, this definitely isn’t to say that I’ve accepted or agreed with the works of every philosopher in the syllabus. In fact, the disagreements I had with the ideas in the texts were often extremely reminiscent of the disagreements ones I have with modern issues, for most of the same concepts I criticized in the texts are still largely echoed in our society today. Thus, the process of forming opinions about the ideas in the CC texts lead me to create my own thoughts about the universal concepts of politics and humanity that will always available to be, thanks to CC.

**Greg**

Without a doubt! I learned an incredible amount of information throughout the course and I still think about many of the subjects we touched on. Once again I credit Nicole for this because seeing how passionate she was about the subject made me interested in learning more about it, and through this I was able to gain a substantial amount of knowledge surrounding the general ideas of Philosophy.

### 7. Do you think the reading and writing and thinking strategies from this class will stay with you beyond the course? Why or why not?

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<td>Ben</td>
<td>Yes. The reason I think the strategies from CC will stay with me beyond this class is because of how our professor conducted our reading, writing and thinking. There were times when the readings assigned for class were anything but a simple read. That being said, the ways we broke down ideas and beliefs from certain readings, and how that translated into writing and thinking, has and will continue to stay with me for future endeavors (whether it be...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>I do. The techniques of annotating a text have proven to be very valuable to me across all of my classes. I touched on the idea of the commentaries the writing techniques we have used also in previous responses, and continue to think that those will prove valuable down the road as well. Other small techniques that I picked up have helped me also, such as reading aloud when reading Shakespeare and writing out your ideas completely, regardless of a word-count and then shaving it down if necessary. These strategies aren’t specific just to CC, or just to humanities classes in general. They are helpful in a host of contexts, and not just specific to academic work either.</td>
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<td>Steve</td>
<td>I think there really isn’t any way the reading, writing, and thinking strategies could possibly go away. The only way I could imagine is if I just took technical courses for the rest of my Columbia degree, which is entirely possible, but I hope not what I end up doing. I think pretty strongly that I’m just stuck in this current moment in the middle part of Plato’s cave, still kinda chained to the ground but also fully aware of the world outside the cave and beginning to accept a different way of looking at things. I guess it is a pain that demands to be felt. Going through that amount of pain, I just can’t see myself going back to the bottom of the cave. Truthfully though, the moments where I feel like I should stop questioning the world are mostly when I talk to my parents about CC. My parents expressed concern over Winter Break that I was caring to much about philosophical ideas but not enough about engineering. I think they are legitimately afraid that I won’t graduate with a job or launch a successful career. They are definitely justified in thinking this way, especially given the fact that they are paying for my college education. After these conversations, I would start studying for technical interviews or tried to focus more on finishing problem sets than finishing CC readings, and once I would get into the habit of solving one problem after another I would see myself spending less time reacting to the news or the world around me. In these moments, I don’t think like a philosopher and I could see myself choosing a life where only my grade in the technical classes matters so I completely submit myself to the desires of my engineering professors. That’s pretty scary but I think that’s where some of my reading, writing, and thinking strategies could disappear. I think these skills have to continue to be used in order for them to stay fresh, kind of like a rubber band that needs to be stretched every once and a while or else it will lose it’s elasticity. I think I’m always going to think really critically about the world and why it sucks in some ways more than others, so hopefully my desire to have conversations and ask questions never dies down, but there are definitely moments even in my engineering classes where I ask myself, &quot;It feels like I’m the only person in the room asking questions. Am I weird or something? Am I just stupid? Does the professor hate me? Does the professor think I’m stupid? Why the hell does no one care about the lack of clear explanations? How is everyone just accepting what this guy says without asking anything?&quot; I just got to surround myself with different people with different perspectives to keep my philosophical spirit alive sometimes.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>Yes. I explained that CC class trained me to think about the bigger picture of the issues beyond the superficial level. In addition to that, CC writing assignments helped me develop my ideas and present them in a logical way that can convince the reader. Writing assignments in CC was based more on logic and analytical skills, which helped me become a more persuasive writer (and a debater, I guess). This helps me in everyday-level discussion with friends about current issues, and even in quantitative classes where I have to utilize the same analytical and logical skills.</td>
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<td>Matt</td>
<td>Yes. I guess kind of the same reasons as in the above question but also because I think they are really valuable strategies to use. I like that I learned how to both break down ideas and arguments and how I learned how to construct my own arguments. Making sure that I am able to construct a logical argument and also challenging other people’s ideas to see if they have really been thorough in their thought process. I think the course definitely changed the way I think, read and write, and it challenged me to continue examining what I thought, read or wrote. I’m sure that being just a year removed from the course makes my answer a little biased because the class is still fairly fresh on my mind.</td>
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<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Yes. Similar to the above, the structure of my thoughts have changed permanently. My thought process is much more complex than it was before, and this has improved my writing, somewhat. Through continued practice and application, these lessons and strategies will continue to help me improve in the literary realm.</td>
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<td>Rose</td>
<td>The discursive writing was very challenging for me, being used to solitary assignments and essays, and I felt pushed to write to provoke and stir community debate. I learned how to write in a way that made others think about what I was thinking and challenge their own ideas, and this required me to read with a lens of grounded focus in this project.</td>
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<td>Ashley</td>
<td>There’s no doubt that our reading practices in CC will help us beyond the course. Not only we are reading texts that are structurally and conceptually challenging, but also we are reading in considerable volume. Reading well is important, but so is reading fast. As of writing, I mentioned before that CC commentaries were really helpful in breaking my bad habit of ”conservative” writing. I am better able to explore my thoughts and build my claims without being restrained by structural perfection.</td>
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<td>Alex</td>
<td>Yes, in two ways. Firstly, I believe that the rigor and depth of the course improved my critical thinking skills. In many commentaries, the larger essays, and the exams, I was forced to develop my thinking strategies in a way that I had previously never been forced to do. This fundamental deepening of my intellectual abilities will certainly serve me</td>
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Greg

My writing improved exponentially and I will forever be grateful for the care Nicole put into helping her students fully develop their ideas and helping them convey them in the most effective way possible.

8. Tell me about your initial thoughts when you learned about the commentary assignment for our class.

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<td>Ben</td>
<td>Initially I thought it would be difficult simply because I did not know how I could come up with so many thoughts or observations every week. Little did I know that I would not have enough posts to get my ideas down.</td>
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<td>Pat</td>
<td>I was initially nervous about it. Most my writing is very calculated and deliberate, and it takes me a long time to flesh out an idea to the point that it sounds reasonable. So to spontaneously start writing and spilling my thoughts made me nervous, because I wasn’t very confident in my initial reactions to be very insightful.</td>
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<td>Steve</td>
<td>I had good hopes for the commentary assignment. I thought it was kind of weird and uncomfortable to write about how Plato made me feel or what I thought Plato was really talking about. I was definitely concerned that my peers would not like some of the things I had to say. I also didn’t know if I could contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way. All I really have in my back pocket is a pretty good understanding of US History, a subscription to the NYTimes on my computer, coursework in math/science, and a lot of just non-exciting high school experiences from suburbia New Jersey. I definitely though Nicole was a little crazy. The potential for starting a flame war was just way too high.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>At first, I was a little lost because there was absolutely no restriction on what we could write. However, once I got used to it, I was able to be more creative about how to connect the CC texts to something I am interested in, and could also be interesting to my peers.</td>
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<td>Matt</td>
<td>I was pretty disappointed that I would have to do much more work outside of class instead of getting to come to class and have a teacher tell me the “right” way to interpret the text. On the plus side since it's graded on completion I could rack up some easy participation points.</td>
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<td>Kyle</td>
<td>My initial thoughts: Why...We talk about the text in class anyway, why do we have to write about it outside of the class? And having people write responses? Does she want to split us up based on our opinions?</td>
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<td>Rose</td>
<td>I initially underestimated the demand of the commentary assignments, and thought that it would be easier to write smaller, summary-like amounts throughout the course of the semester than to write longer papers. However this was not the case at all.</td>
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<td>Ashley</td>
<td>At first, I thought it would be a lot of work. Because of my habit of writing slowly, I was afraid I would have to spend a ridiculous amount of time (as much time I would spend for writing a short paper) on each commentary.</td>
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<td>Alex</td>
<td>I was a little confused at first. I missed the first day of class, and when I asked another student what we were supposed to write for the commentaries, she said, &quot;I'm not sure, just write about something that bothers you I guess.&quot; So my initial approach was to read through the text and look for a contradiction, either within the text itself, or with my own ideas. I also thought it would be a lot of work, so I wasn't too keen on the idea at first.</td>
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<td>Greg</td>
<td>The commentary assignment was a bit of a new concept for me initially and I was a bit uneasy about tackling the task.</td>
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9. What, in your words, is the purpose of the instructor’s use of the commentary? What do you think the instructor hopes that the commentary will do for you, as a student and participant in this class community?

