Student B

Dr. Robert Leston

Eng 1121

May 20, 2017

*The summary of Plato's allegory was the easiest to touch up. There were not any of my own thoughts to revise and make sure were clear. I did have to do some elaboration on some of Plato's ideas. I had to explain enlightenment and clarify how enlightenment is reached and the difference between the enlightened man and the men in the cave. Try to explain more of the how and why in the third and fourth paragraphs. I also took out some unnecessary commas and added words here and there to clear up ideas. Over all I think the summary does its just in delivering Plato's main idea and reason for writing the allegory.*

Summary of Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave"

In "The Allegory of the Cave" Plato writes a fictional dialogue between Socrates (Plato's mentor) and Glaucon (Plato's brother). They discuss the difference between reality and what we believe or perceive to be real. The cave is a representation of how our society works and the challenging road to truth. Describing the process a group of individuals must go through to reach true happiness and gain power found in virtue and wisdom. He presents the role of the philosopher and his responsibilities to share with others. In doing so Plato answers the question as to who should be the ultimate ruler or "Philosopher-King".

Socrates describes a cave in which prisoners’ heads are chained in a way that forces them to face only the rear wall of the cave. Behind them lies a fire creating shadows on the back wall much like marionette puppets of the men and figures of animals that pass behind the prisoners. The prisoners have been chained in the cave since childhood and see the shadows of passers-by and believe the shadows are the actual beings. Socrates proceeds to tell of a man who leaves the cave for the first time and describes his experience as he sees the light/ sun for the first time. His initial reaction is to turn away and head back towards the cave, to what he knows. Once outside his eyes are quick to see only shadows and night, but as time passes he adjusts to the light. He must now relearn all that he once knew to be true and see what the light has to teach him. Through this experience the man sees himself for the first time and discovers what the shadows and figures in the cave actually were.

The man who ascended from the cave has learned the truth and developed a new way of thinking. He is now knowledgeable of what is true and "good". He obtained an understanding of what is beautiful and just and his soul has entered the intellectual world. Learning all these new truths the man has become enlightened. The next step is to reenter the cave and teach the prisoners remaining. After entering the cave his vision needs time to readjust to the darkness and the men in the cave tease him calling him a fool who has "lost his eyes". As soon as his sight becomes accustom to the darkness again he can not only see in the dark but has the knowledge he received outside the cave. Unlike the men who never left the cave, the man’s way of thinking is more superior and advance then the others. He does not fight with the others over the power as they do and no longer cares for the same "honors and glories". He understands that power comes from having true knowledge of virtue and wisdom.

As Socrates talks about the reentering of the cave, Glaucon does not understand why the man must do so and sees it as a punishment for the man. Socrates then reasons with him and in doing so reveals Plato's philosophy and point of the allegory. Socrates explains that the man must reenter the cave to help and teach the others. Ignorance truly is bliss in the cave and because they do not know better they believe they are already "dwelling apart in the island of the blest" (page 4). Those in the cave are unaware of the truth and act not with reason but on compulsion, therefore cannot be rulers or "Minister of the State". Their lack of knowledge is the reason the enlightened must return. The educated man must become the "benefactor[s] of the State" whose goal is not to please himself and because he is not eager to rule they are "the best and most quietly governed" (page 5). In order to make happiness reach the entire State the wise must teach the ignorant. The truly wise, the Philosopher-King, is a just ruler and shares his virtue and wisdom. Socrates teaches Glaucon through the allegory that learning and teaching others is the responsibility of men in society.

*I am not the best at revising my own work mostly because after I have written it I do not want have to look at it again. But, I got a lot of detailed feedback on how I could fix it. I explained that the idea of the cave and the matrix being a representation of today’s society in not an actual fact. I made changes to clear up ideas or possible misunderstandings like explain that Mouse is a character in The Matrix. I also made some changes to my wording and correct some of my typos like writing "pass" instead of "past". My goal in revising this essay was to clear up some of my ideas and in the end I think I was able to do so.*

The Message within Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and Film *The Matrix*

In “The Allegory of the Cave," Plato explains his philosophy, teaching that true power lies in wisdom and virtue and those who have obtained both are responsible for teaching others. *The Matrix* is a futuristic representation of Plato’s cave and the Wachowski brothers’ way of commenting on human society. The message in "The Allegory of the Cave" is that there is a controlling force exploiting members of society by deceiving them with simulations, the same message is reflected in *The Matrix*. Both "The Allegory of the Cave" and *The Matrix* show that there are many challenges in escaping exploitation and reaching enlightenment and the only way to escape and fight back is by learning the truth and teaching it to others. In delivering this message both attempt to make the audience take a second look at their own lives.

Plato begins his allegory by giving a description of the cave and the prisoners who were born into it. He explains there are men who control what the prisoners hear and see. In the film, humans are born into the matrix which is the Wachowski brother's futuristic adaptation of Plato's cave. What humans see and hear in the matrix is controlled by the A.I. (Artificial Intelligence). For Plato and the Wachowski brothers’ the cave and the matrix are representation of our human society and how it works. Similar to the men in the cave and the humans in the matrix, what our society believes to be reality is controlled using imitations of what is real. People are told what to think by being shown shadows and simulations. The character of Mouse in *The Matrix* points out that humans in the matrix are told what their food tasted like and in fact do not know for themselves. In the same way members of today’s society, commonly referred to as consumers, are told how to feel and think by these illusions and never actually decide on their own. Consumers come from the idea of consumerism. Consumerism is social order that is founded on creating the desire to buy goods and/or services in excessive amounts. Jean Baudrillard, who influenced much of the Wachowski brothers’ film, describes in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* the late- twentieth- century consumer as living in a "hyper real" world where simulations are substituted for what is real and distract people from reality itself. This is similar to the idea behind the matrix.

