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Reflections from Experiences in the Academic and Professional Lives

I attribute my ontology and epistemology to various aspects of my life, primarily my upbringing and personal observations. I also attribute most of my educational and career successes to the persistence of my parents. They urged me to constantly learn about any topic that I encountered, such as watching a television program that discussed the origins of the universe. This approach allowed me to frequently gain an understanding of various subjects that seemed interesting, especially scientific facts I would not normally study on my own. Along with my family, formal education and work experiences have shaped how I approach the world. I would estimate that my general approach to the nature of knowledge combines empiricism and a bit of rationalism. Bernard defines rationalism as promoting myself to prepare the mind, and discusses the empirical approach in David Hume's idea of "tabula rasa, or a clean slate," which suggests that human experience dictates the nature of knowledge (Bernard 9). I do not feel that a person should adhere to a single methodology or theory.

I approach problem solving by utilizing aspects of empiricism and rationalism. For example, one of my hobbies is woodworking, and I am planning to build a solar oven. I know that my jigsaw sometimes demonstrates odd behavior when I use a particular motion or maneuver that could cause an injury from the tool. I gained this knowledge through experience in

using the tool, but could not predict it when I first started using it. Conversely, I want to use the tool to cut another piece of wood, but this time the piece is much thicker and my jigsaw will not be enough to complete the task, so I immediately rationalize that the circular saw is a better tool for the task. I could also make this rationalization before I cut my first piece of wood by looking at the different sizes of blades and applying logic. This example was simplified for brevity, but I understand that there has been a historical debate between empiricism and rationalism (9). My parents had similar approaches to solving problems and expanding their knowledge.

I feel that my cultural background significantly affected choices and thought patterns throughout my life. Both of my parents were born in Poland, but from two very different societal regions. My mother came from a middle class family, where her mother was a school principle, and her father was a paratrooper in the military, but he eventually settled down and worked for the postal service. My father came from a poor, rural area of Poland, and having lost his father at the age of 14, he became the “man of the house,” in charge of the family farm, and all of the hard work that was required to tend to the animals, produce milk, grow crops, and so on. Even though my parents grew up in different areas of society, they both were raised by devout Roman Catholic families, and so there was an immense focus on “the family” and general traditions.

My grandmother (father’s side) desperately wanted to flee from Communism, so she moved with her children to Trenton, NJ near some extended family that fled Poland in the 1960s. My mother went to a private school to become a teacher. Before she was to start teaching, she visited her aunt in America (also in Trenton, NJ) in 1980, where she met my father, and they were married in 1982. I was born in Trenton and have lived in Lawrenceville for most

of my life, although I am thinking about moving to Texas in about three years for various personal and professional reasons. My parents were quite strict in my upbringing, especially in regards to education, where my grades were always expected to be at the highest mark. This strict educational enforcement was due mainly to the successes of my father when he came to America. After arriving in Trenton, he immediately took jobs wherever he could find work, whether it was in construction or at a Polish deli, but he dreamed to become the first in his family to attend college. Within two years of living in America, he became fluent in English and began attending Trenton State College (renamed as The College of New Jersey) majoring in Chemistry. He went on to become a successful analytical chemist at Colgate Palmolive for 24 years and taught me how to maintain a professional life that did not overtake my personal interests, such as in music or sports. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2006, which was summer before the beginning of my senior year as an undergraduate at NJIT, so he never saw me graduate or move on to my current career successes, but I know he would be proud of my achievements.

I remembered his calm and calculated approaches to facing difficulties in life, since I was “man of the house” now, and I was able to graduate and begin a career successfully. I interned as a Technical Writer during my third year as an undergraduate, and began a second internship at the same company after completing the undergraduate PTC program in 2007. I was hired full-time as a Technical Writer two months later. As of July 2010, I am a Senior Technical Writer at this same company. I could not have achieved my academic and professional goals without a balance in rationalism and empiricism. Throughout my adult education, my experience was particularly shaped by philosophical ideas discussed in Philosophy and Technology Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology by Carl Mitcham and Robert Mackey. I first read this

book as an undergraduate in a philosophy course, and used it as a source for projects in undergraduate STS courses, and most recently in PTC 603.

This book contains many essays on the philosophy of technology, such as the reflections written by I.C. Jarvie, Karl Popper, Lewis Mumford, and Jacques Ellul. Their writings analyze how society and culture accepts, adapts to, or perhaps is overtaken by technology. I always found this topic fascinating because ever since reading this book, I have noticed the effect of technological advancement on society, especially with my own generation. Typically these advancements involve the integration of social networking websites with mobile internet devices. People are actively using these social networking tools and even announce their frequent routines for all to see, such as restaurants they regularly enjoy dining. This software can even use GPS technology so that the person broadcasts their location, hoping that a friend or colleague is nearby and might join them for a meal. I have also noticed the impact of this social networking technology in my professional life.

I have been a Technical Writer for three years, and have enjoyed many successes in my young career. I feel blessed that I had such a supportive family and my experiences lead me to overcome many obstacles from tragedy to other challenges related to the classroom and the business world. I have worked on multiple product lines, including mainframe software and distributed systems such as “help desks.” Each of these applications requires specific standards for delivering product documentation, and working on different products has allowed me to gain a strong understanding of how customers want to access the documentation and what they want to read. When providing end-user documentation, there seems to be a strong desire to utilize “Web 2.0” environments such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Instead of displaying

screenshots and writing long process topics, users would rather view the procedure on video, instead of just reading the sequential steps.

My company is starting to diversify its documentation delivery methods and hopes to utilize these Web 2.0 tools in the upcoming year. One of my professional goals includes providing innovative ideas about how my department can improve its documentation through the use of this technology. I feel that PTC 604 will further develop my research skills in discovering methods to innovate how I perform my job. I am very interested to research about achieving innovation in technical communication. I have found that each course in the MSPTC program has provided an advantage when encountering issues in my career. I look back at projects I created and go over my notes to see if I can leverage information or methods for my work projects. I look forward to improving my research skills by collaborating with fellow students and Dr. Elliot. My experience from STS 307 was priceless, and I hope to improve my research skills at this next level.

Works Cited

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