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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>The purpose of the commentary is to get the mind thinking, which is what philosophy is about. I think that the instructor hopes the commentary will provoke further thinking. In addition, reading other students’ commentary only helps facilitate further growth in understanding. There has been several times when I did not know what to write about, whether it be because I had writer's block or did not thoroughly understand the reading. However, a quick look at my peer's commentary opened my mind and triggered my thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>I think the purpose is to force a student to confront their own ideas when they are young ideas that aren't totally put together yet, or completely fleshed out. This forced confrontation makes a student defend their ideas and can make them more aware of where there could be blind spots in their argumentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I think the purpose of the commentary is to help Nicole understand what students are feeling without having to sit down with us 1:1 before every class. It gives her an opening into our minds and our understandings of the text, and it helps her figure out which themes of the text we really feel curious about and which ones might need a bit more Platonic reasoning and exploration. I think Nicole hopes that the commentary will help me as a student come to grips with some of my deeply seeded beliefs and just talk about the struggles those beliefs might causes or the challenges those beliefs might face in the modern world. I think Nicole also hopes that the commentary can help me understand my fellow classmates better. For example, I now know after reading several commentaries that my classmate, Cal, is very connected to his faith. Now, that helps me gain an understanding of Cal and his belief system so in class, I can ask him about why he believes what he believes and we can have a conversation about all of our beliefs in a more open way, because the starting points to the conversations are already publicly available on line. It's kind of like how being part of a facebook group for &quot;Dog Lovers&quot; and seeing another friend as a member of the group makes it easier to start a conversation, because we both know from the start, that dogs are a point of interest.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>The purpose of the commentary is to help the students to actively engage in the philosophy texts. After all, the goal of philosophy book is to help readers develop their own philosophical powers, not to inject them with ideas. The commentary assignments pushed the students to think further about the text and relate them to their own lives, and thus helped the students gain their own perspectives.</td>
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<td>Matt</td>
<td>I think it is useful for an instructor to see what people are able to understand from the texts and what they struggle with. In that way it can help shape the direction class discussion will be guided. It also helps motivate the students to do some amount of the reading so they don't show up to class without touching the reading. I think one of the hopes of the commentaries is to build the community and make the students in the class more comfortable with discussing with one another. I think another hope is that practicing philosophy will lead to improvement in the reading, writing, and thinking skills that we use in class.</td>
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<td>Kyle</td>
<td>They were a way to get us engaged not only in the ideas of each text, but in the ideas of our peers. To take a look at their interpretations, look at our own, and then try to reconcile them. I believe there are hopes that the commentary exposes each participant to new ideas and interpretations, regardless of whether they are in agreement or disagreement with your own.</td>
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<td>Rose</td>
<td>I'm not sure that I am in a position to claim someone else's intention, but I am fairly confident that the purpose of these commentaries was to induce the change in writing, reading and thinking style that I myself experienced. It is a challenge to read in a way that prepares you to write in a way that makes your thinking accessible and questionable to others. As a student and as a participant in this class community, it demand awareness, consciousness and openness to different perspectives, as well as a malleability for language style and preconceived ideas.</td>
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<td>Ashley</td>
<td>I think commentaries are meant to organize our thoughts after the reading, ask questions that arose, and engage in various discussions with our peers. After all, CC is not a lecture course, but a discussion course, and while we read these texts individually, we develop our understanding of the texts collectively.</td>
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<td>Alex</td>
<td>I think the primary reason the instructor used the commentary assignment was to prompt us to think about the readings in a way that was internally-motivated, and could only be accomplished through the act of writing. While reading, it's easy to simply accept or try to understand the material. Reading only requires us to be passive observers. However, the commentary assignment required us to actively produce something related to the text, even if it was just to recreate the main argument. Thus, the commentary assignment forced the entire class to engage with the text—and each other—in an active, and critical way.</td>
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<td>Greg</td>
<td>I think the commentary was a tool to help us as students think in a way that many of us weren't used to. As far as achieving this goal, I think the commentaries were extremely effective.</td>
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10. Do you think the commentaries influence what happens in class? How?
Ben | I think the commentaries influence what happens in class because it gives the students a head start in what will be discussed in class.

Pat | Probably, yes. I think most students come into class with generally raw ideas about the reading and the concepts that we discuss. The commentary allows for some expansion and more thorough consideration, and can help to guide the following discussions.

Steve | To some extent. I think the commentaries haven't done a great job of influencing what happens in class, because we take an approach where students are divided into areas of interest and we just explore what the author has to say in a few sections and then restate the argument. There have been times when my commentaries have been very generic, or I didn't finish my readings so my understanding of the text was a little weak, and I felt completely fine being in any group. In that case, the commentaries just really didn't come up. But there have been a few specific times when we summarize the argument pretty quickly and then we start making metaphors and connections to the world around us, and suddenly all of these really cool ideas that were afterthoughts the night before from the commentaries pop up in the discussion. We briefly mention these ideas in class, but making those metaphors in discussion really solidifies understanding.

Jane | I think the commentaries helped students understand each other more, in the sense that it helped each other know more of their opinions and philosophical ideas. We would learn from others who have different perspectives, which inspired us to exchange thoughts even outside the class.

Matt | Yes. I think that they can show what the students are interested in talking about, given what may be going on in the world around them. A lot of times the groups that we had in class were based off of the topics that we wrote about in our commentaries the night before. I think they played a big part in what the focus of the day's class would be.

Kyle | Absolutely. The commentaries forced me to think about the themes and ideas from class, outside of the classroom. Even if I had left the commentary for the last task of the evening, that just meant that I would be thinking about the themes and ideas until I fell asleep. All of this makes for a very engaging discussion the following class period, and gives the community a bit of material to kick-start the discussion for the day.

Rose | The commentaries definitely changed the atmosphere of the class, which initially had the impression of general levity, gradually became intentional and careful, not necessarily guarded, but each correspondence and group work and comment did not just spit out, but was first designed and carefully constructed to invite as much conversation as possible, and incorporate other ideas and the reading as much as possible.

Ashley | For the specific structure of our CC class, I do believe the commentaries influence our class. First, we are often seated with people who wrote about similar ideas (whether we agree or disagree). Then, each group can have an individual discussion and bring its idea to the class as a whole.

Alex | Yes. I think that at the very least, the commentaries require students to come into class with at least one original idea about the text that they could share if called upon. While this is relatively minimal, it means that a discussion could be spurred by the commentary of a single student, for they have produced an original idea based on the text. I also think more students read more closely (and read more, period) because of the commentary assignment, and this certainly allows the time spent in class to be more productive.

Greg | I do think they influence what happens in class because they helped change the way we thought and thus allowed us to develop more thoughtful questions and ideas surrounding the topics we were discussing.

11. Have your feelings about the commentary changed over the course of the semester? If so, how?

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<td>Ben</td>
<td>I think I grew to enjoy the commentaries more throughout the semester simply because it became a habit. At the beginning of the semester I was questioning my ability to write so much; towards the end I was, in a way, excited to see what my classmates took from the readings compared to myself.</td>
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<td>Pat</td>
<td>The initial nervousness I had started to subside, as I realized that everyone’s initial knee-jerk reactions to a passage or to an idea are raw, and sometimes not always pretty. Everyone’s flow of ideas is a little choppy, a little messy and not totally cohesive, which was encouraging to know.</td>
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<td>Steve</td>
<td>I feel more happy and open when writing commentaries. I kind of look forward to them when I read a text I really took the time to understand. There have been times when I just start typing and can’t stop, because I just have a lot to say and being able to share some other afterthought from some other line of reasoning from some other moment</td>
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of my life with a philosophical twist is very cool. I look at it more as an opportunity now, less of a chore. Just a fun, stress free, grammatically incorrect, academically unfocused exploration. I definitely get irritated when I read some classmates' commentaries and I feel like they're just reiterating sides of their personality that we already know or are spoken about so often in the media. I kind of wish there was more interesting discussions at times.

Jane

As I mentioned in the first question, I got to be more creative in how I connected the CC texts to everyday life. I would watch a TV episode, and connect it to the CC text I learned the past week, and share it on the commentary, and see what other people thought about it. I also enjoyed reading other's commentary, and as the semester passed, they became more creative and diverse as well.

Matt

I'm not going to say that I loved doing them every time that I had to do one. I think I gained more insight into why it was important for us to do the discussion posts. It was good practice for the skills I would need to use in order to write a philosophy paper. It made me try to engage with the texts and create something new or gave me the ability to ask for help understanding a certain passage. It was much more versatile and helpful than I initially thought.

Kyle

My feelings changed from dread to a sense of appreciation. I learned to recognize the importance and value of doing them, even though I rarely loved writing my post. However, as the year went on, I began to take more risks with putting my opinions in my posts, and this caused my stake in the discussions to rise, which increased my overall engagement online and in class.

Rose

I wanted to grow and change my style but it was a frustratingly slow and painstaking process, but I felt that over time, as I got used to what was effective and what was not, I started to sincerely enjoy them more and more. It became a weekly point to look forward, rewarded by a satisfying creation and crystallization of my reading and thinking.

Ashley

As I mentioned, I was very worried about commentaries being difficult and time-consuming to write. But as we wrote over and over again, I was naturally able to write faster and more easily, and it wasn't as daunting as I had originally imagined.

Alex

I think I've started to enjoy the commentaries a little more over the course of the semester, and I've also changed my approach towards completing them. At the beginning of the year, I was pretty concerned about the structure, spelling, and grammar of my posts. Now, I care much less about these things, and I try to focus more on the content of the commentary. I think this is due to an increase in comfortability with the other students in the class, for I'm now know that i should be afraid of being judged for misspelling something, etc.

Greg

As the semester continued my feelings definitely changed. In the beginning, to be honest, I dreaded writing them, but as my writing abilities developed and as I continued throughout the semester I found them to be extremely useful in full rounding out my ideas and writing.

12. Please just generally reflect on your experience using the commentary:

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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I thought the commentaries were a great way to get involved in the class. They were a way for students to participate, throw some ideas out there, and ultimately learn from each other.</td>
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<td>Pat</td>
<td>I thought the commentary was valuable, and I've adopted the habit of doing my own mini-commentaries throughout my annotations of texts now. An idea comes to mind and I try to write out what I'm thinking to remind myself what I was thinking, and to force myself into considering what it meant or why I was thinking it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>The commentaries were an uphill climb at first, but now I look forward to writing them. I don't complete mine on time generally, because it takes me longer than most people to get through the reading because I'm not used to reading as frequently as others, but I really do love looking at the words of others and figuring out what my classmates are feeling. The process of writing commentaries has also made me feel more comfortable when free writing and also has made me more comfortable just engaging in general conversation with my classmates outside of class. I feel less afraid to engage in socratic reasoning and I'm more open to asking questions about people's identities and experiences. Then again, I also feel like sharing a part of yourself normally not shared before is hard, or sharing a different perspective not necessarily in 100% agreement with the text or the classmates around you is scary. I guess a culture where every commentary is considered a work to be critically examined with the text or the classmates around you is scary. I think it was a very effective way of truly learning the CC text books because it let us apply the philosophical knowledge. I think it was a much more effective way of learning then to simply read the whole book or have a strict essay prompt each week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>I thought it was a very effective way of truly learning the CC text books because it let us apply the philosophical knowledge. I think it was a much more effective way of learning then to simply read the whole book or have a strict essay prompt each week.</td>
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### 13. What do you think were/are positive aspects of the commentary, specifically related to: encouraging careful reading, building community, and shaping the class discussions?