The matrix is an entire world built using simulations that distract the humans from noticing they are being exploited. Today, particularly the working class, humans are faced with a similar situation. They are distracted by glamorous depiction of consumer culture using the media and advertising. Examples of how advertising is used to hide the exploitation of people are ads such as those used by Nike. The sneakers are shown in ways that lead the viewer to believe they are a necessity in order to be as happy as the people in the ads. What the ads do not show are the hundreds of people who are exploited during the making of the sneakers. These tools of deception are used to keep the public happy and blind to what is happening on the outside by delivering these false messages, much like the matrix. In the film the character Morpheus shows Neo what is left of the real world and introduces it as a "desert of the real," which is another phrase taking from *Simulacra and Simulation*. Morpheus holds up a battery and explains to Neo that batteries are all that humans have becomes for the A.I and are nothing more than bioelectricity. In the same way today’s consumers are being used as batteries to keep the ruling class running. In "The Allegory of the Cave," Plato explains that this is wrong with society just as Morpheus does in the film. Using the film the Wachowski brothers deliver the idea of simulations and exploitation to their audience and make them take a second look at their world.

The journey to truth is not an easy one for people who have lived in a life their entire lives and are faced with many challenges. Plato compares finding the truth to seeing a blinding light and says that the man who sees it would "suffer sharp pains; and the glare [would] distress him." Ones natural reaction would be to turn away back towards the darkness and what is familiar. Neo demonstrates this when shown the truth about the matrix, initially rejecting what was being shown to him and wanteing to return to the world he knew. In today's society, people often have a difficult time seeing and understanding flaws in what they view as their "perfect" society. As difficult as it is to see the truth at first, it is only part of the journey to enlightenment. In a similar way when a person finds something wrong with their society today, they are almost obligated to educate others about the situation. Another challenge they face is to now having return to the cave after having learned the truth. They are faced with then ridicule from the men who are still in the dark and are teased and called foolish. In *The Matrix* Neo is face with a similar situation when he is attacked by Agents who try to prevent humans from discovering the truth. The film forces the audience to question how this many occur in their own society, and who are today’s "Agents?" These agents are members of the ruling class who have enough power to keep society blind and rely on the lower class for survival. Arguments can be made that these "Agents are people involved in the media, politicians and or celebrities. Both the allegory and the Wachowski brothers' film depict the challenges in learning the truth and allow the audience to understand the journey to their truth will not be an easy one.

The final part of Plato’s message is that truth would not only free a person from ignorance but give them power and allow them to see what is true "honor and glory." Morpheus tells Neo that like a computer system the matrix has rules that can be bent or broken but only when knowing the truth about the system and its illusions. Now enlightened Neo has the power to break the rules and do more than any other in the matrix and uses his power not for his own benefit but to help others. Plato calls those who have reached the same level of enlightenment as Neo a "Philosopher King" and like the man in the allegory he must teach others as Morpheus did. As a Philosopher King, Neo has become a "benefactor" of humans still stuck in the matrix. Like the man in the allegory Neo is just, virtuous, and wise, willing to help others and free them from their state of false consciousness. What does that mean for the films audience? It tells them that not only must they free themselves from a state of false consciousness but help others do the same.

The message in Plato’s "The Allegory of the Cave" is that power lies in having wisdom and knowing the truth. Both the man who ascends from the cave and Neo go through a similar journey to enlightenment. They discover that there is a controlling force that exploits members of society by deceiving them with simulations and the only way to escape and fight back is by gaining the power that comes with learning the truth and teaching it to others. By allowing Neo to go through the same journey as the man from the allegory, the Wachowski brothers' film reflects Plato’s philosophy and conveys the same message forcing their audience to think about their society differently.

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*For the Trask essay I worked on refining the language. I corrected some of the formatting throughout the essay like correcting the way I had my block quotes and some of my citations. I also had to fix the way I cited Trask in the work cited page. I did some proof reading and worked on my transitions from one paragraph to the next adding words or sentences where they needed to be added. I did my best to go over the paper to check spelling and grammar. In the end the biggest change I made was switching where I had my information in my essay. Instead of ending with the information on the Texas School Board I opened up with it like it was suggested.*

Simply Stating the Facts: How History Should be Written

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines history as "a chronological record of significant events (as affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes" (Merriam-Webster). The writing of history has been used as a means of educating about events that have happened in the past. The act of writing history is not defined as a way to distort or disfigure cultures and/or countries in the attempt to make one look superior over the other. Then why is this an emerging pattern in the writing of Western history? If all men are created equal why is it that cultures different from that of Western culture are constantly referred to as being savage or uncivilized. Historians have proven to write history one-sided and allow very little insight, if any at all, into the traditions and beliefs of others. Even if "insight" is given, when using a word like savage, historians cast a negative light on to them. Should history be written in such a way? History should be written by stating the facts and allowing both sides to be equally presented, never distorting the truth or disfiguring the history of other cultures or countries and in doing so allow an accurate learning of past events.

Focusing on Western history, a pattern is seen after researching how it is written. There is a tendency to portray other cultures, which are far different from Western, as savage or uncivilized, depicting Western culture as the superior. The annexation of Hawaii is a prime example. In Haunani-Kay Trask's “From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i” Trask tells of the disfigurement of her culture and Hawaiian civilization by historians. Hawaiian culture as historians describe it was savage with pagan beliefs and in need of help. To justify their actions' Western historians have said that Hawaiians wanted to be annexed, ignoring the clear evidence stating otherwise. Trask presents a song that the natives would sing showing how they were opposed to the annexation. Historians on the other hand never consider it to be actual proof because it is not written history. Another tactic they use is to describe anything they did not understand about the culture negatively as Trask shows in her essay (398). Trask makes an interesting point when speaking of one historian in particular, Ralph Kuykendall, but what she says applies to all. She explains that the lies written about Hawaiian natives were not written because of pure ignorance, but to deliberately make Hawaiians look bad in an attempt to make the newer generations look down on their ancient traditions and allow them to be easily assimilated (Trask 397). Historians have demonstrated that they have had no interest in learning about the culture from the natives and looking at it with unbiased eyes; they use history to put into play their own agenda. Historian Hayden White explains that historians take events that have happened and form stories by arranging them in a certain way to express an ideology. They have a set way of thinking and want to make it known to others. They write history to justify their way of thinking and their actions. In making this their main objective, they are not concerned with accurately telling history; there are multiple examples of how this has happen in the past.

