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Journal #6

Reading Douglas proved to be a difficult task. I found that before I could really engage with the text I had to remind myself that it was written when primitive wasn’t a negative adjective. However, the more I read the book the more difficult it became to swallow that term. Moving on from that discussion, which is something I’m sure will be addressed in class. There is a lot to think about after reading the first few chapters of the Douglas book. Primarily, I found myself most concerned with clean and unclean, or pure/impure. On pg. 9 Douglas writes “what is clean in relations to one thing may be unclean in relation to another, and vice versa,” which shows the relation between what is considered clean and what is not. It’s an inverse relationship. We only know what one is, because it is either the opposite or different than what we compare it to.

Personally, I never questioned how it is that I know something is clean and/or pure, dirty and/or impure. It is something that is learned from a young age, and then ingrained in us that questioning it seems odd. It’s, in my opinion, something of an absolute. The influence of religion and religious beliefs is evident in some of our understanding of what is and isn’t clean/pure. In chapter 3 there is some discussion by Douglas on defilement. “Defilement is never an isolated event. It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas,” (p. 42) which I understood to essentially mean that there is an entire system behind what is, or isn’t dirty/clean, pure/impure. This led me to think about the system behind the beliefs that influence our ideas of clean/dirty, and pure/impure. What I found most interesting is that there is something to be gained by us when we are all in agreement about what is, or is not clean/dirty, and pure/impure. There is a validation in finding another group, or groups that share our same beliefs. It seems to me that we seek out that validation, and so finding others that share our beliefs about what is and is not clean/dirty, and pure/impure is a vital part of our existence. This validation, I think, extends itself beyond the realm of clean/dirty and pure/impure, but it is no less important to actively address. Without understanding the ways in which our beliefs can influence our actions, and thought processes outside of religious practices.

Of course, this seeking out validation also equates to us feeling threatened, or at the very least uncomfortable, when encountering a group, or belief system that does not agree with our own ideas of what is pure/impure and clean/dirty. This is what has led me think about what this all means exactly. Why is it important we think about this, and read Douglas in this class? At the moment, the only connection I can make, is that it is important that we be aware of different cultural or religious practices that may be vastly different to our own. These differences may also account for social practices that seem “backwards” or “wrong” to us, but without the sensitivity or knowledge of what influences them, then we’d be likely to step all over them, which would make finding the best solution to communicate, in general or to address a risk, very difficult.