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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I think the most positive aspect of the commentaries were that it shaped the class discussions and forced the students to built on the readings together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>I think the shared experience of everyone doing it at once certainly helped other students come to the same realization that I did-- that all of our ideas are initially raw and messy, and that can lead to a comfort in the class community that allows for people to step outside of their comfort zone to share an idea that they aren't completely sure of yet. I think in that sense, the commentaries can help to provide a classroom environment that is conducive to collaborative discussion and discourse that the class is aimed for. The at times jarring reaction I had to just how raw some my thoughts were, that they were often just nonsense, did remind me of how important careful close reading really is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>I think the biggest strength of the commentary is the ability to be in groups of people that are thinking about the same things, because then we just naturally gel together and start working off of each other's understandings. Also, people just get a smile on their face when you bring up something they said in their commentary and add to it. They feel heard, and that builds a community in a way no other experience can. That being said, there are times when you're reading someone's commentary and you know they're bullshitting so those discussions just don't pan out as well. I think careful reading is really hard to build, just because it's difficult to get through the readings in the first place. When we're together though, I think careful reading is much easier, because there are ideas understood by select people who can then work together to build a full understanding of the texts we study.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>I think the powerful effect of the commentary was the way it encouraged the class discussion by inspiring the students to be engaged more with the texts. The commentary forced the students to apply what they learned in the CC texts to what they were interested in, and when the students are actually interested in the texts they are more eager to express them and share in a class discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>It made me better at careful reading and being able to engage with the texts and connecting the texts together. I...</td>
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think that it's nice to be able to be in a group that discusses a topic in the text that one has already spent time thinking about and has things to say about it. It is like class discussion is facilitated before class even starts, and so it makes it easier to participate. It makes the students more prepared for class.

Kyle

While the commentaries could be written without a deep understanding of the material, the commentary encouraged engagement that sometimes cannot be attained in person. Behind a keyboard, there is a distinct feeling of security and privacy that is experienced, even with knowledge that the post will be read by others. For this reason, opinions that were far-fetched or downright odd would sometimes be shared, which usually livened up the discussion both online and in class. In addition, this liveliness only had positive effects on the class community, bringing us together in a positive way, and introducing us to new angles of viewing the material. This aspect, as well as the aspects and effects noted before, caused the commentary to be an unexpectedly powerful tool in this class. Without it, I doubt a similar experience can be attained.

Rose

It was actually really interesting to see parts of the reading that were popularly responded to, and parts that weren't, especially if there was a crucial detail that I thought was worth pointing out that not many had already done so, or if many others had pointed out something that I had starred and underlined and circled. Everyone experiences the text in a slightly different way, and the commentary does not necessarily show the big picture, but it certainly gave me a refreshing and valuable window into the way others read compared to mine, not necessarily in an evaluative way, but in a wholesome appreciative way. Everyone tended toward different lenses - economic, cultural, etc - and toward certain underlying questions that they were fundamentally interested in - which often became the topic of their longer essays - and I discovered it very pleasurable to share these inner hints in the form of the commentaries.

Ashley

I think writing commentaries is a good way to not only organize our thoughts about the texts, but also construct new ideas. For instance, I always start writing a commentary thinking that I would write about one thing and I always end up writing about so much more. By the time I'm done writing, I have not only revisited my points x and y that I developed by reading the texts, but also established a new point z. Personally, I think that's the most useful aspect of writing commentaries.

Alex

The commentary requires me to form at least one unique and original idea about the text, which can only be accomplished by reading the text carefully. In a commentary, I cannot claim there to be a contradiction or unanswered question in the text if I haven't read the text in its entirety. Therefore, to cover all of my bases, I must generally be familiar with the text before writing the commentary. In terms of the in-class application of the commentary, I believe that working in groups with other students who wrote commentaries about similar subjects definitely allowed for a much more comprehensive discussion of the concepts. This is due to the fact that each student must have prepared themselves to write about that subject, and therefore is absolutely prepared to speak about it as well.

Greg

The commentary exercises were extremely effective in challenging our thoughts and testing our close reading abilities. The more practice we got, the better our commentaries were. They were a huge help in developing my writing and reading abilities outside of just this course. They also helped to further develop my thought process and allowed me to convey my thoughts more effectively. I felt as though the commentary helped me to develop better ideas and to contribute relevant ideas in class discussions.

14. What do you think were/are challenges created by/in doing the commentary, specifically related to: encouraging careful reading, building community, and shaping the class discussions?

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<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>I think that some challenges in the commentaries were when I did not know what direction to go in. Although it was always possible to build off of other students' ideas and observations, there were times where the questions for the commentaries did not align with what I understood from the readings. That being said, this rarely happened simply because there was hardly ever a wrong answer. The commentaries were a place where we could throw ideas, get criticism, and build.</td>
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<td>Pat</td>
<td>I would imagine that some students who were nervous like I was felt insecure about what they had to share, and that their commentaries may have exposed that. If students feel reserved or that their ideas aren't as good as others, they will probably retreat into a corner and not want to share their ideas any further, and that can create problems. I think that for most students, they have the inner grit to recognize where they are struggling and be honest about that and work past whatever insecurities that the commentaries may expose in their understanding of the works, but I could imagine some students feeling insecure about their ideas and that affecting the classroom environment.</td>
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<td>Steve</td>
<td>Honestly, I think the biggest challenge with the commentary is that everyone writes their commentary between</td>
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I think the possible negative aspect of the commentary is the spread of the misinterpretation. Someone could have misinterpreted the philosophical text, and the idea could spread. (e.g. a student may mistaken one philosopher's idea as another one's..) In this case, the correction by the other student or by the instructor would be important.

Regardless of commentaries, I think that difference in skill levels can be a challenge in discussion-based classes, especially at Columbia where two people's talents can be in two extremely different areas. One wouldn't want someone to get left behind or to feel like they couldn't go into as much depth as they wanted to. I think that our class was a really accepting and great environment and that made it easy for me to talk to anyone. But it is a challenge to have a class discussion based on the commentaries when some people may be ready to discuss the subtle points of an author while others are still working on understanding what the main points are.

The commentary introduced a wide range interpretations, which unfortunately led to misinterpretation at times. Since it was to be done at home, it was inevitable that many posts would be done without careful reading/understanding of context, or applied in a way that was foreign to other students. These misunderstandings often would halt class discussions, as it would be evident that many of us did not actually grasp the meaning of the text. Time that could have been spent in discussion and debate ended up being spent defining and drawing simple conclusions. Those who understood the text completely were, undoubtedly, slightly vexed at the lack of preparedness exhibited by their peers. I am guilty of causing a few misunderstandings in this class, but all of the time we spent correcting my mistakes made me realize that sometimes others had the same misinterpretation. In this sense, the time was never wasted, merely redirected.

There is definitely a pressure that demands that you do the reading well and grasp the larger idea along with crucial details - the community serves like a watchful net of eyes that makes sure you are doing the work but also as an audience which you feel motivated to provoke, challenge and debate with at times. This pressure was unrelenting and never gave way, because each time there was at least one area that I felt I could have done better in, only to realize after reading all the comments and seeing what works better. But this challenge was not suffocating - it was really helpful and effective because I always knew what to work towards and had a clear goal in mind, so it was not like I was running a marathon and panting the whole time. I was paced and calm and sure about where I was going, I just really really needed to get there.

I think commentaries are helpful for the reasons that I've suggested earlier (and later in this survey), but one thing I want to mention is timing. I often find myself writing better commentaries for Monday (reply to the Sunday for Tuesday class), because I am able to read the text in entirety over the weekend. But my commentaries for Tuesday (commentary for Thursday class) are often incomplete in thought or not as rich, because I often have to write the commentaries without being able to read the full text (since there's only how much you can read in one afternoon).

I don't necessarily think that the commentary helps to create a sense of community. While you're reading and engaging with pieces of each others' writing, it's often in the context of having to complete an assignment. This tends to lead me to view the other students' commentaries as being detached from their faces and names, and it therefore becomes more clinical and removed than in-class discussion. Also, I hardly ever went back to look at what students had commented on my original posts, and I had the impression that my replies similarly were not read by the authors of original posts. While the commentaries provide a virtual space for students to work out their own individual ideas about the texts, I believe it is far more removed from the sense of "community" built by the course than in-class discussions are.

The biggest challenge in doing the commentary was finding a way to fully comprehend what I was reading, then develop a well thought idea, and being convey my thought on paper. However, as the semester went on and as I learned more about what the commentary was designed to do, I found this process to be relatively fun and engaging.
Email from Steve 3/20/2017

Thinking about ‘Academic Therapy’
Monday March 20, 2017

I did two things on Sunday. I read Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling and I listened to an NPR podcast. Today, I finally understood what I meant when I referred to the act of writing a commentary as ‘academic therapy’.

Kierkegaard is really emotional. That’s the first thought that popped into my head as I read the text. How could a man think this hard about one passage of the Bible? Genesis 22 is hardly a page, and depicts only one scene but Kierkegaard distills every moment of the scene into a visual, psychological, and seemingly poetic exploration of human decision making, ethics, and faith. I would refer to the text as cinematic in my mind, but I got to stop myself from being anachronistic. I don’t know much about Kierkegaard but I know that he is deeply moved by Abraham’s decision and he’s talking about it in a real way. He’s pissed off. He’s frustrated. He’s angry. He’s hopeful. He’s curious. He’s struggling.

Kierkegaard talks about his struggles and confusions with the Bible. He wrestles with the Bible and the interpretations of it over the centuries. He strangles his past, looks towards the world around him, and uses literary allusions to poke fun at the philosophical castle built in the kingdom of academia. More importantly, he’s slowly breaking down the castle brick by brick. This world just doesn’t make sense to him, so he writes, and he writes a lot. Kierkegaard is commentating just like I have been doing for the last several months with my classmates. His commentary isn’t a few paragraphs online, it’s a small book, but it’s a commentary that he’s proud of. He knows he’s talking about issues worth talking about and he knows the world needs to take him seriously for his ideas. Why does Kierkegaard feel proud of his ideas? Why can I sense his pride in his words? I couldn’t see this in the other philosophers. What about Kierkegaard connects to me?

Well I thought about that NPR podcast I listened to. My therapist sent it to me, and it’s about the inner mind. The title - Invisibilia - refers to the things that are invisible to us that define all of our lives. In this podcast, the reporters discussed dark thoughts and the ways therapists work to help patients recognize what those thoughts are. The therapists interviewed in the podcast discussed cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is founded on the principle that our ideas aren’t the keys to our souls, they’re only kind of important. We can’t spend years dissecting where every thought comes from - we have to contradict them to show where they might be false. This requires us to wrestle with our pasts. It requires us to question our presents. It forces us to be less anxious of our futures. This process requires us to converse. The therapist in the podcast emphasizes that these thoughts appear because of the strong role morality plays in identity in the people suffering with unavoidable thoughts. The reporter comments, “That’s the terrible irony of this condition. It’s exactly a person’s conscientiousness that makes the horrible thoughts return again and again and again.”

There I see the struggle. There I see the pain. There I see Kierkegaard. I don’t know who this man is, I didn’t read the book’s introduction. I skipped to his words. I see a man wrangling with his ideas. He’s engaging in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy without a therapist. The therapist helps us 21st century teenagers do what philosophers have been doing for years. He helps us make sense of an amazingly complex world.