An example of how history has been changed to express an ideology is the case of the Texas Board of Education. The Texas Board of Education, the largest buyer of educational textbooks, has been given the right to pick and choose what should be included and excluded from textbooks that will be supplied to Texas schools and schools in the neighboring states (McKinley, A Claim). James C. McKinley Jr. a writer for The New York Times wrote in March that the members of the board (who are not professional educators) are being allowed to change the textbooks:

[They] put a conservative stamp on history and economics textbooks, stressing the superiority of American capitalism, questioning the Founding Fathers’ commitment to a purely secular government and presenting Republican political philosophies in a more positive light...Standards should be written with people who work with the kids every day, who are professionally trained to do this sort of thing, and the government shouldn’t be dictating, the political leaders shouldn’t be dictating what is taught in the classroom" (McKinley, Texas Conservatives)

The Texas Board of Education is essentially being given the power to change history and the way it is told. History should be told as it happened but instead it is being changed to serve one group of individuals. The Texas Board of Education claims that Texas books are full of "liberal bias" and should be changed. They have not made an attempt to hide their very obvious Christian agenda (McKinley). Texas board member Barbara Cargill even admits to wanting to put in only what is "really best information" and "take out all of the content that liberal publishers might have and want to pour into the classroom, and we serve as the filter” (Severson). Committee members have also claimed that the text books have a have a pro-Islamic bias that should not be permitted (McKinley, A Claim). Cargill explained how one of the chapters in this US history book was called “Nightmare at Omaha,” referring to Americans landing at Omaha Beach and the title of the section was changed to "A Day for Heroes." By doing so they change the "tone of what is being said so the students come out learning about the sacrifices made by the soldiers and how they were heroes (Severson). Should anyone have the power to change history no matter the reasoning?

Fritz Fischer a professor at the University of Northern Colorado and chairman of the National Council for History Education feels that history should not be changed and refers to what is happening as disturbing. Explaining his feelings on the subject in an interview with correspondent Lucky Severson for Religion and Ethics: News Weekly, He says, "Theoretically something like this could happen from the left some day as well as from the right. It’s to focus on what is good history teaching, and what is the purpose of history in the classroom? It’s to teach judgment and critical thinking. It’s not to teach a particular political version of the past" (Severson). Severson reports that one of the changes the board wants to make is to the words being used such as recommending changing the word “expansionism,” as in American expansionism, from “imperialism”. Fischer uses the example of the annexation of Hawaii and like Trask he does not feel what happen in Hawaii should be covered up and sugar coated with words that favorable to America, "eventually Hawaii becomes a state. Eventually it’s integrated into the United States. But originally in the nineteenth century it was clearly imperialism. There’s no other way to explain it" (Severson). Should one group of individuals be able to take away so much history, ignoring people and events that have made significant changes and shape today’s world. History should be written the way it happened, leaving nothing out. There has even been talk of excluding the civil rights movement because it presents whites in a negative light. Mary Helen Berlanga, a Democratic board member, explains her concerns with excluding information on civil rights. She argues, "The contributions and treatment of minorities in Texas are “whitewashed” in the proposed standard changes" and has no information specific to the Mexican-American experience (Severson). Instead of history being used as a tool to teach about subjects like inequality in America which would allow us to learn from mistakes of the past, it is being used to paint a flawless picture of America. The idea of writing and teaching history is to learn from the past and the mistakes made so they are not repeated in the future, but this idea is being thrown aside. History should be written in a way that does not exclude important events in the attempt to cover up mistakes made in the past. Nor should it be used as way of making one side look better from another by twisting facts to justify their actions and often forcing one way of thinking.

Historians write to retell history in the way they see fit. In Trask's writing she gives examples of how historians misrepresent other countries and cultures:

And when they wrote that Hawaiians were lazy, they meant that work must be continuous and ever a burden... And when they wrote we were racist because we preferred our own ways to theirs, they meant that their culture needed to dominate other cultures... And when they wrote that Hawaiians were "primitive" in their grief over the passing of loved ones, they meant that the West grieves for the living who do not walk among their ancestors. For so long, more than half my life, I had misunderstood this written record, thinking it described my own people. But my history was nowhere present. For we had not written (Trask 398)

Trask claims that historians must first learn the culture and live it in order to write about it. This technique has it constraints, a one major being in order to properly write history after living with the civilization would take a number of years. Although this is an ideal way it is not practical. A more reasonable method is by learning as much as you can about the culture and actually studying their beliefs and way of life. If historians writing about Hawaiian culture would have done so they would have learned more about Hawaiian customs and language. Doing so, they would have learned important details about the natives, like the Hawaiian language, showing us how they felt towards the land (Trask 397). Living with the natives is unlikely to happen, but doing research on the language and the culture can provide historian with enough information to give both sides fair representation. History should be written in a way that does not disfigure other cultures causing one to appear more superior to the other. History should show both sides of the story and state all the facts, while respecting the beliefs of others and allowing them to be represented fairly.

It is difficult to write history in a more effective way that is less biased and arguments can be made to defend how it has been written in the past. Knowing the defects in how history has been written and knowing that not everything that is written is true, one must go into the reading with an open mind remembering that much of the information is biased and may not be exact. The problem of how to write history is not one that can be solved over night, but our way of reading it can change. We should be our own historians not only reading the history books set in front of us, but looking into books that show different points of view. Reason through the information you read and put the pieces together yourself, looking at all the facts. Along with reading about history, if ever given the chance, experience it for yourself and as Trask recommends, study more than written history because oral history tells just as important of a story. Throughout history it is obvious that there needs to be change. Written history should state facts and allow sides to be equally presented, never distorting the truth or disfiguring the history of other cultures or countries, in doing so allowing us to learn from the past and strive for a better future.

