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A Reflection on Studious Exploration

Of all the aspects of the humanities, I find philosophy to be the most interesting as well as the most important to me. Broadly speaking, I would say that it describes a pursuit of truth and order. Put simply, at this stage of my life I have a desire for clarity and practicality. Hence, I think that humanism may be the most pragmatic and interesting movement today. It seems to me that much of the recent philosophical innovation within areas that interest me is both a result of and a benefit to the modern humanist's noble and ambitious ideal of an empowered 'happy human'. It is in the movement of humanism that I think the subject of philosophy finds the essence and importance of what it is to philosophize in the contemporary climate. As Montaigne would put it (more aptly than Cicero), "to philosophize is to learn how to die" (179). I interpret this as saying that perhaps through philosophy, the human being can overcome the tribulations of life, and arise to greater heights. In hoping that one might come to have a comprehensive understanding of my position, I want to explore how my study in the humanities has come to enlighten me on the benefits that could arise from a philosophical investigation into humanism and perhaps even some markedly esoteric ideas.

It is through my own engagement with the humanities and the social sciences that I've come to hold such a position on the utility of philosophy, particularly in recent years where I've begun to delve further into philosophy's practicality. My first encounter with philosophy came about when I read *The Tao of Pooh* as a younger man, and the *Tao Te Ching* more recently. I would say that most of my engagement with philosophy from then on has been framed within the perspective that those two books inspired in me. With that said, the degree to which Taoism influences my views on some things may be negligible. Indeed, my interests in the humanities and social sciences have broadened to the point that the tenets of Taoism are often not applicable, or are inadequate in gleaning an understanding. This is particularly so in areas of the social sciences. I generally understand philosophical ideas as lenses through which I can clarify broader ideas and social institutions. This understanding reinforces my identification with humanism.

My own positions may often align with those of a pragmatic humanist. I think that this also relates to a desire to see a greater interdisciplinarity in the humanities and the sciences. There are many ideas propounded by thinkers within the humanities that have great value and greatly assist human progress, just like there are in the sciences. This is particularly evident in the analysis and study of sacred texts and literature, which often contain varying implicit ideas that are ever-so relevant to sociology and the psychology of the human being. Thus, adopting a pluralist's position

and recognising that there are many ways to understand politically engaged topics and social science is a vital prerequisite to understanding the pragmatic humanist's position. One could argue that this is particularly so with recent advancements in A.I., which is a topic that humanities researchers will likely influence when it comes to developing it and legislating it. It is through this that one can see how the humanist's ideals are more relevant than ever in pursuing a greater society.

In discussing my interest in the field of philosophy, I should also bring to fore my latent interest in the philosophy of esotericism and theology. This interest is somewhat related to my earlier exposure to Taoism and some related studies I have read, but it also arises from a brief study in romanticism. While reading about romanticism I was referred through secondary sources to texts that discuss esoteric ideas about supernaturalism and the like. My own assessment of why these references appear would be that it stems from the romanticist's interest in the imagination and the unconscious. Perhaps it is for this reason that I have at times caught myself conflating romanticism with esotericism. Some readings that I've found interesting while exploring this field are: St Ignatius' *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Jung's *Liber Novus*, and particularly Youngusband's *Life in the Stars* and his *Modern Mystics*. Of course, this interest might appear to some as contradictory to my interest in humanism, but one should recognise that there are others, like Carl Jung, who can be considered a humanist and see these two subjects (humanism and esotericism) as naturally aligned, in that they both seek human understanding and emphasise greater human experiences. Nonetheless, I believe it is the nature of philosophical investigation to explore ideas to arrive at one's own sense of clarity. I will expand no further on this aspect nor shall I attempt to reconcile any esoteric ideas with a humanist perspective. Though I will say that this interest harkens back to my recognition of the valuable ideas that sacred texts and literature can offer humanity. For now, this remains a prospective topic that may later be elaborated upon, either in my own writing or perhaps within an academic context.

I still think that it is fair to say that my interest in philosophy revolves around discovering pragmatic value in ideas that arise from discussing how to live, or rather how to die. I have no doubt that my views within the humanities will alter to some degree throughout the rest of my study. For the moment my investigations are framed from a humanist's perspective, but I long for the revelations that might arise from a study of post-humanism. Furthermore, there is an excitement at the prospect of developing any infantile ideas that are brewing within me. A thorough engagement with a study in the humanities through the lens of philosophy should grant this, noting especially the assistance I have already derived from a study of historical movements. It is clear to see how my continued engagement with the humanities and humanism will influence my positions and thought on philosophical topics in the present and future.

Works Cited

Michel de Montaigne, *Essays of Montaigne*, vol. 1, trans. Charles Cotton, revised by William Carew Hazlett (New York: Edwin C. Hill, 1910).