So then what is academic therapy? Why did I coin a phrase I couldn’t actually define? Academic therapy is just the regular struggling we do day to day when something of great meaning comes up in our lives and we figure out how to manage it. Academic therapy gives us a way to process what we care about and make sense of it. An artist’s brushstrokes are an exemplification of the suffering or jubilation they may feel. The notes of the piano played by middle school choir teacher during our lunch blocks from her original compositions were reflections of the ideas she was working with in her mind. Kierkegaard’s criticism of one small passage of the bible is him battling the confusion in his brain. There’s nothing really special about CBT, the most common form of therapy in America. It’s really been going on for thousands of years with all these old texts I’ve been reading. I’m just engaging in it for the first time within myself.
I'm not just the only one though. When a girl in my class talks about why she’s angry with Rousseau’s characterization of Sophie, damn she means it. I can tell. There's fire. There's anger. There’s a little Kierkegaard in her. That is awesome.

Honestly, I am slightly afraid and worried about my peers, some in other schools. They call me at nights asking for help with their relationships and friendships. They struggle with their own emotions, not enough to warrant a trip to a mental health professional but enough to create small agonies in their day. They have no opportunity to talk about these issues in their minds, because they have to continue finishing problem sets and regurgitating mathematical formulas in blue books. My friend calls some of these moments ‘emotional constipation’. I couldn't agree more. The weight of the world is on your shoulders, and no matter how much you want to put things to the side for a moment to focus and learn more about yourself and your feelings - you just can’t. So the emotions pile up and you never process them. You can’t process your inner thoughts like Kierkegaard. Then you end up paying at a therapist’s office, when really all you needed to learn to do is find a way to work through your emotions with yourself. To engage with your mind. To struggle and be okay with it. To be able to say, “Hey, I think that was messed up and I want to know why?”. It's taking that time. We’re all learning how to do it in some form or another, some are better than others. Some aren’t doing it at all. All this talk about ‘self-care’ at this school is ridiculous. It’s not solving the problem. “Go out for a run, watch a movie, bake a cake” - that might help some people, but I have a strong suspicion that what students really need is the ability to process their emotions. Figure out why they’re doing what they’re doing. That can come from hours at Columbia Psychological Services, or it could just come from within.
Appendix J: Full Email from Peter

Email from Peter 1:32 PM (20 March 2016)
Hi Nicole,

I'm working on paper ideas, and was hoping if I sent you my plans so far, that you could shoot me some feedback when you get a chance, I can also come meet with you. Are office hours normal this week?

I am going to apologize in advance for how long and possibly convoluted this is, but even typing it out to you is helping me understand and make sense of my own argument.

Here is where I think my paper will be going:

I want to write on the Social Contract and Democracy - specifically on Majority Rule, the pros and cons and the "tyranny of the majority". I am planning to use Rousseau, Tocqueville and Mill, probably in that order. Here's what the rough sketch looks like right now.

Rousseau explains that the majority rule is a part of the social contract. When he is explaining how people can vote for a king to represent themselves, he explains that the Majority rule is apart of the agreement in the social contract - this is in chapter 5 of book 1. In doing so, he mentions that the minority has an obligation to submit to the bidding of the majority. That, and there is always the option to leave the social contract, and because residency implies consent in the social contract - when a society shrinks it means that it is failing. Either the policies do not reflect the desires of the people (majority), or the minority is leaving, indicating that the majority that the majority holds is not by much.

Using Rousseau to introduce the rule of the majority in the social contract as the most democratic method.

Tocqueville - I essentially want to use tocqueville to argue that his advocacy for democracy is hinged on his support for majority rule as well, concluding that majority rule is an essential tenet of democracy that therefore tocqueville supports. P. 201-202 he highlights the democratic institutions in the American constitution, and that the majority governs in the name of the people - making majority rule a component of his definition of democracy.

I also want to include the "big quote" we looked at in class (the one that encompasses all of CC), and use it to add to what I previously argued, and extend it to highlight the effects of democracy-- what it produces and how and why tocqueville advocates for it.

Finally, Mill will serve as a counter weight. Mill talks about Liberty vs. Authority and brings up the idea that was considered, essentially saying "If rulers policies identify with the desires of the people, why limit his or her power?"

This is where Mill brings up the "Tyranny of the Majority" and suggests that there must be political institutions that safeguard democracies not only from political despotism, but also from the tyranny of the majority. If the majority wants to do harm to a political minority group, there must be institutions that safeguard against that, because at the bottom of page 7 he notes that people who exercise power are not always the same as those over whom power is exercised. Mill's argument is that although a democracy is intended to reflect the desires of the people, there must be limits upon how much power can be vested in the majority.

I think this would be a good place to note that in congress, for example, you need more than just a majority to pass a bill, or to amend the constitution. In that sense, there are protections against tyranny of the majority.

Finally, I would like to do a modern application of the Majority Rule- and highlight why Mill's ideas are important to consider. I'm still weighing how I want to frame this, but probably around Donald Trump. As abhorrent as he is to so many people, if he is getting votes, he will continue to win. And despite the Republican establishment hating him, and trying to do anything possible to keep him from getting the nomination, if the majority support him, he will get it. In this sense, Trump's candidacy is a test of American Democracy, and also, to many people, a manifestation of the problems of tyranny of the majority.

Ok, that's all my thoughts for right now.
If nothing else, thanks for at least letting me put all my thoughts down.
See you on Tuesday!
Peter D
Appendix K: Full Commentaries from Ben

28 April / Re: Ghandi expectations (Apr 28, 2015 8:30 AM)
I agree with your idea about how Gandhi is one of those authors that, although we may not have read of his works, we already have some preconceived notion or belief about him for other obvious reasons. It's an interesting point you bring up about picking and choosing material from authors that people simply tend to agree with, then dismiss the rest; if you really look deep into the text you can actually begin to question some of the actions he takes such as hospitals. You say it perfectly, Gandhi's ideas are somewhat controversial, which is not necessarily something new that we have seen from CC. However, it was interesting to see how we can go as far as to question such a leading figure such as Gandhi. So to answer your question, I think that yes, our cultural conception of Gandhi does change how we look at his writing simply because of this preconceived idea that we have of him.

16 April / The Interpretation of Dreams (Apr 14, 2015 8:19 PM)
Freud’s ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ was very interesting because he touches on issues that we can relate to so closely. Dreams, for Freud, seem to represent something much deeper than simply a meaningless imagination. Instead, Freud argues that dreams are the unconscious relaying messages and feelings that the conscious state otherwise could not do. One of the most curious points he makes was his reference to dreams acting as a desire. Dreams can essentially be seen as an escape from reality where the unconscious can either return to history, childhood or past memories, or desired fantasies that please the mind.
Yet, while I found myself nodding my head to much of what Freud was saying, I also was not totally convinced by some of the things he claimed. For example, Freud seems to suggest that dreams are most always wishes of the unconscious; this is certainly not true in some situations when we have nightmares, right? Also, Freud argues that all dreams are important and significant because they always represent some meaning in our lives, and this concept encompasses all people, not just some. Although I may not be the one to judge, it seems a bit difficult to assume that Freud’s arguments are legitimate, especially since it is so hard to make assumptions for our unconscious state. In any case, did anybody else find themselves agreeing and disagreeing with much of what Freud had said?

14 April / Re: Du Bois & the Thrasymachus Question (Apr 13, 2015 11:32 PM)
I found that quote you mentioned to be very interesting, too. It’s something that has been the topic of discussion for much of the semester, strong vs. weak, right vs. wrong, etc. It is interesting to see that Du Bois almost fights for the equality among blacks, claiming that there is not reason why whites should continue oppressing people of color simply because they feel like they are in a position of superiority. As we noticed in class as of late, we are starting to read books that have been published not long ago. This is interesting in particular because of how much we can assimilate to the issues Du Bois is referencing. We read Wollstonecraft, Defoe, and other feminist works from the 1700-1800s, and it made it somewhat difficult to really feel the connection since women rights are no longer necessarily an issue any more in the US. Du Bois, on the other hand, feels different, especially in light of so many black lives matter protests going on in the US. In other words, it is fascinating to read a work from 1903 that argues that people of color should no longer be oppressed by their white counterparts, as [redacted] mentions, which is still an issue today.

2 April / Bird of Prey, Lambs, Grammar, Good. (Apr 1, 2015 12:11 AM)
I feel like this was probably the hardest section of the reading, so I thought maybe if I tried to ask some questions I would get some clarifications. I found Nietzsche's arguments on the origins of goodness to be quite confusing, but at the same time really intriguing to think about. Nietzsche develops this idea of the concept of good with the comparison between lambs and bird of prey; according to Nietzsche, goodness derives from the notion of resent or envy, or as he called ressentiment, which can bee seen from a lambs point of view in regards to birds of prey since they kill lambs.
However (and this is where I get confused), Nietzsche continues by explaining that "the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything." He uses grammar as an example to prove that in certain situations, we tend to think of actions only in regard to the subject. So does this mean that our
actions are separate from ourselves? So in the case of the birds of prey and lambs, does the action of killing necessarily make the bird not good?

31 March / Re: Darwin as a philosopher (Mar 30, 2015 11:57 PM)
Even as [redacted] mentioned, I never really considered Darwin to be a philosopher, which is pretty interesting considering the similarities we can make with other mainstream philosophers even though he is generally seen as a scientist. I had never even really thought about that idea until I read the first line in your post.... Anyway, I agree with your take on how many comparisons were evident in respect to some of the other philosophers we have read thus far. Darwin's idea of the natural way of living rang some bells with some of the works we have read, but his most famous concept of the survival of the fittest made me think of Machiavelli instantly.

One of the interesting ideas that Mill expands on is something that can be related to today's discussion in class on Tocqueville. We discussed how Tocqueville feared a situation in which people lost the ability to possess unique characteristics that made each person unique. In other words, the fear of mediocrity was very evident in Tocqueville's writing, which is something that I began to think about when I came across a passage in chapter 3 of “On Liberty”. "No one's idea of excellence in conduct is that people should do absolutely nothing but copy one another. No one would assert that people ought not to put into their mode of life, and into the conduct of their concerns, any impress whatever of their own judgment, or of their own individual character (pg. 64)." Mill is basically saying that no individual should or would ever simply live life as an imitation of somebody else's. Instead, one must live with their judgment and individual character; this is what promotes individuality and deters mediocrity, exactly what Tocqueville was afraid of in Democracy in America. That being said, Mill does acknowledge the fact that "it would be absurd to pretend that people ought to live as if nothing whatever had been known in the world before they came into it; as if experience had as yet done nothing towards showing that one mode of existence, or of conduct, is preferable to another (pg. 64)." In other words, it is impossible to pretend like we do not use past examples to make future decisions. When deciding how to act in a certain situation, we usually base our reason off of a past example of how to act. This sort of balance between what to judge our actions off of closely resembles Apian Imitation. We live our lives using snippets and small pieces of examples from other people's lives in order to better live ours.