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*There were not very many changes to this essay and I would say it is the essay that gave me the most trouble in both writing it and making corrections. Writing the paper in an interview form was not easy and working with another person makes adds to the difficulty of writing it. This is not the first paper in which I had to conduct an interview but the first one was a research paper and easier to write. Telling an actual story is structured a little differently. I tried going over my grammar and structure. In the end I think the paper was pretty mediocre and the only way I could change that I feel would be starting from scratch. I did my best to follow the suggestions I was given. I changed some wording around to try and get it across better that the information I wrote about was from an interview I conducted. I hope that I was able to accomplish that.*

What Can We Learn by Listening to a Story?

In "From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i" by Haunani-Kay Trask she discusses a problem with the watt history is written and uses Hawaiian history as an example. She teaches us that when Western historians wrote Hawaiian culture they have their own agenda that did not do native history justice. The Hawaiians were misrepresented. Why did that happen? Trask says that historians never spoke to the 'aina (the natives) or bother to learn the language and understand the culture. According to Trask history cannot be written by someone who has not experienced the culture. If Western historians are genuinely interested in writing accurate history "they must put down their books, and take up our [the natives'] practices. First, of course the language. But later, the people, the 'aina, the stories. Above all, in the end, the stories. Historians must listen, they must hear the generational connections, the reservoir of sounds and meanings" (400).

The idea of speaking to the natives intrigued me. Will you get a better understanding if you speak to someone with experience? I decided to test this idea out for myself. I chose to look into a topic that I believe many are not aware of. In fact, it is a topic I know about but have never experience firsthand. I spoke to my grandmother and asked her about one of the first times she traveled to Cuba with my grandfather.

As a witness growing up in the USA I have never had to struggle to practice my beliefs. As anyone else I had to put up with prejudice from people but nothing that would prevent my practicing. My senior year in high school I learned that because of several Supreme Court cases in the 1940's I have the right to practice my religion and preach my beliefs. I have heard and read stories that have taught me that not everyone has had it as easy as I have. There are Witnesses all over the word that struggle because of their faith and are persecuted for their beliefs. They have to practice in secret and live in fear of being discovered. In Korea young men grow up knowing that as soon they turn of age they will have to serve time in prison because they are consciences objectors of war. In Georgia Witnesses must stand by as their house of worship is burn to the ground. I have learned that during the reign of Trujillo Witnesses struggled. In studying about the Holocaust in school I did my own research and learned that along with Jews Jehovah's Witnesses and many others were also persecuted and tortured in concentration camps. I have always kept these stories in the back of my mind. I am aware of what is going on around the world and try to appreciate what I have. I remember my paternal grandparents told me and my family the story of their trips to Cuba where Witnesses were also not allowed to practice or preach. It was several years ago and I did not remember all the details from the first time I heard the story. Unfortunately my grandfather died almost two years ago and I could only ask my grandmother Valentina S. Caraballoso to repeat the story of my grandfather's first trip back to Cuba in 30 years.

Sitting with my grandmother in her living room she began telling me her story. In 1992 her and my grandfather Agustin V. Caraballoso visited Cuba to see hisfamily. My grandfather had not been a Witness when he left Cuba 30 years ago so his family was unaware of the change. She tells me she was excited and egared to visit because it would be her first trip to Cuba and first time meeting my grandfather’s family. While there they hoped to visit the Kingdom Hall and meet some of the Jehovah's Witnesses but her sister-in-law informed them that Witnesses were banned from practicing their religion and even more so from preaching. The two weeks they spent in Cuba they could not get in contact with any Witnesses. My grandmother shares that she was sadden by the news and concerned as to what would happen to the Witnesses in Cuba. On that trip they spent a lot of time with their family and spoke to them about Jehovah's Witnesses and their beliefs.

They returned the next year. By this time his family had found a group of Jehovah's Witnesses and had been meeting with them. My grandmother explained to me that Cuban Witnesses lived in fear of being discovered and imprisoned. They live in such fear that a family can go months if not years without knowing they belong to the same religion because they could not trust each other enough to say if they were. Meetings that are open to the public here had to be by invite only in Cuba in order to keep them secret from officials. My grandmother goes on telling me about the first meeting they visited. They were brought to one of the meetings for the first time. Because there were no Kingdom Halls small groups would meet at someone’s house. They would dress casually and change into formal clothes like skirts, ties, and suits that were already in the house. More and more chairs would appear as more people would show and the meeting would start.

Meeting in small groups my grandparents were able see what the brothers and sisters needed like bibles and other literature. In the US thousands of Watchtower and Awake magazines are distributed and available to whomever wants but in Cuba one old magazine was shared between dozens of people. The issue of the magazine was so old that the ink had faded off and all that was left was the imprint of the typewriter on the paper. A meeting was held every hour at different home to make it less obvious to outsiders what was happening. In the question and answer portion members who wanted to comment would have to do it by memory.

My grandmother says they spent the following ten years visiting and decided to help as much as they could. They would bring whatever literature they could from the states to Cuba. Books hidden inside of other books and magazines kept in different secret compartments in the luggage. This worked for quite some time until my grandfather was called to the courts in Cuba to be questioned. Someone had turned him into the officials and knowing his family they were able to find him easily. They asked him if he had been bringing in religious literature and he admitted to doing so. They demanded that he stop and from that time on he could no longer bring in the books Cubans needed. But, being that my grandmother was not Cuban and was an American citizen and as she puts in "they could not touch her” and she continued to bring information into the country.

The preaching work done in Cuba was also different then how I have grown up doing it living in the US. There work is done informally. They casually speak to people in the street and "feel them out" before speaking about anything religious or related to God. My grandmother on another occasion told me about spies that the government has walking the streets and how several times they noticed they were being watched and explained that people would walk and stand near them to hear their conversations. There are brothers that have become political prisoners because of informers who have turned them in.

