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Philosophy of Religion
Final Exam: Essay Question

Position yourself within one of the five major ontological positions presented in class, and defend why you think that is the best position. Explain the consistency of your ontological position in your epistemology, axiology, ethics, aesthetics, and anthropology.

It has become increasingly obvious to me this semester that I am an **IDEALIST** at heart; however, at times there is a strong expression of **REALISM** in my life. There is a popular misconception concerning this ontology that idealists are people with high ideals and not realistic. In my life the form or the idea is important; however, I will sacrifice this position because the reality of a particular situation dictates it. I learned that the "universal ultimate reality" can be brought down to earth. This can be best illustrated in my life in my career as a photojournalist.

I was "classically" trained as a fine art photographer in the tradition of Ansel Adams. I learned that every detail of a photograph can and should be controlled. This philosophy carried over into the control of the negative and its processing as well. Adams once said something to this effect concerning the photographic process, "the negative is like the musical score in a great concerto and the print is like its performance."

While in school, a fellow classmate made an interesting statement to me concerning fine art photography. He said, "Fine art photography is great but you can't eat it. If you want to eat you better make pictures that people will understand or buy." I thought that this was a good maxim but I wanted to do both--maintain my high commitment to the "art" of photography and eat. I compromised by becoming a photojournalist.

I attempted to carry my idealistic philosophy into my first job at a newspaper as a staff photographer. I remember approaching this job with painstaking care, as I executed photographs on a daily basis. Not only did I control the total process of making a photograph from the smallest detail of exposure of the film, in order to achieve the "perfect negative" but I also processed the film in the same painstaking manner in order to achieve the "perfect print."

Idealism does not work well on deadline. After a while, I had to adjust. Once the reality of the "daily grind" set in I realized that under most daylight conditions light intensity was a fairly constant value. This led me to leave my camera at the same setting most of the time and not to "meter" (check exposure) on a regular basis. I continued my struggle in the darkroom,

attempting to produce perfect negatives but this too soon fell by the wayside.

By the end of my career, the pressure of producing quality photographs under difficult circumstances became fairly routine. My idealism--adhering to a perfect form--was sacrificed for the reality of the living in the real world of assignments and deadlines from time to time. Color and black and white negatives are very forgiving. Slight over or under exposure can be compensated for quite easily. This is reality.

I did not realize my idealistic or realistic tendencies until I took Philosophy of Religion this semester. In short, I prefer the "idea" or "form," of what something should ultimately be; however, I live in the real world and from time to time I must sacrifice my idealism in order to get the job done.

It follows that my **EPISTEMOLOGY** is **RATIONALISTIC** or **REASONABLE**. Reason is important to me. Everything must have a reason for being or doing, especially a logical reason. I do not appeal to my emotions in making decisions. In fact, emotionalism generally drives me in the opposite direction in making my decisions.

It goes without saying that objective truth is the most important thing for me. I always pursue the absolute truth. There is only black and white for me. There is no middle ground. This sometimes causes a conflict for me because in reality the world exists in shades of gray not black and white.

I have a friend, who is a seminary student and going through the process of divorce. I have attempted to hold him accountable to the objective standard of God's Word. I have told him that God "hates divorce" and that his divorce was not a reality until the process was actually completed. This chaffed him. At one point he said that I was "too idealistic" and that "I did not live in the real world" when it came to people and their relationships. It clicked. I realized that I was an idealist.

I love the truth. I love for things to be black and white but the world does not exist in black and white. I lives in shades of gray. I must learn how to balance my idealism with reality. This does not mean compromising the standard of God's Word but it does make me realize the reality of human sin and the consequences of it. I must learn to live with and minister within those realities.

I finally began to listen to what my friend was saying to me. He needed my support, my love, and my fellowship. In this instance, as I did in my career as a photojournalist, I sacrificed my idealism for the reality of what the situation dictated. I think that my relationship with him is more important than any idea I might have. But how do I balance this conflict? I do not know at this time.

I have also come to realize that my **AXIOLOGY** flows directly out of my idealism. I value "rationality, orderliness, balance, symmetry, morality, light, perfection, life, and persons," but not "mystical experiences." As a photojournalist, I executed these values on a regular basis but without realizing why I did or even what they were.