10 March / Re: Author's Intro (Mar 9, 2015 11:37 PM)
I agree with how the start of Tocqueville is very similar to Burke. As you mention, Tocqueville came to America to basically analyze the democratic profess of American politics so he could return to his native homeland in France and try to implement the ways there. It was very interesting to see his style of writing be so open, which further proves how willing he was to incorporate the government rule in France. The quote you choice was actually something that had been brought up in my introduction to American Politics class, and it really serves as an instrumental piece because it proves just how praiseworthy Tocqueville was. With this in mind, he was also somewhat critical, which is something that you bring up when you said that he argued that some failures in the democracy was due to people wanting equality amongst everyone such as equal rights and equal things. To answer your question, I don't know. If Tocqueville was here today, what would he say?

The topic that you bring up is something that I found to be really interesting, as Wollestonecraft claims that if society bars women from becoming educated and the rights of women not be equal to that of man, women will "stop the progress of knowledge and virtue (Vindication pg. 2)." Her argument is based around the idea that women's education is directly correlated with their ability to co-operate and be compatible with men. According to Wollestonecraft, for women to co-operate with men, they need to understand how to be virtuous; in order for this happen, women need to be educated. "Contending for the rights of women, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue.... And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? (Vindication pg. 2)." Thus, education leads to the understanding of virtue, which leads to women being capable of
becoming a better companion of man. Just as you state, if women are not educated, the general population will lack virtue and truth.

26 February / Woman is man (Feb 24, 2015 11:55 PM)
“She should have everything that suits the constitution of her species and of her sex so as to take her place in the physical and moral order (1250).”
This quote started the beginning of what would eventually become quite an interesting topic for me to read. At first I was quite surprised that a woman would be categorized based off of a guideline so ordinarily in the text, as if it were normal that a man like Emile would search for a woman who had a ‘suitable constitution’. In any case, what I found to be pretty cool to read was the description of how man and woman are exactly alike when we take sex out of the equation. It is true, but we often times do not really think about men and women in this way. “She has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed in the same manner, the parts are the same, the workings of the one are the same as the other, and the appearance of the two is similar. From whatever aspect one considers them, they differ only by degree (1251).” This specific quotation really stood out because it was so simply put; this definition of how similar we are to woman when we eliminate sex from the discussion could even be used as an explanation in an argument as to why women still don’t receive equal rights as men, especially in the work place. As the text explains, “in all that does not relate to sex, woman is man (1251).” Maybe I just somehow found it interesting, but did anybody else see how simple yet powerful this passage was?

24 February / Re: Inheritance (Feb 24, 2015 12:35 AM)
I think the idea of inheritance in your post is really quite intriguing, and it is something that I found myself deliberating for a while. I find it interesting how Burke touches on this subject in a way that most of us would not necessarily think about. When we think of inheritance, we usually think of material possessions that are passed down from family generations. For example, a watch that your father may have could be passed down to you as an inheritance. However, as you mention, Burke’s take on inheritance is in regards to a country. Our forefathers fought for our land, and since that time, the American democracy was slowly but surely developed, and passed down from generation to generation. It is fascinating to see this type of inheritance in a different perspective. As we spoke about in class, and as you mention here, the United States that we know did not simply begin with a democracy that we have today. Instead, slight reforms over many generations has seen our inheritance of the nation that we now live in.

19 February / Federalist Papers 51 (Feb 17, 2015 8:38 PM)
While reading Madison’s Federalist Papers 51, I noticed that he seems to question the chances of checks and balances actually becoming successful in a government system. Madison first introduces the concept that there must be a separation of power between the governmental departments in order to keep “each other in their proper places (pg. 1)” in the first paragraph. The checks and balances were introduced as a necessary divider that would ultimately limit any governmental branch from gaining too much power over one another, preventing corruption.
However, one part of the text that I found most interesting was when Madison began to doubt the realistic ability of forming a government this way. According to Madison, there are two necessary applications that need to be implemented in a nation for these checks and balances to succeed. First, all people need to surrender their power to the administration of a single government. Second, it is important “in a republic not only to guard the society against the oppression of its rulers, but to guard one part of the society against the injustice of the other part (pg. 3).” Thus, all people must be protected against the oppression of the branches, and each branch must be wary of the oppression of another part of government. We see this system of government still today with the separation of power between the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government. Madison wanted to expand on the idea that members of each branch of government should not be dependent on each other. “Members of each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others (pg. 1).” In turn, this would effectively eliminate the possibility for departments to infringe on the others.

17 February / Re: Labor (Feb 16, 2015 11:46 PM)
Smith’s take on labor was very interesting, especially the sentence that you quoted arguing that the best invention or improvement in society has been of the discovery of an individual’s desire to save his own
labour. From this, I feel like Smith elaborates on his idea of labor as an introduction to the concept of money, which originated after the difficulties that trade of labor brought about. "When the division of labour has been once thoroughly established, it is but a very small part of a man's wants which the produce of his own labour can supply. He supplies the far greater part of them by exchanging that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he has occasion for (pg. 24)." According to Smith, labor originated because man had a surplus of his own produce, and desired produce of another man; therefore, the natural tendency of trade developed and labor soon transformed from a self-sustaining labor to a barter system. People began to labor produce in order to trade for other produce. Ultimately, at least from my point of view, labor served as the stepping stone to what would ultimately become the center of our society today: money.

12 February / Imitation and example (Feb 10, 2015 10:45 PM)
"Imitation has no place at all in moral matters, and examples serve for encouragement only, i.e. they put beyond doubt the feasibility of what the law commands, they make intuitive what the practical rule expresses more generally, but they can never entitle us to set aside their true original, which lies in reason, and to go by examples (pg. 23)." Kant's take on imitation and example made me question some of his ideas in this passage. From what I understood from this quote, Kant believes that there is no excuse to imitate others, and using somebody as an example should only be a source of encouragement. Yet, I do not necessarily agree with what he is arguing about how examples should only be used as encouragement; when somebody is viewed as an example, you look at that person as a source of motivation and try to imitate them in one way or another in order to achieve something. Whether it is copying their practices or ways of going about things, imitating examples seem to go hand in hand, but Kant suggests that the two are separate. Although he does argue that "they make intuitive what the practice rule expresses more generally", imitating somebody else and following their lead as an example is ever present in our society today. Just above this passage Kant talks about God and Jesus Christ, which is the perfect example to argue that imitation does have a place in moral matters and examples should be seen as appropriate. Religious practices are based around people looking up to a higher power and seeking guidance, often times using saints, disciples, apostles, and other followers as an example of how to praise God and live. Does anybody else see this?

10 February / Re: Utility (Feb 9, 2015 8:52 PM)
Kant's take on good will and reason stumped me a little bit too, and I got confused when he argued that it is more moral to do something out of an obligation rather than kindness. I agree with what Shane is saying in that Kant has this idea that there must be some sort of ulterior motive behind why somebody does a good deed. From what I understood on this topic is that a best form of good comes from somebody's duty or obligation to help someone rather than out of sheer kindness. Although at first I was reluctant to accept this, it makes a lot of sense if you really think about it. If you do something out of kindness, there is much more room to argue that there is an ulterior motive and you want something in return even though you may not have clearly said so. However, if were to do a form of good out of duty to help somebody, there is no question that you necessarily benefit anything from it; that obligation or duty is almost forced upon you, thus making it hard to say that good will that results from duty is more moral than out of sheer kindness.

5 February / The Ancient Society: Family (Feb 3, 2015 9:53 PM)
While reading Rousseau's piece On the Social Contract, I found chapter 2, Of the First Societies, especially interesting. It could be due to the fact that I am learning about some of the early societies in one of my political science classes, but what really caught my attention was Rousseau's emphasis on family and how that is the only natural society that existed. "The most ancient of all societies, and the only natural one, is that of the family (pg. 157)." Rousseau continues to point out that families run much like political societies in a sense that the leader is usually viewed as the father, and the populace is seen as the children. However, one issue that I saw with Rousseau's argument is that "once the children are freed from the obedience they owed the father and their father is freed from the care he owed his children, all return equally to independence (pg. 157)." Although we may read this and agree that once we turn 18, we can legally become disaffiliated with our families, Rousseau compares families to political societies; thus,
does this mean that he is alluding to a society where once certain obligations are fulfilled, such as taxes, a person is no longer obliged to continue that dependence? Or is Rousseau simply trying to explain that our association with our family is one of the oldest relationships known to man? Am I overthinking this or simply trying to cause a debate?

3 February / Re: Song and Dance: The Origin of Inequality (Feb 2, 2015 9:33 PM)
I found the quote you chose to write about very intriguing because Rousseau pins song and dance as the origin of not only inequality, but also vice. More specifically, he mentions that "the one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly regarded. And this was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, vice (73)." Rousseau argues that the development of arts within the individual is what originally created inequality and vice, and the fact that shame and envy is a direct result of another person's individual capability to perform the arts is quite interesting. Yet, if you think about the arts, Rousseau's idea can be expanded far beyond just singers and dancers. Anybody who has a special talent over another person is usually seen as a threat to that 'lesser' person, especially since Rousseau argues that this is how envy and vice originated. So, [redacted], when you say that inequality is a direct result of the human mind, I agree. Our feelings towards each other, particularly our feelings towards the arts, brings about emotions of vanity, contempt, shame, and envy, just as you mentioned. Thus, to answer your question regarding whether Rousseau saw this origination of inequality and vice as human nature or a social construct, I think that it is both. Naturally we humans possess qualities such as envy and admiration, so when people began to become "accustomed to gather in front of their huts or round a large tree", it was society that constructed these events that ultimately served as a catalyst to release our natural tendencies to feel this inequality amongst other people and their talents (73).
Does that sort of make sense? I tried to explain this as clearly as possible, but it was hard to word it neatly.