My grandmother has many more stories of their trips. Visiting prisons and meeting brothers who played big parts in helping Witnesses get information they needed and report back to the states how they were doing and how much the groups were growing throughout the years. One thing that I find interesting is that at the time and till today the public does not know how many Witnesses there are in Cuba because the information is kept secret in an attempt to protect those who practice in secrecy (this happens in other countries around the world and most recently has begun to happen in Morocco). Today, although there is a hand full of Kingdom Halls in Cuba not everyone can meet at the same time and they still meet in small groups. District assemblies that are normally 3,000 or more in the US are as small as 20 people in Cuba. Even though the exact number of Witnesses is unknown we do know that the number is increasing despite the fact that they are still not able to formally preach or practice. I would hope to never have to live in a place where I was not free to practice and share my beliefs but I would be interested in experiencing it by visiting Cuba.

I have been trying to go to Cuba for years but for one reason or another have not been able to. I want to follow Trask’s suggestion and try to live as others do in order to get a better understanding. To hear the stories of the challenges my brothers and sisters in the faith go through makes me feel like such a spoiled brat. It has made me realize that I should appreciate the freedom I have to practice my beliefs. I do believe the way to find the truth or get a better understanding is by experiencing or by asking a "native". You have to ask someone who has the experience and the knowledge. Speaking with someone allows you to experience things as they did. You can feel the emotion as they tell the story. Trask believes that historians can only get the truth and an accurate understanding by asking the people and learning their language. I believe that this essay is just another example of this.

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*The research paper is the one I am most proud of and feel reflects my abilities the best. I looked over my intro to make sure it was as clear as it could be and opened up nicely for the rest of the paper. I added to the middle of the paper to help clean up the transition into the second paragraph speaking about Chandler. I read the paper over to make sure my changes made sense and work on any "sticky language" I might have. Again went over spelling and grammar. I am pretty pleased with final result and think it does a good job clearly stating the argument throughout the essay.*

Benefits, Limitations, and Challenges of using Writing Therapy in the Classroom

Writing therapy practiced in the classroom is the idea of exploring personal trauma through writing in composition courses with the stated objective of helping students learn to write better. The practice of exploring personal trauma in writing assignments allows the student to confront personal issues and deal with traumatic events. In doing so, students reach a point of self disclosure, a process of revealing deeply personal and traumatic issues to the class and the teacher after one has learned to deal with them, which is believed to be vital to the process of becoming a better writer. Scholars believe that students must grow emotionally before they can grow intellectually. This theory stems from Freud's observation in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he explains the importance of self-disclosing. In studying soldiers who suffered from shell shock, he concludes that the reoccurring dreams of the soldiers were the unconscious mind's way of inviting the soldier to revisit the traumatic experiences. The unconscious mind forced the soldier to confront the event and purge their emotional excess in order to learn to deal with the trauma and move forward. Freud’s theory is what powers the idea of using therapeutic writing in the class. In the same way that soldiers dealing with their trauma were able to move forward, writing therapy encourages students to purge emotional excess in order to move forward intellectually. Once students have worked through their “emotional block” they are able to grow intellectually and become more competent writers. Along with becoming more efficient writers, some scholars argue that writing therapy is beneficial not only in the classroom but in helping society to solve many of its problems. There is evidence that writing therapy is beneficial, but it has shown to have limitations and many challenges.

Sally Chandler professor at Kean University shares her research in “Fear, Teaching Composition, and Students' Discursive Choices: Re-Thinking Connections between Emotion and College Student Writing" on the relationship between emotional growth and intellectual growth and its importance in the writing classroom. One of her discoveries in teaching her students was that once they were asked to think critically and encouraged to push their thinking, they felt as though they were being forced into an uncomfortable position. This discomfort caused their writing have more of a narrative structure instead of an analytical one. Chandler writes, "Writing assignments that press young adults towards critical thinking and identity shifts can evoke stressful emotions that, in turn, evoke discursive patterns inappropriate for the demands of critical, analytic writing" (54). She concluded that in order to help the students to expand their way of thinking, their emotional attachment to what they know (formulaic patterns of writing) must first be dealt with. Much like a computers students have a default setting and when uncomfortable they fall back on the techniques they know. Chandler believes that this can be changed by reaching the student emotionally through personal writing.

Jeffery Berman professor and author of the books *Risky Writing: Self- Disclosure and Self- Transformation in the Classroom* and *Diaries to an English Professor: Pain and Growth in the classroom* has spent years studying the effect of writing therapy in the classroom. Berman realizes the connection between emotion and writing and believes personal writing can lead to educational and therapeutic breakthroughs (Berman 10). He argues that self-disclosure is a means to becoming a better writer and is vital to growing intellectually. Berman mentions composition theorist James Berlin and his feeling that “personal writing is at best politically ineffective and at worst reactionary” (Berman 23). In response Berman quotes Peter Elbow who said “Personal expressive writing happens to be one among many registers of discourses we can use for academic duty. Because personal writing invites attention to the self does not mean that it leaves out other people and the social connection” (Berman 23). Berman takes note that there are risks to personal writing, but explains that not writing about one’s personal issues is a greater risk. A risk is that students may never have the opportunity to write about serious issues in their lives. Marian MacCurdy in her book *From Trauma to Writing* explains that professors should not shy away from giving students the chance to tell their stories and allowing them to take control of their lives, an opportunity they may never get outside the classroom. Writing professors practicing writing therapy in the classroom believe that this type of writing not only sharpens the writing skills of students, but also helps them to become better people by teaching students to become more empathetic and less judgmental. As a result, it is common for such classes to develop strong bonds among students a strong sense of community. One of Berman’s students commented on the relationship that develops in the classroom between the students, “By the nature of this class, we become connected to one another” (Alcon 64). In creating this sense of community it becomes apparent that writing therapy affects more than just the individual doing the writing.

