

Action Through Doing

(EPP Stage Three)

This is the third stage of our Everyday Philosophical Practice. Here is where we utilize all of the information and insights we have had about our choices, beliefs, thought patterns, automatic reactions, and behaviors. The goal here, however, is *not* simply to change our behaviors. We want to change *what gets us to* those behaviors.

As we will see throughout the course in our discussions of your mindfulness topics, our unjustified beliefs and unconscious thought processes often lead us to behave in ways that are maladaptive and harmful to us and to those around us. We could certainly locate these problems, and walk around all the time thinking about them, being on the alert for them constantly . . . but I certainly wouldn't wish to live that way. Even when we manage to do this, we find that our old, habitual, ingrained thought patterns surface again and again, to derail us.

Consider this example: Suppose I find, through my analysis, that I am continually mean and nasty to my mother. I *could* just say to myself, "ok, I need to be nice to Mom." Then I would have to think about this, keeping it in my mind, "Alright, there is Mom. I am always mean to her, so I need to be nice to her now. But wait, she has neglected me for years! She isn't nice to me. I need to be mean to her to teach her a lesson and to pay her back, because that is what she deserves!"

At that point, I would fail to change my behavior, because I haven't changed the problems that lead to those behaviors. In the case above, I would have, hopefully, realized that I was holding, and desiring to act upon, certain false beliefs. Such beliefs that I see above are: "I need to be nice to my mother simply because I found that I wasn't being nice to her," or "Dammit, I have to do this stupid assignment for philosophy class, so I have to be nice to Mom." Additionally, there are others as well: "Parents shouldn't neglect their children," "I know what neglect is, and what my mother did fits the definition," "There is no way for me to be wrong about this, either," "One must 'payback' badness with badness," "People can deserve to be treated badly," "I am the only one in this situation whose perspective matters at all," and so on. *Those* are the sorts of insights you should have gained during your thoughtfulness work, and *those* are the sorts of things that are perfect fodder for your plan of action.

On the following page is detailed information on the purposes of your thoughtful analysis. Use that information, along with this explanation, to work up your plan of action—remembering, of course, that your plan of action is to CHANGE THOUGHT PATTERNS AND BELIEFS, not just simply to change your behaviors.

The Point of our Everyday Philosophical Practice

[This information comes from the American Philosophical Association's Delphi Report: *Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction* by Dr. Peter A. Fascione.]

Self Regulation is one of the key components of critical thinking, and is the point of doing the EPP assignments. Note the emphasis on *thought processes*, including the antecedent beliefs used in those thought processes.

SELF-REGULATION:

Self-consciously to monitor one's cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results educed, particularly by applying skills in analysis and evaluation to one's own inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting either one's reasoning or one's results.

In other words, the point is to be consciously aware of the thought processes we use in coming to judgments—this is the *meta-cognition* we keep coming back to. Recall, as well, that the point of being *aware* of our beliefs, thought patterns, behaviors, is that it is necessary to see them before we can actually investigate them, and then change the maladaptions to things much more beneficial to us and those around us.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

- to reflect on one's own reasoning and verify both the results produced and the correct application and execution of the cognitive skills involved.
- to make an objective and thoughtful meta-cognitive self-assessment of one's opinions and reasons for holding them.
- to judge the extent to which one's thinking is influenced by deficiencies in one's knowledge, or by stereotypes, prejudices, emotions or any other factors which constrain one's objectivity or rationality.
- to reflect on one's motivations, values, attitudes and interests with a view toward determining that one has endeavored to be unbiased, fair-minded, thorough, objective,

respectful of the truth, reasonable, and rational in coming to one's analyses, interpretations, evaluations, inferences, or expressions.

- For example: to examine one's views on a controversial issue with sensitivity to the possible influences of one's personal bias or self-interest; to review one's methodology or calculations with a view to detecting mistaken applications or inadvertent errors; to reread sources to assure that one has not overlooked important information; to identify and review the acceptability of the facts, opinions or assumptions one relied on in coming to a given point of view; to identify and review one's reasons and reasoning processes in coming to a given conclusion.

SELF-CORRECTION:

- where self-examination reveals errors or deficiencies, to design reasonable procedures to remedy or correct, if possible, those mistakes and their causes.
- For example: given a methodological mistake or factual deficiency in one's work, to revise that work so as to correct the problem and then to determine if the revisions warrant changes in any position, findings, or opinions based thereon.

EPP Paper Format

From now on, your weekly EPP papers will have the following format, and use the topics listed in the syllabus. After we finish discussing the previous week's topic in class, I will give you the specific instructions for the next week's topic.

I want you to follow this format precisely. This means you will use the bolded headings below in your papers. You do not need to worry about transitions, nor about making the whole thing one coherent paper that hangs together. These papers are more reports of what you have been doing and learning and plan to do based on what you found than they are typical "papers."

Note that all of these papers must be typed, double spaced, and stapled, if you use more than one piece of paper. In no case will you go onto three pages.

The format you will use is on the next page.

Name
EPP#
Date

Remember: two pages maximum!

Topic: (here you put the week's topic, e.g., "honesty" or "magnanimity")

Awareness

In this section you will give me a paragraph or two about the enlightening mindful experiences you had during the week. This doesn't have to be much, or in much detail—it is really just evidence to show me that you have been mindful throughout the week.

Analysis

In this section you will:

1. Explain how you did the assignment (if a specific one was given in class).
2. Define the topic term as you have come to understand it.
3. Describe some of the automatic interpretations and involuntary reactions you found in your analyses.
4. Give me a paragraph or two about some of the irrational beliefs and fallacies that led you to those automatic interpretations and involuntary reactions. From where did they come? How did you find them?
5. You will choose one of the things from (4) above to focus on, and explain it in detail.

Action

In this section, you will do all of the following:

1. Make a list of as many reasons as you can think of for **not** changing your beliefs and thought processes.
2. Make a list of as many reasons as you can think of **for changing** your beliefs and thought processes.
 - You will then list five reasons from each category in your paper for me.
 - Note: you will do 1) and 2) above on your own, not in the paper—all I need are the two lists of five.]
3. Answer the following questions:
 - What makes you think that you could make this cognitive change if you decided to?
 - What would it take (or what would have to change) for you to make this change?
 - If you were to make this cognitive change, how might you go about it?
 - What do you intend to do with respect to this issue?