27 January / Re: Concerning Moral Sentiment and Journalism (Jan 27, 2015 7:53 PM)
I agree with your opening sentence regarding what Hume’s idea is in finding the distinction between right and wrong and how it is often determined by one’s own opinion or view towards a certain situation. As you said, only after people have examined the generally agreed upon sentiment do they begin to consider and articulate the facts of the situation. As both you and [redacted] said, this is exactly what Hume is getting at; emotions come first. As you mentioned with the fear inducing coverage of topics such as Ebola and ISIS, people’s reaction are almost always related to emotion before anything else, and we are always quick to assume the worst of any situation because fear often strikes us first. Our emotional reaction trumps our reasoning a lot of the time, which is also what [redacted] is getting at with the Charlie Hebdo
‘Je suis Charlie’ topic. Without reasoning with the real factual evidence of any situation that seems to take over the headlines of CNN, our emotions get the best of us. This isn’t to say that we should not trust our emotions or believe what our instincts tell us, but it is important to balance reason with emotion. Marina explained it very well regarding the Paris shootings; it is important to consider and recognize that sometimes there is more than meets the eye, and it is important that we reason with our emotions.

22 January / Re: Why Utility Pleases (Jan 26, 2015 8:22 PM)
The idea that you bring up about choosing friends for a certain kind of use reminds me a lot of Aristotle’s piece in the Nicomachean Ethics where he describes the different types of friendships. According to Aristotle, there are three types of friendships, one of which is very similar to the idea that you are expanding on with Hume and utility. “Those who love because of utility love because of what is good for themselves, and those who love because of pleasure do so because of what is pleasant to themselves, and not because of who the loved person is but in so far as he is useful or pleasant (pg. 144).” This idea that Aristotle is talking about can be closely associated with the utility that Hume is getting at. To me, furniture that may not necessarily be of the best use, but is appealing to the eye, is just as useful and legitimate as a friendship that survives off of pleasure. You mention the concept of picking out a lamp because it looks nice; yes it may not be the best source of lighting, but it may serve another purpose aside from its intended purpose. Although it may be a lamp that is theoretically supposed to light up a room, it could also be viewed as furniture that connects the room together or boosts the aesthetic value of the house. This is ultimately what the art world is based around; does a painting really have any other purpose other than to look nice and please the eye? I completely agree with your last statement about how beauty and utility are often times considered separate entities that must be carefully balanced. Instead, they ought to be interconnected.

Swift A Modest Proposal / Swift and Satirical (Jan 20, 2015 10:39 PM)
Was I supposed to know this was a satirical piece of writing? I read Swift’s Modest Proposal and was a little concerned with some of his assertions. For example, Swift says that he had “been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled.” At first I thought I was misinterpreting the word ‘child’, just as the word ‘kid’ can sometimes be referred to as a baby lamb; now I just feel like Swift tricked me. Anyway, after reading the piece once again, knowing that it was a satirical piece, it made sense. The last paragraph seems to give away his not so obvious satire by admitting that he does not really have any interest in “endeavoring to promote this necessary work”, but he wishes that the general public are healthy, infants are provided for, the poor are relieved and even the wealthy have success. I did not necessarily think it was rude or vulgar, but I will admit that it was very convincing. Although he ponders how an “infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year”, he makes some legitimate claims regarding children who can get away with certain activities such as stealing at a young age, but when they grow older they will eventually become beggars, something that Swift opens his account talking about. This serves as just one example of Swift’s ideas that makes the reader believe that his claims are real and legitimate, ultimately confusing the reader when he/she finds out it is a satire; I ended up second guessing everything he said that I previously thought to be true.

12/4 / Of Property (Dec 3, 2014 12:00 AM)
Early in chapter 5, Locke says that the earth is human property, so we are all individual owners of the earth’s land. He then comes up with an interesting question: how does any individual person own his or her own personal land if we are all ‘shared’ owners of the earth? Locke argues that property ownership starts with individual’s ownership of his or her own body, and through the efforts of labor they are able to acquire land. “Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men (Locke pg. 274).” What interests me is something we talked about in class today that relates to this idea of owning land, but provides a problem to Locke’s statement. Eminent domain is a government’s right to take any individual’s private property for public use. So even if a person pays the required price of a land and fulfills any obligations to continue ownership of that land, the property still is not entirely his or hers. This law
completely derails Locke’s argument on how humans are able to earn full ownership of their property. He even references the Bible by saying that we are all owners of the earth. Is it possible to pardon the actions of a government? Or should we look to Locke and say that no government or agency has the right to take what we earn?

12/2 (Hobbes Day 2) / Re: Hobbes on Liberty (Dec 1, 2014 11:37 PM)
I found Hobbes section on liberty and the commonwealth to be quite interesting as well. The idea that you touch base on regarding the proposed covenant is a little skeptical to me. Hobbes argues that fear and liberty are consistent or relatable. At first I was quite hesitant on agreeing with this, but he further explains why he believes this is true. "When a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear that the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will; it is therefore the action, of one that was free: so a man sometimes pays his debt, only for fear of imprisonment, which because nobody hindered him from detaining, was the action of a man at liberty (Leviathan pg. 140)."

The idea that a man acts a certain way to avoid imprisonment or in fear of some sort of retaliation is a little skeptical to me. If a man only acts a certain way to avoid punishment, is this action just? If a man acts charitable to avoid imprisonment, does this make him a charitable person? I guess what I'm trying to get at here is whether the action of avoiding a specific retaliation is legitimate or not. If the man that Hobbes is describing paid his debt without any fear of imprisonment, does that make him anymore a man of liberty than if there was a threat of imprisonment? (I'm trying to word this as easy to read as possible, but it's a little confusing...)

12/2 (Hobbes Day 2) / Nature and Man (Dec 1, 2014 11:22 PM)
Nature makes man equal. This idea in chapter 13 of Hobbes’ Leviathan creates a number of implications. One question that we came up with in class was why, if we are all equal, do we fail to get out of a constant state of war? In the opening paragraph of chapter 13, Hobbes says that nature made men equal in both the body and the mind. Therefore, even if one man is physically stronger than another, "when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable…. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself (Leviathan pg. 82)." Does this mean that no single person can truly be better or greater than another person? Since a stronger person does not necessarily have any advantage, according to Hobbes, over the next man, can any single person be designated a leader or ruler over other people?

Maybe I’m just interpreting this wrong, but it seems to me that Hobbes brings up an interesting concept that could even be related to today’s world. No longer does the saying “the survival of the fittest" apply. Weak humans are able to live and prosper in our dangerous world, and Hobbes is making claims that go along the same lines as this. "The weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself (Leviathan pg. 82)." The quote serves to reiterate Hobbes’ belief that even the weakest of men can overcome the strength of opposition. In this context, we are talking about equality and civil war, and on what grounds one man has the right to rule another.

11/25 / Re: Continued Examination of Justice (Hobbes vs Plato and Aristotle) (Nov 24, 2014 10:42 PM)
You choose a very interesting quote from chapter 15. This quote really does prove how distinct Hobbes’ conception of justice is, just as you explain. For Hobbes, a man cannot be just when no covenant is made. However, when there is no covenant, a man can become unjust only when he breaks that promise. So, since man has the power to make these decisions, does he indirectly have the power to be just or unjust? Does making unreasonable covenants make you an unjust person because of the likelihood the covenant will be broken? This is an interesting thought that could be argued either way. Going off of what Hobbes is explaining in this quote, it would seem that we all indirectly or inadvertently ‘choose’ to be just or not. Here Hobbes describes it plain and simple, “for where no covenant hath preceded…no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is unjust.”

Something else I found interesting with Hobbes that you sort of touch base on is the comparison of Hobbes and other authors, such as Augustine and Plato. As you mention, the latter two authors emphasize individual duty as a means of creating justice, and that justice is very separate from other people. One cannot rely on another person for being just.
Number seven of the CC study questions really got me thinking about Descartes idea of how “I” is separable from the body. It was only until after I read the question that I began thinking about the similar concept Augustine brings up in his story Lucretia’s suicide in Chapter 19 of Book 1. In his passage, Augustine clearly says, “the speaker observed in the union of two bodies the disgusting lechery of the one, the chaste intention of the other, and he saw in that act not the conjunction of their bodies but the diversity of their minds (Pg. 29 City of God).” He continues by saying that it was the “highly extolled Lucretia” that “did away with the innocent, chaste, outraged Lucretia (Pg. 29 City of God).” This example of a suicidal person serves as a sort of proof that there truly is a separation.

So how is this particularly relatable to Descartes’ Discourse on Method? Descartes does not necessarily understand to a full extent what it is that separates the mind and the body, but he understands to a certain degree that they are in fact different entities. He explains for almost two whole meditations, two and six, that the different ways the mind and body can acknowledge either bee wax, the pentagon, or anything else in this nature, proves that “the mind is wholly diverse from the body, had I not yet known it well enough in any other way (Discourse on Method pg. 101).”

This is something that I would have definitely liked to elaborate on if I were posting for this reading. I felt like this text was definitely relatable to some of the other texts that we have read in class such as Republic, Politics, The Discourses and The Prince in a sense that all of the works try to describe an ideal city-state or government.

However, what I found to be a little different in Thomas More's Utopia was his attention to detail that we did not really see in the previous texts. This could be due to the fact that his descriptions are not necessarily essential in describing an island that is as close to perfect as possible. On page 93 (iBooks), he goes into detail on how much the people care about their gardens. "They cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have both vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers in them; and all is so well ordered and so finely kept that I never saw gardens anywhere that were both so fruitful and so beautiful as theirs (pg. 93 [iBooks])." In regards to what [redacted] had mentioned about the description of the pride taken in the gardens, this quote helps establish the edenic feel that you pointed out.

When reading Excerpts from Democrates Alter, I was intrigued by the discussion of not only what justifies war, but also what the causes are that justify war. Democrates says that “a war requires not only just causes for its undertaking, but also legitimate authority and upright spirit in whoever declares it and a proper manner in its conduct... (Sepulveda: Democrates Alter 49-50).” So according to this, Democrates defends war as just as long as it has a just cause. So if a country A bombs another country B, would it be justifiable for country B to retaliate and declare war? Would this be considered a just cause? According to Democrates beliefs, yes, it would be justifiable because it has a legitimate cause. Yet, the thought I had that could potentially question this idea is whether the independent effects of war on the innocent public, even if it is considered to be just, still make for a just war. Would harm to innocent persons during a war label the war as unjust, regardless of whether the cause of declaring war was just? It may be confusing, but I tried to word it as logically as possible...