Can writing therapy help a community? Some scholars argue that it has the power create changes in our society. Marshall W. Alcorn Jr. author of *Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Construction of Desire* and Mark Bracher author of “Healing Trauma, Preventing Violence: A Radical Agenda for Literary Study” argue that writing therapy is beneficial in and outside of the college classroom. In his work, Bracher tackles the issue of violence and discusses its origin. In working with various groups of people, including prisoners, he found that the violent acts they committed were because of trauma they experienced as children. The trauma was caused because they were not given a certain amount of recognition if any at all. Bracher argues that as humans, we are willing to pay anything for recognition from others. Gaining approval from others is what constructs and maintains our identity and is the reason for all of our actions (520). Because recognition plays such a vital role in our lives, Bracher states that the lack of recognition is the worst thing that could happen to us. This lack of recognition is what traumatizes and shames us and causes destruction of self-esteem and results in violence. This trauma often takes the pattern of a cycle; it originates from violence or abuse, whether physical or nonphysical, against a child that is inflicted by a parent or adult who themselves suffered from childhood trauma (521). This cycle reaches beyond the relationship of a parent and a child.

Bracher also states traumatic cycles lead to collective violence such as war, genocide, and terrorism. For example, terrorists, argues Bracher, have a fragile identity because of past abuses and seek a connection with others who share their ethnic identity to help them compensate for the recognition they didn’t receive earlier in life. There is no limit to the types of shared identity used to draw groups together. They can share political, economic, or social problems and many times it is more than one. The issues that cause collective violence are known to be transferred from one generation to another. Older generations unconsciously pass down their problems to the following generations through actions and their way of speaking. In a person’s formative years these actions and ways of thinking are ingrained in a person’s identity so much so that Bracher refers to it as "transmitted psychological DNA" (524). But why is violence the end result of no recognition? When people feel the shame and humiliation that go hand-in-hand with having no recognition, they will do whatever is necessary to gain it. "The recognition I cannot get willingly, I will take by force," writes Todorov (in Bracher 526). Shame and humiliation makes the person feel worthless, ignored, and annihilated, they do what they feel necessary to take the recognition they want (225, 524). Bracher believes that one way to help with the problem of violence caused by lack of recognition is by dealing with the issue in the writing class (539).

Marshall W. Alcorn makes a similar argument. Although Alcorn does not focus on one specific social problem, he believes that writing therapy can help individuals and society as a whole. In his book *Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Construction of Desire* he discusses a change in emotional script that is necessary for emotional growth. He acknowledges the difficulties with this type of writing, but argues that its benefits are worth the struggle. Alcorn believes that one must reach emotional growth in order to reach intellectual growth and suggests that changing a person’s way of thinking and beliefs is a way to solve many of society’s problems. He writes, “if social injustice is perpetuated by thoughtless and unreflective habits of thought, and if social justice in impeded by a acceptance or indifference to such habits of injustice, new language, producing new logical space and emotional response, can lead people to no longer tolerate what they once unthinkingly accepted" (Alcorn 93). Alcorn refers to Richard Rorty’s point in “Feminism and Pragmatism,” that a change in language, in the meaning of word, can "change the instinctive emotional reaction" of a person. Rorty uses the example of the differences between men and women in their reactions towards rape, stating that changes to beliefs come when people feel "revulsion and rage where they once felt indifference or registration" (in Alcorn 93-94). As a result, new emotional responses need to be created and can be done so in the writing class. This goes hand in hand with Berman’s argument that writing allows students to learn from each other and teaches them to be empathetic towards one another. Wrestling with deep problems gives students the ability to accept new ideas which leads to intellectual growth although these changes do not come without its challenges (Alcorn 119).

Both Bracher and Alcorn agree that there are challenges involved with using the writing class to help students grow emotionally and intellectually. Alcorn makes clear why this change is difficult. Subjects often find changing their beliefs a challenge because beliefs help to form a person’s identity. Teachers interested in changing the way students feel and believe are also faced with a difficult challenge. In *Changing the subject in English Class* Alcorn quotes Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's definition of teaching "The function of teaching is to transmit a determinate knowledge to a subject who does not possess this knowledge" (Alcorn 97). A limitation with teaching as it is done now is that it cannot reach students on an emotional level. The only things being transferred are word but not meanings. Jacques Lacan’s work is the foundation many scholars work, Marshall Alcorn being one. Lacan believes that to make a change in a person you must first change their desire, much like an emotional shift. A change will come when the person is affected emotionally, not when they simply receive new knowledge. The desire or feelings and beliefs a person has are "inaccessible, inert, and stagnant with respect to any dialect" (Alcorn 98). One’s desire affects the meanings of words; when words are transferred from one person to another, they carry the individual’s desire with them. Alcorn gives an analogy to help better understand Lacan’s theory. Words and language in relation to a person’s drive is similar to working with a word document on a computer. If one wants to eject a disk from the computer you can try typing the words “eject disk” on a word page but the disk will not eject from the computer. Similarly, a person can hear a new idea but if it does not affect them internally it will not change their desire.

Alcorn agrees with Lacan's work indicating that a change in discourse can only happen if the subject's desire can make use of it and says that "real change requires not the discursive production of new knowledge [as discourse] but a certain mobility in desire, a shift in the *object a*" and unless the object a is effected, information cannot be transferred (Alcorn 98). Scholar Slavoj Zizek supports Alcorn and Chandler's argument that subjects will fall back on core beliefs that often cannot be explained through language because they have been created by experiences that have affected the subject emotionally. These beliefs are "immune to any dialect" (Alcorn 98). A change in the beliefs in us means a shift in our identity, our desire, it is most often met with resistance. Alcorn argues that you must change the students desire in order to gain actual change in the student emotionally. To reach a student emotionally is not as easy as many have hoped. Subjects often have an irrationally attachment to a belief that cannot easily be changed. He compares this attachment to being in an argument were the opponent was not "led to new emotions by the happy and creative use of language" (Alcorn 96). When a rational argument does not result in a logic change in mind, the attachment is not allowing "dialectical development" (96). The opponent shows resistance to the new idea because their beliefs are imbedded deep in emotional experience ("labidal attachment that cannot be moved by discourse") as John Clifford comments:

the illusion... that we can somehow change the minds of others in a rhetorical vacuum freed from pollutants of prior social alignments...denies identity, represses class conflict, negates the way ideas originate in specific social configurations (Clifford 44)

