

Analysis Through Thoughtfulness

(EPP Stage Two)

In order to gain real benefits from mindfulness, one must think about and analyze the experiences noted in mindfulness. Below are a number of questions to ask yourself, questions basic to any inquiry into meaningful matters. After you have been mindful for a while, try the following to help you as you write about those experiences.

The topic at hand

- What do I mean by X?
- How do I know X?
- What are my reasons for doing or believing X?
- What, for me, is a viable alternative to X?
- What am I assuming in regard to X?
- What is the value of X for me?
- You can (and should) rephrase these questions to apply to others as well, not just to yourself. Note that “others” is a large group; you should be as specific as you can about whom you are thinking: friends, family, Americans, human beings in general, etc.—whoever is relevant. For example:
 - What do my friends mean by X?
 - How, in general, is X known by humans?
 - What are the common reasons Americans do or believe X?
 - What, for my peers, is a viable alternative to X?
 - What do other students assume in regard to X?
 - What is the value of X for others?

Other Points of View

- Yet another way to enhance our mindfulness exercises is by the use of multiple points of view.
- This technique involves placing oneself in different points of view as imaginatively as possible, in order to experience and explore the issue in full.
- With respect to our dishonesty exercise, for example, you could imagine you have just discovered that you have been deceived by someone close to you about something very important to you:
 - How would you feel?
 - What would you think?
 - What would you do?
 - How would this deception affect your relationship with the deceiver?
- Now imagine *you* are the deceiver:
 - Why did you deceive someone close to you?

- Does it matter that the person you deceived is close to you?
- What did you hope to accomplish with your deception?
- What did you have to do or not do in order to allow yourself to be this dishonest?
- What did you hope to get out of your dishonesty?
- Now use this technique to figure out *exactly* why dishonesty is wrong.
 - Yes, it hurts others, but in what specific ways?
 - And what about the deceiver? Does it harm him/her as well? How? Be specific.

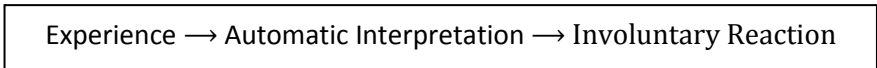
Insights

- As you write, you will find yourself having certain insights about yourself and your thought processes.
- You will be able to recognize these when you hit them because you will FEEL it and know it is significant.
- These insights are what you are after.
- These insights will form the basis of the real work of your papers. We will look at these insights in the following section, before you get your second EPP paper assignment.

Breaking the Chain

One of the main goals of our Everyday Philosophical Practice is to live consciously. Living consciously means being aware of what is going on around and inside of us, and then *choosing* how we respond.

Typically, on autopilot, we experience the following sequence:



In our daily lives, we experience various things. Science tells us that what we really experience is simply the external world impinging on our sensory organs. After that, we must make sense of the data coming in. It is at this point that things get sticky. Without talking about complicated philosophical or neurophysiological issues, we can say simply that we “interpret” that sense data, make sense of it, and then somehow react to it—even if our reaction is to do nothing.

When we are working on autopilot, this interpretation, based on acquired beliefs and on habitual trains of thought, happens automatically. When this happens, we are not thinking, we are not living—at least not consciously; we are merely robots reacting as we have been programmed by our experiences and by ourselves.

Our Everyday Philosophical Practice is a means to become conscious in our daily lives. We can break that chain of automaticity and take control of both our interpretations of things and of our reactions to them. In such a case, we supplant the above series by this one:

Experience → Reflected Understanding → Chosen Response

What we experience doesn't change in the new series, but everything following does, along with the speed at which we move from one node to the next. In the first sequence, one normally travels from beginning to end as quickly and thoughtlessly as possible. In the second one, what we want to do is to slow the whole sequence down, so that we do not move from one node to the other unconsciously, but instead do so slowly, consciously, and thoughtfully.

If you recall that beliefs guide our actions, and then realize that interpretation is itself an action, you will see that our beliefs influence our interpretations as well. If we change our beliefs, we can change our interpretations. While some of our beliefs tell us how to interpret our sense data, others tell us how we are to react to our interpretations. We can hold either or both of these types of beliefs, and not even be aware we hold them, let alone have any idea *why* we believe them. Those beliefs *are not our own*, as we have seen before, and thus our understanding of things and our responses to them are not our own either. This part of the Practice suggests we slow down our responses, examine the automaticities and bring them under our conscious control.

EPP Paper 2: Irrational/Limiting Beliefs and Common Errors in Reasoning

What causes these automatic interpretations and involuntary reactions are, typically, core philosophic beliefs we hold. Upon examination, we often find that these beliefs are false. Additionally, when we couple those beliefs with faulty reasoning, we stand little chance of getting things right. So, to that end, I want you in your second paper to do the following:

1. Research limiting and irrational beliefs, and provide a list of 5 of them, explaining how they are limiting/irrational/false.
2. Research common errors in reasoning—otherwise known as logical fallacies—and provide a list of 5 of them, explaining how they are illogical/irrational.
3. While being mindful this week, locate in your own thinking two of the ten things you found and explain what role they play in your thought processes.
4. Devise a workable plan to eradicate the flaws you found from your future reasoning processes, should you chose to do so.

All of the above will be done in 2 pages.