From the start of the excerpt, Leopold seems to hold Christians to a higher standard. He asks Democrats whether it was just that the Spaniards declare "war on those innocent mortals who had caused them no harm." Democrats responds by saying that we must "search not only in Christians and in the writings of the New Testament, but also in those philosophers whom we judge to have dealt most wisely with...especially in the writings of Aristotle." A few lines later, Democrats makes his stand by requiring a just war to have a legitimate cause or reason. It seems as if Democrats is simply referencing Aristotle because he agrees with his beliefs. To me, this raises some questions of legitimacy. What credibility does he really have? If I quote some person that would support a claim I made, does that make it credible? Aristotle says that war is justifiable "against those men who, having been born to obey, reject servitude." Although Aristotle is a very respectable and highly influential philosopher, I do not agree with the fact that Democrats relies on Aristotle to prove his point.
Besides this, you bring up a very strong argument that I overlook when I read this piece. How credible can these arguments be when the writings happened thousands of years apart?

11/6 (Luther) / Re: Connections to Al Gahazali, Ibn Tufayal, and Aristotle (Nov 4, 2014 8:21 PM)
I first thought about Augustine in City of God when he talks about the division of the body, but the arguments you bring up from Al Gahzali, Ibn Tufayal and Aristotle are very strong. I think that Luther's description on page 46 when he mentions how it is possible to "remain in this mortal life on earth" is instrumental in relating this concept of a division to any author or philosopher. His idea of a division in one lone body is furthered when he says that faith is what truly brings out the division. As I said in my commentary, it is not possible for the outward being effect the acts of righteousness the inner soul does. Thus, faith is the catalyst that strengthens this division.

11/6 (Luther) / Luther and Augustine (Nov 4, 2014 8:12 PM)
When reading Luther's work on the Freedom of a Christian Man, I could not help but think about the slight similarity it has with Saint Augustine. Although it may be a little far fetched, I started to relate Augustine's piece on Lucretia with Luther's argument that people possess two 'different' mortals. Luther talks about the existence of an inner soul and outward beings, which the Bible calls the new and old man, respectively. After reading this I went back to chapter 19 from book 1 of City of God, which explains how "the speaker observed in the union of two bodies the disgusting lechery of the one, the chaste intention of the other, and he saw in that act not the conjunction of their bodies but the diversity of their minds (Pg. 29)." It is evident that in Lucretia's suicide, there were two different mortals present, and the outer body triumphed. "There were two persons involved, and only one committed adultery (pg. 29)." In regards to Luther, this type of division within one body can be seen when he explicitly describes the differences between the inside and out. He argues that righteousness comes from the inner soul, and that no outward force or help can make a Christian man either good or guilty. In the example that Luther gives us, we can see that the inner soul serves as the more powerful mortal, opposite that of Augustine's story. Lastly, Luther talks about the Commandments by explaining how they teach us all acts of goodness. Yet, Luther argues they really only prove how incapable we are in achieving any sort of virtue. If we were to take Luther's statement to be true, what is the point of the Commandments then in the first place?

10/30 / Machiavelli: The Prince and The Discourses (Oct 29, 2014 9:30 PM)
In The Prince, Machiavelli talks about how to be a successful Prince in a commentary to Lorenzo de 'Medici. In The Discourses, he goes into depth on the structure of maintaining liberty in a republic, whereas The Prince is an examination of the foundations of a princely rule. Throughout The Discourses, Machiavelli praises dictatorship and the type of rule it partakes in; the first section of the text seems to discuss how to form a republican government, as well as the necessary leadership qualities within a republic. The Roman Empire serves as a perfect example of a successful republican political order, which is also used in The Prince when Machiavelli explains the most complete instance of maintaining rule. Furthermore, Machiavelli talks about the importance of protecting a republic's truthfulness through the maintenance of a strict social order, proving the necessity of a strong military and citizenship. Again, this can also be seen in The Prince. There are many themes that unite the texts together, but two themes that seem to stand out as the most important are virtue and fortune. In Book Two of chapter 1, Machiavelli talks about "Whether Virtue or Fortune was the Principal Cause of the Empire which Rome acquired (270)." This serves as prove that virtue and fortune are the two prominent themes in both The Prince and The Discourses.

10/28 (Mach. The Prince / Re: Machiavelli's Audience (Oct 26, 2014 11:40 PM)
I think you brought up a very interesting point regarding who Machiavelli is writing for. I asked myself the same question even before chapter one when reading the Letter to Francesco Vettori. From the very start he addresses the Florentine Ambassador as "your" and he explains his daily life activities, making me feel as if the letter was a personal letter to a friend.
Then from chapter one of The Prince, I agree that there is a distinct pattern of the interchangeable use of "your" and "His Magnificence", but I find that majority of the time Machiavelli's writing is strictly dedicated to one person, Lorenzo de' Medici. That being said, I do not necessarily think that his ideas must be restricted for the open public to consider. He makes very good points about how to maintain power as a new ruler, and although he does make very harsh statements, as you proved with his statement about
how "people should either be caressed or crushed", his argument is explaining how to maintain power as a ruler. Although he is very blunt at times, I think it is worth considering that he provides evidence for his sometimes frank claims, such as his piece on the Romans and how they succeeded in matters that "all wise rulers ought to do."

10/28 (Mach. The Prince / Hereditary vs. New (Oct 26, 2014 11:17 PM)
Machiavelli describes two different types of rule: republics and principalities. Within these two systems are multiple means of acquiring power such as a lineage or a takeover. In chapter two, Machiavelli briefly explains his idea of a hereditary principle and how a hereditary ruler "will never lose his state unless some extraordinary and overwhelming force appears that can take it away from him." However, Machiavelli really dedicates a large amount of time discussing the mixed principalities in chapter three. He argues that a government rule that has been newly taken over is at risk when the people who "willingly change their ruler" are not satisfied.

The difference between a hereditary and a new principality, Machiavelli describes, is that as a hereditary ruler, nobody can necessarily "take up arms against" you, which is often found to be the case in a mixed principality. As soon as a new ruler takes power, s/he is immediately in danger of losing the newly acquired principality. Later on in chapter three, Machiavelli provides a solution for rulers who become new rulers in a principality; he says that "you are on the spot, you can identify difficulties as they arise, and can quickly take appropriate action. If you are at a distance, you only learn of them when they have become serious, and when it is too late to put matter right." Thus, a ruler must be present in the newly acquired territory in order to continue holding power. If a ruler is away living in a distant territory, it becomes very easy for the state to become unsettled beyond repair.

10/21 / Re: Parallels and Differences Between Aquinas and Aristotle’s Discussions of the End Goal, the Good and Happiness (Oct 20, 2014 11:23 PM)
I also saw many similarities between Aquinas and Aristotle, especially when Aquinas talks about the best form of government being one that is run by a king. He also elaborates on tyranny governments, again likening to Aristotle’s explanations of the different forms of tyrannical governments. I really enjoyed reading your last paragraph on the similarities Aquinas and Aristotle have in regards to happiness. As we have read, Aristotle explains that you will not be able to attain happiness unless you exhibit moral acts of virtue; then and only then will you be able to be enlightened with happiness. On the other hand, Aquinas says that it is simply impossible to attain happiness throughout his lifetime, and therefore nobody can ever be happy. So why does Aquinas take segments of Aristotle’s beliefs to strongly, but argue completely the other way on some others? His take on government and the tyranny of government were very similar, but the two had completely different takes on the possibility of being happy.

10/16 / Why was Hayy never fully adopted? (Oct 14, 2014 10:07 PM)
While reading about Hayy’s life, I found it to be so interesting how at first his ‘mother’ raises him from an early age, but at some point, Hayy almost becomes self-dependent. I continuously noticed the progress he made starting with when he first learnt to walk, to his self-taught understanding of life and death. What is constantly repeated all over the text is how Hayy gained knowledge about life through his experiences. This first becomes evident when he questions why “the private parts of an animal were better concealed than his own (pg. 110).” Further on after the death of his ‘mother’, Hayy begins to experiment with different parts of the body, attempting to revive his dead mother.

However, the question I particularly wanted to raise was why his mother never really took him in and gave him shelter, food, and clothes? As we can tell from the text, Hayy was able to make his own clothing, create shelter with a fire and find food, but I kept asking myself the same question: Why did the doe not fully take him in as her child? Before the age of two, the doe served as the child’s mother; “She brought him to water when he was thirsty; and when the sun eat down she shaded him. When he was cold she warmed him (Pg. 109).” Yet, after every day, the doe “would bring him back to the spot where she had found him, nestling him to herself among the feathers with which the little ark had been cushioned (Pg. 109).”

I tried to answer the question myself, arguing that maybe it would have looked wrong for the doe to completely adopt Hayy. Yet, when the doe got old, Hayy began to “lead her to rich pastures and gather sweet fruits to feed her (Pg. 111)”, so surely they were seen together. Was this desert island off of India really so private?
10/14 / Re: Hierarchy as Body & Soul & GOD (Oct 13, 2014 8:17 PM)

I felt that Book XIII Chapter 2 was a very interesting section of Augustine as well. He makes his point loud and clear about how the body and soul differentiate, and that both the body and soul are similar in that they are both inferior in power compared to God's desires. As you mentioned, Augustine says that "the death of the soul results when God abandons it". Thus, once God abandons a human soul, the body perishes too by default. Literally speaking, this argument could make sense because a person with no soul either has no purpose living or simply cannot live. On the other hand, doesn't Augustine say that a soul could live on even after the death of the body? This statement, quite the contrary to the former argument, is impossible because without a living body you simply cannot live.

This hierarchy that you describe is very interesting, and makes a lot of sense. The body dies when the souls leaves, and the soul dies when God abandons the soul. My question is, however, can't a body live on without a soul? Is this something that Augustine chose not to bring up? Or is it assumed that a body with no soul has no reason to live?

10/9 / Anger in the Qur'an (Oct 7, 2014 11:27 PM)

There are multiple instances of anger in the Qur'an that I picked up on while reading the excerpts for class as well as our discussion today. Surah 98 offers this idea of those who do not follow the religion of the Qur'an as "the people of the book" and those "among the polytheists". At first glance you would not necessarily think that there is anything wrong with categorizing those who do not follow the same faith as you, but as we continued and discussed about in class, the language only gets harsher. "Those who reject (truth), among the people of the book and among the polytheists, will be in hellfire, to dwell therein (for aye), they are the worst of creatures (Surah 98 6-7)." Looking at this text from a literature point of view instead of a religious standpoint, why is the punishment so hard? The last few words that describe those who do not follow the book of the Qur'an as "the worst of creatures" is so grim. I think that maybe the reason and explanation as to why these words were chosen is because of the line above. "Those who reject (truth)" serves to prove that anything other than the Islam ways are unfaithful and wrong.

Additionally, in Surah 56, the illustrations of the right vs. left hand are extreme, especially in the left hand situation. Those who are categorized in the left hand live a miserable life and are never satisfied. Much of the reading possess very extreme language and ideas. Is it necessary? Obviously we can see this sort of extreme behavior in today's world with all of the conflict around the world with the religion. In any case, I found this to be the most interesting aspect of the Qur'an.