What we believe and the experiences that have formed that belief are what form our identity, it is the desire that sustains us. Lacan believes that beliefs, such as racism, are created by experience and cannot be explained with words. Because these beliefs are created through experience, they are ingrained in us almost as though they were part of our genetic makeup. Alcorn uses the example of racism and explains that it is "felt in bodily sensation...logic operates not according to the logic of the symbolic [language or words]...but according to the real and the drives" (Alcorn 107). Freud explains that because our identities are built off our beliefs it is hard and usually painful to let go of them. The self "never willingly abandons a libido position, even when a substitute is already beckoning" (Alcorn 112). What is painful is the effect of withdraw libido (drive and desire) from something you already have. Freud argues that this act of losing and having to mourn the loss improves mental health. You must lose old thoughts and habits to grow intellectually and gain new ways of thinking. As a result the person forms a new identity (Alcorn 112). In working through the “emotional block” they have grown intellectually and are able to work on bettering their writing skills. This emotional shift must also happen in regards to the way students think of themselves as writers.

Chandler agrees with Freud that the students must have an emotional shift to move forward as writers. She believes the first step is for the student to recognize they are "novice writers" which means they are only starting as writers and are then willing to accept a new identity. This change in attitude then allows them to except the help and advice that will be given to them by a professor. Keeping in mind that most students are in their formative years were they are trying to figure out their own identities. When a professor attempts to change their habits they are being stripped of what they know. These narrative stories they fall back on allow them to reflect on who they are and by changing them their identities are being changed as well (66). If professors are able to make the students comfortable while changing their habits, Chandler believes that they will "let go of discursive patterns that function as psychological defenses" in their writing and in grow to be more intellectual thinkers and writers. Chandler also acknowledges that this process may be a difficult one.

Although the process of growing emotionally is a difficult one with challenges as Alcorn and Bracher have demonstrated, Berman believes that there are steps to make the process easier for both students and professors. In *Risky Writing* Berman acknowledges that the risks and recommends three steps that will help teachers to run the class. First, teach the students to be empathetic towards one another and emphasize the importance of being understanding and respectful. This will help to decrease the feeling of shame, anxiety, and aggression. "The others distress must be alleviated if one's own distress is to end" (31). Second, avoid critique. Criticizing how one feels can make a person shut down. Teachers must help students to express themselves. And third, teachers must observe professional boundaries. Bracher feels that the first step is to assure that the class does not add to the problem, as it has done so in the past, by not recognizing many minority groups. Once that is done, witting can be used to solve issues. He argues that it will help to deal with the traumatic roots of violence and heal the person by giving them the recognition they lacked. By giving them recognition it makes the process of giving up the old violent identity easier. Quoting the Cheers theme song he explains that people need a place "where everybody knows your name" in orders to build their identity. Alcorn refers to Jeffrey Berman’s work to help support his own stance on writing theory. Berman's students show that there is the possibility of changing a belief through writing. With the professors help students are able to accept knew beliefs and encourage students to "engage in self-discovery" (Berman 242). One of Berman’s student comments that the change in his belief, his growth, was brought about by his English course (Alcorn 111).

Scholars like Bracher, Berman, and Alcon make convincing arguments in defense of writing therapy and show the many benefits of using it in the classroom. But, there is also evidence that writing therapy has its limitations and possible negative effects. The lasting effects of writing therapy have been put into question by a variety of scholars. Will the sense of community extend outside the classroom? Is the students’ self disclosure something they will carry out into other classes and aspects of their lives after graduating, or is it limited to the classroom? If a traumatic experience has affected a person her entire life, can it be adequately addressed in a single semester? The argument has also been made that students can and have been re-traumatized by “risky” writing and even by listening to their peers’ essays. For instance, students reported having the desire to commit suicide after reading Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*. Andrew Solomon adds that suicidal thoughts can be spread like an infectious disease throughout the class (in Berman 250). Berman quotes Andrew Solomon in his review of *Night Falls Fast* talks about the power literature and writing can have on a person:

Jamison notes that suicide is catching, and avers that one death often enables many others, as localized suicide epidemics have indicated. If suicide is contagious, is not Jamison’s book itself a potential source of infection? Her evocations of the suicidal mind invite too much empathy at times; her eloquence can be dangerous, and I felt a will to self-destruction rise in me as I read on (250)

The risk of re-traumatizing a student is not one that can easily be ignored along with the possibility of a student traumatizing one of their peers.

Scholars have several other concerns in regards to using personal writing in the class. One concern is that self disclosure can causes students to be uncomfortable and regret having shared their personal issue with their class. An example of this is found in Jeffrey Berman’s book *Risky Writing* of a student named Dora who was unhappy about having shared her story about binge drinking:

As I sat down thinking about this assignment, I asked myself how personal I was willing to be. I was not sure how revealing I wanted to be. I was hesitant to write important details of my life. Exposing your habits to your professor can be alittle scary because you have no idea how your professor is going to react, and did not want you, professor Berman, to think bad of me in response to how candid I was. I have to admit I regret being so open and revealing. I just do not feel right about it. I feel like you, my professor, should not know about those details of my life. I am not surprised if reading my paper caused you to think things about me that I do not want anyone to think. I partly came to this conclusion as I read your comment, “Will it be so easy to break such an ingrained habit?” I felt I have given a horrible impression of myself. I have never written o candidly to a professor before” (Berman 228)

Dora is very clear in her response essay that she was unhappy about having shared such personal information with her professor. This is only one of the valid concerns scholars have. Along with regretting having disclosed personal information, scholars fear the risk that a student may feel coerced into sharing their experience. Another of Berman’s students named Ashley wrote that in reading other essays she felt that she had to disclose as much as they did. “I don’t know if I could be as honest or courageous as they were, but I will try” (Berman 173). Berman, who is an advocate of writing therapy, mentions his own concern that Ashley may have felt coerced into self-disclosure by the “desire to write as honestly” as others and she may have also been trying to write in order to please her professor. These lead to another problem. There is a chance that the professor may unconsciously use the power of suggestion, which affects the outcome of the students self disclosure. A student expressed her feelings about a writing assignment she was given in one of her classes “I wanted to do what you [the professor] thought was expected of me” (Berman 246). Professor John Buksbazen discusses his idea on the power of suggestion, teachers should “be especially aware of the unconscious communication phenomena we may create by the ways in which we formulate our metacommunications” (246).

