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Western Philosophy

God is the creator of us all

In this essay, I will compare great philosophers of modern time such as Rene Descartes, Blaise Pascale and John Locke to medieval and ancient thinkers such as Seneca, Plutarch, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Even though they might have some contrast in specific ideas of curiosity, in general they seem to me to have similar perception of curiosity as a whole. The major similarity I have analyzed is the role of the God in their understanding of curiosity.

First, Rene Descartes uses three characters to describe what is curiosity and what is the right way to be curious. He explains what is the rational soul. His definition of curiosity is “desire for knowledge-an illness which can not be cured, for curiosity grows with learning” (Descartes, 1641, p. 402). His argument is to in order to learn something is through our own reasoning and reflection. He claims there are simple things which should not be learned through having definition of them but practicing them. One of the example he gives is with doubting, in order to understand what it is, all we need to do is to doubt. Next, Blaise Pascale gives a such an important role of God in his essay. He believes that Jesus Christ is the one who can show you the God and point at our “wretchedness” (Pascale, 1670, p. 57). He says that knowledge can be gained through curiosity but “they are lost through pride”(p. 57). He continues with saying that it is much better to have some little knowledge about all the things in the world rather than having deep knowledge at one thing(p. 58). Also, kindness is important at some extent. In general, people must strive for humbleness. Following that, John Locke discusses the right way to raise a child. His definition of curiosity is “an appetite after

knowledge, and therefore ought to be encouraged in them, not only as a good sign, but as the great instrument nature has provided to remove that ignorance they were born with, and which without this busy inquisitiveness will make them dull and useless creatures” (Locke, 1670, p. 93). He refers to curiosity as an important tool in our lives which must be used in order to be useful. In addition, he claims that children should be taught to be kind, courageous, liberal, and civil to others(p.87). Also, he argues that covetousness, cruelty, crying, laziness and falsehood should be removed in early ages, otherwise it will stay with them for the rest of the life. The role of a parent is to make their children curious about things around.

Second, I will compare the standing of curiosity of modern philosophers to ancient and medieval ones. In Pascale’s essay, he gives the God and Jesus a huge role. The same applies to Seneca, Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. However, the most similarity I have noticed is between Augustine and Pascale in terms of a view towards the God. Augustine argues that the happy life is with the knowledge of God and the truth can be found within the God. Moreover, Pascale claims that “Jesus is the true God of men” (p. 56). He believes that God has all the answers and know everything which is the “truth” in Augustine's point of view. Also, Pascale claims that humans are the weakest creatures in nature. In addition, Augustine talks about natural desires which can not be resist without the help of God. Next, I see similarity between Aquinas and Pascale in terms of their views on bad curiosity. For instance, Aquinas claims that people should be curious for the search of truth. However, people might take pride in knowing the truth and as a result he refers to is as a sin. Same standing point of view have Pascale where he says “what they gained by curiosity, they lost through pride (p. 57). They both agree that people should not take pride when acquiring knowledge because then people will stop being curious and they will feel like they already

know something. After that, I see similar understanding of curiosity between Plutarch and Descartes where they refer to curiosity as a disease. Plutarch notes that it is “a disease which is thought to be free from neither envy nor malice”(p. 475). Then here is the Descartes’ claim, “an illness which can not be cured, for curiosity grows with learning”(p.402). They both agree that it is evil and can not be stopped. However, there is a difference in their understanding of curiosity. For instance, Plutarch refers to being curious in others’ business, whereas Descartes refers to knowledge that it is a disease in a way because we want to keep learning, keep reading and reading. Following that, I would like to compare John Locke to Plutarch. The similarity I see is that Plutarch argues that self control should be taught in early ages and should be taught to be studiousness. In fact, Locke referring to children claim that “teach them to submit their passions” (p. 88). Also, he believes that children should be taught to have a temper. So, they both believe that children should be taught to be restraint. However, they disagree when it comes to interference with others. Plutarch suggests that people should not point at other people’s mistake, rather they should focus on their own error. In contrast, Locke claims that children should have “quality of a readiness to impart to others, implanted”(p. 87). So, one suggests that we should not help and interfere with others whereas another one suggests to help and educate others.

In summary, when comparing great philosophers such as Seneca, Plutarch, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas who were active during medieval and ancient time to modern thinkers such as Rene Descartes, Blaise Pascale and John Locke, they tend to have related understanding of a word curiosity in general but with some difference in the more detailed interpretation. I claim that the role of God is significant in comprehending the conception of curiosity because both medieval and ancient philosophers comparing to modern ones share the same belief.