10/7 / Re: Left vs Right Hand (Oct 6, 2014 9:00 PM)

You bring up an interesting part of the Qur'an in Surah 56, and I find it hard to understand as well. It seems as if what is being stated completely contradicts what Allah wishes for us to do. "They will be on Thrones Encrusted and globes, beakers, and cups filled out of clear-flowing fountains." So why is heaven filled with materialistic goods? Allah explains multiple 'trials' that mankind faces, as if they are tests for Allah to judge us off of. "Majority of the problems challenging the world are because of fitnah of money." Allah addresses the problem, but then explains that we must spend our wealth. Does this answer our own questions about it being contradictory?

The reason Allah tells us to spend our wealth is because according to him, there will come a day when all of the materialistic goods, and that day is the Day of Judgement. Look at this idea from an objective point of view (and reading this book as a text), Allah makes a good claim. All of our materialistic goods such as our phones, cars, clothes, will eventually be of no worth. Having said that and considering that we must spend our wealth, what are we to spend our money on that would be acceptable in the eyes of Allah? After we have spent money that covers all of our necessities of life, what are we supposed to spend the surplus on?

10/2 / God is all around us. There is no excuse (Sep 30, 2014 9:20 PM)

"Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Romans 1:20"

I found this to be a very important quote because it makes the claim that there is simply no excuse not to worship God. Because God proves that He is "cleary perceived in the things that have been made",

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everyone should be aware of His almighty power, and therefore, worship Him. However, those who
decide not to honor God must feel the wrath for their wickedness. We talked in class about the character
of God in the Old Testament, and here, in the New Testament, we can see a similar characteristic. God
wants His people on earth to fear Him by saying that the ungodly and wicked men will be punished. “For
the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their
wickedness suppress the truth. Romans 1:18” There also seems to be an obligation that God will only
protect us as long as we follow his requests; it is sort of a give and take scenario. In Romans 1:24, God
explains that those who do not worship him are given up "in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the
dishonoring of their bodies among themselves…." This is a perfect example of the consequences (the
give and take) of if you do not do x, you will feel the wrath of y.
So, what if a person truly did not understand that God was the creator of all heaven and earth? Would
s/he be excused for his/her unknowing? Woud that person not feel the conse
quences? Or is it simply not
possible for anybody to not comprehend the fact that God is responsible for all things around us?

9/30 / Re: I AM WHO I AM (Sep 29, 2014 10:50 PM)
The sentence you chose was one of the quotes I found to be the most intriguing from our readings. When
Moses asks God what his name is, God's response is fascinating. He simply states, "I am who I am", as if
that is all Moses needs to know in order to complete his journey to free the people of Israel. The point you
raise about Job is something that I had not thought of, but it marks a great point. Both instances of Moses
traveling to free the Israelites and the book of Job raise the questions: Why does God not define himself?
Does he expect all people to become followers and not question him? Why is he exempt from responding
any other way other than "I am who I am"?

9/25 / The Iliad vs. Exodus (Sep 24, 2014 11:59 AM)
I felt that the most exciting passage from Exodus comes when Moses and his brother journey back to
Egypt where God asks them to help the Israelites return back to Canaan. Once the brothers arrive in
Egypt, they ask the Pharaoh to release the Hebrew's with no success. Moses even tries to rattle the
Pharaoh by turning his magical staff that God provided into a snake; this only makes the Pharaoh more
annoyed, and he increases the workload for the Hebrews. Finally, however, God decides to take matters
into his own hands, and he casts ten plagues on Egypt. This turns the Nile into blood, dust into gnats, and
sends flies to cloud the Pharaoh's house. Further plagues hit Egypt until the Pharaoh gives up and
releases over 600,000 Israelites.
What I think is interesting is that this can be related to some of the Greek books we have read last year.
For example, in The Iliad, Apollo sends a plague to the Achaeans because Agamemnon refuses to give
Chryses his daughter. Eventually, the plague becomes too heavy that he releases the daughter. See how
this can be related to the Pharaoh’s plague?
Exodus can also be related to the Iliad where many gods create a path for mortals to follow in order to
accomplish something. It may be a far reach, but it could be something worth considering. Let’s take The
Iliad and the Hebrew Bible; obviously the two books are extremely different phenomena’s (one is based
on Greek myths and one is the foundation of the human history), but it is interesting to relate the two. For
example, God tells Moses that he plans on moving the Israelites back to Canaan to their land, and he
needs his help. Moses complains that he does not have the ability and skill to return to Egypt, but God
persists and convinces Moses by providing a powerful staff as well as the company of his brother, Aaron.
Likewise, if we rewind back to freshman year and take a look at The Iliad, we can see how immortals
(gods) ordered their mortals down on earth to fight in battles and journey great distances.

9/25 / Are we free? (Sep 23, 2014 10:25 PM)
According to Aristotle, the only way to be a free person is to work for your own personal gain. On the
other hand, those who choose to work for other people and for the sole purpose of wages are vulgar
workers, and are therefore ‘unfree’ people. This led me to question our own society: are we all vulgar
workers? And if so, does this mean we are not free people?
First off, I think it is safe to say that regardless of the motives behind why we work, we are all generally
free people; we have rights, equal opportunity for an education, and so on. But Aristotle says that this
should not be the case. According to the philosopher, women and the working class should not allowed to
receive any educational opportunities because education is only available for the free man who work
towards benefitting his own self. Yet, it is evident in today’s society that both women and those who come
from a working class family have the right to receive a higher education. Aristotle also claims that a vulgar worker is a person who only works for the sole purpose of increasing wages. Yet, isn't that all we want in life? Obviously we all want a job that we love and enjoy doing, but isn't the whole purpose of work to provide not only the necessities of life, but also the pleasures? Aristotle makes it seem that in order to be a 'good' worker, you must only work until you satisfy the basic needs of survival.

Maybe it is unfair to try and compare Aristotle's ideal system with the world we live in today. His idea of a communal education system does make a lot of sense, but the restrictions he implements make it not only unreasonable, but also unfair. The restricted access of who can be considered free and who can get an education seems to only benefit the higher-class citizens (himself and his audience).

9/23 / Re: Communal Education (Sep 22, 2014 10:00 PM)
I think you are spot on about communal education being a serious consideration in ancient times. However, I believe that present day educational structures prove that communal education ends at a certain time/age. We all learnt how to read the ABC's, count to ten, name the first President of the United States and so on. But there comes a time where basic education stops, and it seems to be post high school. After high school, students who continue to higher educational institutions begin to focus on subjects of their choice. An example is every one of us at Columbia. We all have different majors and careers that we wish to pursue. So Aristotle had the right thought process, but political leaders did not really understand or consider the fact that each person brings to the table different educational desires, but the general concept of a communal education, especially in ancient times, seems to have been an impressive proposal.

9/18 / Does Aristotle Believe in Happiness? (Sep 16, 2014 10:27 PM)
Aristotle spends a large amount of time on the notion of happiness, and some of the concepts he talks about leads me to consider that he believes happiness does not actually exist during a person's lifetime. Aristotle talks about how happiness varies from person to person, which is true because certain things make some people happy which others would not find as enjoyable. I believe that what Aristotle was trying to say is that happiness is attainable and can be achieved, but a person will never be able to live in a state of happiness while alive. So is happiness simply a goal that humans strive for their whole life in order to leave a legacy of themselves behind as a happy person? Or was Aristotle wrong, and happiness is a feeling that comes and goes depending on daily circumstances?

9/16 / Re: What's Good for One vs the Whole? (Sep 15, 2014 9:30 PM)
I agree with your early statement that Plato's Callipolis is flawed because it's main goal is to maintain a general, average feeling of stability and need. What Aristotle talks about so much is that happiness varies from human to human, and we witness that in our everyday lives. The first day of class (maybe the second?) we were asked to write down what made us happy in the last week...not everybody had the same experiences that made them happy. However, what I found most interesting in the first three books is the part where Aristotle explains how happiness is a feeling that can only be evaluated as a whole, meaning one's entire life. Does this mean that nobody is truly happy until after death? Can that be possible? Interesting to think about.

9/9 (Plato V-VII) / Plato's Kingdom (Sep 9, 2014 10:56 PM)
In book 5 of Republic, Plato describes an ideological city where one citizen's suffrage results in the entire communities suffrage (for example, if one individual gains success, the whole city shares the success). The question is, did Plato really believe this could ever become a reality? At first I thought there was no way Plato could elaborate anymore on this ideal city without sounding like a communist, but I was wrong. He continues his argument by claiming that it would be possible to rule a city if everybody over the age of ten were thrown out. This would give children the chance to be brought up with a controlled education that leads them to believe that their lives shall be devoted to maintaining a balance of happiness in order to help create an entire city of happiness. Much like we discussed in class together, this sounds much like North Korea in the sense that the higher power officials use education as their most powerful resource; by selectively educating young children to grow up believing a specific set of understandings, they ultimately become living propaganda. Plato's theory of this ideal city is an example of a great idea on paper that simply would not work in the real world. Just some questions to consider, how could you regulate a city
where all children have to be conceived at a specific time of the year? Once the babies are born, the parents are suddenly parents to every single one of the children that was conceived at the same time?

9/9 (Plato V-VII) / Re: The Allegory of the Cave (Sep 8, 2014 11:56 PM)
I have heard many things about Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave metaphor too, but this was the first time reading it myself. I feel that Plato did a fantastic job in portraying the prisoners' journey from imagination to understanding step by step, and the theory of us humans living in a similar existence is intriguing. To answer your question of whether or not each existence of the prisoners represent the four subsections of the line -- Yes, I think Plato does. Although the two levels from belief to thought may be subtle (as you mentioned), it is evident from when the prisoners are released until they enter the light of the real world that they completed a journey. Initially, the prisoners could only look straight out, and considered their 'real world' to be shadows, but when they were dragged out into the second phase, they begun to believe that what they used to consider the 'real world' was just an illusion, that the shadows were created by the fire and statues. This has now become the released prisoners' new concept of life. However, they eventually understand that the statues were false replicas of what is physically alive (ie. trees, flowers, houses), and they completed their journey towards education.

You also bring up an extremely interesting concept to end the post, and that has to do with comparing the Allegory of the Cave to our world; are we simply in the cave? Are there higher 'steps' or 'conditions in the soul' that we do not know of? The definition of allegory is a story or poem that may reveal a hidden meaning... could Plato have been hinting of a further generation of life?
-Ben