I still am not clear about this but I understand that I practice **DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS**. In this type of ethics an "act is justified by proper motive and means. Only a pure motive and means produce an ethical act. The end never justifies the means." I think that proper means (methods) and motive (reason for doing something) must be used to achieve a goal.

When I was a photojournalist, I covered many situations that might cause ethical problems for someone. The most difficult was death and grief. I covered the "Killeen Massacre" in 1992. It was an intense situation emotionally. I did not want to cover it. I knew that there would be people there that were grieving as a result of a man entering a restaurant and killing twenty three people, including himself.

It was my job to cover it. I had to come back to the paper in Waco, Texas where I worked with a photograph that captured the intensity of the emotion and the devastating loss and the magnitude of human suffering in one photograph.

I kept in the back of my mind that this was my job. It was my job to shoot the pictures and let the editors decide whether or not to publish them.

I arrived about two hours after the shooting to find mass confusion and hundreds of people wandering around the restaurant. It took awhile to get oriented. But eventually, I found something. I was talking to a soldier from Fort Hood, trying to find out if a helicopter was going to come in and move the bodies of the victims to a temporary morgue. While I was talking to him, I heard some people wailing and crying. I was standing on the edge of a parking lot near the street. I turned to see about four groups of people spread out around several cars in the parking lot about 50 yards away from me.

What would you do? Would you interfere in this extreme moment of grief? I instinctively raised a camera with a 300 millimeter lens and began to shoot frames. I went through a roll of film in a matter of seconds. I began to unload my camera to replace it with fresh roll of film, when someone, I assumed to be a chaplain of some sort walked over toward me and said, "Stop making pictures. A man over there told me to tell you that if you don't stop shooting pictures, he's going to come over and 'kick your ___!'" I apologized and I told him that I was only doing my job. But was I? I had my picture and I headed back to Waco.

On my way back, I thought about my experience. Did I invade their privacy? Was their grief too personal and private for me to photograph? At the time I did not have an answer except that I was "just doing my job."

About a year later I was interviewed by the local public television station and they asked me about my experience in Killeen in photographing such a tragic event. It was then that I realized what motivated me to make that picture that day. I told them that events such as the "Killeen Massacre" were great milestones of history.

As such, these events had to be documented, much in the same manner that Matthew Brady, who photographed the Civil War, did. This was my motivation--to obtain a document for historical from a tragic event. My method was the best that it could possibly be.

I was standing on the edge of the parking lot using a super-telephoto lens to photograph the scene. I was not standing in front of them with my camera shoved in their faces but I was at least 50 yards away. I respected their grief. I only photographed what was clearly visible for anyone to see who might of been standing there. The only difference was that I recorded it on film. It is now part of history. I have no conflict here with realism. Realistically, this is what I was prepared and trained to do. Had I not, I would have denied my convictions and my philosophy for doing my job. And I would have been unemployed.

I guess this could be seen as being pragmatic; however, I never thought about how this will affect my life. All I was trying to do was my job.

The other part of my axiology is my **AESTHETICS**. As a photojournalist, my idealism is expressed in my interest in conveying a message. I wanted to communicate a message about what it meant to be human being at any one given time in any given location that I photographed. I wanted to convey this message with a strong sense of beauty. Especially the beauty of conveyed through a human face as it communicates a wide range of emotions.

At this point in my seminary training, I do not have as clearly defined ethics and aesthetics; however, I do know that I have the message of the Gospel to proclaim. This is the "ultimate reality."

Finally, in considering my **ANTHROPOLOGY** as an idealist who has some realist characteristics, I am an **ESSENTIALIST**. This is someone, who defines a person "in terms of innate human characteristics: a human has a soul, a mind, a spirit, and self-consciousness." As I noted earlier, a person to me is someone, who is reasonable and makes rational not emotional decisions.

An idealist anthropology causes problems for me because I tend to have a "positive" or "optimistic view of persons."

In spite of this view, I have seen enough of human nature in my career as a photojournalist to realize in reality men are not basically good. In fact they are evil. Simply educating or changing a person's environment, will not lead to better person.

I do affirm the value of the person in the eyes of God. People are worth something or else Christ would not have died for us. We are God's enemies. But because of his great love for us, Christ died for us.