Another issue arises when writing about emotional topics. In the same way one can easily ignore or miss the errors in a paper full of emotion when reading, students can become distracted by the emotion and lose the importance of the writing itself. Professor Lucia Perillo wrote in her article “When the classroom Becomes a Confessional” about the negative reaction she got from her students after commenting on the structure of another’s personal poem. She described the change in the room to a “black cloud” that descended on the class (Berman 26). Some scholars are opposed to personal writing, which they refer to as “confessional writing,” because they feel it is a type of narcissistic venting (Berman 162). Other scholars (McGee, et al.) have argued that professors become distracted and forget the importance of teaching actual writing skills. Professor Patrick McGee in “Truth and Resistance: Teaching as a form of Analysis” comments on the frustrations teachers experience. “The way into their [students] misconstructions is a labyrinth most teachers hesitate to enter for lack of time and support. Out of frustration, they go on correcting commas, writing composition textbooks, and generally knocking their heads against the wall of a resistance to language that may be their own as much as it is their student” (670). When a student has a deep connection to the writing, and the emotion in the paper is strong, the professor is cornered into a situation, a situation where he is not able to correct the student’s writing because doing so would be too invasive to the student’s ego. As a result, he cannot address the writing to the extent necessary. The student’s personal thoughts and feelings about a traumatic experience cannot be challenged the way a student’s writing should be; thus the professors are left to correct only grammar. According to James Williams, this lack of criticism of the students’ writing may be contributing to what has been described as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), where a student feels unduly unique, powerful, and entitled. By coddling students, professors prevent them from realizing that everything does not come easy. Some scholars believe biographical and narrative work is a narcissistic way of writing (Berman 25). Composition theorist James Berlin disagrees with the idea of personal writing claiming that it is simply a "cultivation of the self" (Alcorn 24).

In the end, arguments can be made in favor of using writing therapy in the classroom and the argument that it holds too much of a risk. It has proven to have many benefits. It Sharpens students’ writing skills, encourages self disclosure by helping students deal with traumatic event from the past and move forward, gives insight as to the challenges students have had to overcome, and teaches them to become more empathetic and less judgmental. Along with helping an individual it has the ability to help communities. It exposes students to issues in our society that may have been unknown them, creates special bonds among students and a strong sense of community. But, there are also still many unanswered questions in regard to the short and long term effects of writing therapy. Further research would ask the following kinds of questions: Is there a significant change in the student’s writing? Do students write to please their professors? And do these “risky” topics give the professors too much insight into the students’ personal lives? Without the answers to these essential questions the efficacy of writing therapy in the college classroom will continue to be in question.

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Dear Dr. Leston,

During the semester I think I have grown in my writing and learned a lot about the importance of writing to communicate. I have learned that writing is a powerful tool used to communicate thoughts and ideas and the way in which you write is equally important. Explaining your ideas clearly is vital to communicating and one way to do so is by elaborating whenever there is an opportunity. I think that throughout the semester I’ve learn to elaborate more to communicate in a way that my audience can better understand the subject I am writing about and the idea I am trying to deliver. It is no secret that I am not a fan of English class but I believe the most valuable thing I have learned is the importance of writing and I have gained a respect for it.

I have also learned the value of proof reading to check grammar and spelling. Both are important to communicating in writing. I am a horrible speller which means I have to do a lot of proof reading. My problem has always been that after I have spend a significant amount of time working on a paper once I am finished I don’t want to look at it again. That means when it comes to proof reading I normally do not do as good of a job as I should. I now see the why I should proof read and use your suggestion on how to go about doing it. I break down every paragraph and every sentence making sure that they make sense and can stand on their own. I do have to admit it is still not something I enjoy doing or have mastered. It is something I am still working on.

During the semester I also learned several tips to help with my writing. The idea of the "Hamburger" and its different components is great to help with the structure of writing an essay. I am very much a visual person and found that having a picture to refer back to was very helpful. It is definitely something I am going to try and use more in the future. At the beginning of the semester I didn’t see the befits of free writing but I realized that it is actually similar to how I already begin writing my essays. It can be very helpful in getting your ideas down on paper and allows you to then go back to pull it all apart and begin writing. Something else I learned this year that I was not a fan of at first was the steps you gave us for writing a research paper. It seemed like so much extra work to do at first. Bur in the end it was very helpful and is one more thing I plan to use in the future. I have to admit I would be lying if I said I was looking forward to using them in another English class.

When it comes to the essays themselves they each came with their own challenges. I had not realized how important it was to properly write a summary. I have to say that I found it difficult at first mostly because I had not written one in a long time. The microhistory essay was my least favorite in case you have not figured that out by now. I do think it was a good essay for me to have to write because it exposed me to a different type of essay writing. There were a few essays I did enjoy working on like the Trask essay, Matrix v Plato essay, and the research paper. The styles of the essays are ones that I am familiar with and have always enjoyed writing in the past. I feel they allow me to practice many different writing skills and think critically. I will say that it can be a challenge to express someone else’s ideas but the challenge only makes you a stronger writer. Over all I think each essay we worked on during the semester helped us all to become better writer.

It was a pleasure being in your class and having the opportunity to work with you on the Emerging Scholars project. I hope your next semester goes well.

Best wishes,

Stephanie