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Journal #7

Last week in class each of us was required to write one discussion question. Individually we gave each question a graded, based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score possible. I found this to be an incredibly revealing exercise. Some of the questions were very direct, and focused, while others were longer and attempted to include as many of the main points of the book. It was clear that the class all had gone in different directions when trying to generate discussion questions. My question was short, and one I have been struggling with since beginning to read Douglas. In short, I wanted to know what value, if any, do my peers seen in reading this book in this class? I see the value, and while I grappled with some of the vocabulary used and the concepts discussed the book was thought provoking.

After selecting the top questions we were able to join a group and attempt to answer that question together. My group veered off topic a bit, but it did make sense that we couldn’t easily answer the question. We attempted to answer whether or not it was possible to address these issues of clean/dirty, and pure/impure with offending, or oppressing, someone. I may be paraphrasing the question a bit, but I know that we were working out whether or not it was possible to address oppression in a sensitive way. The discussion proved to me that before we could move forward we had to agree on what oppression meant to us, and who could decide the levels of oppression. It was clear to us that there is power in determining what is clean/unclean and dirty/impure, the same there is with what is considered oppressive and insensitive. This brought back some of what we discussed while reading Beck. It seems that the power associated with definition, and as a result I think, language continues to loom over different aspects of class discussion.

What I found most interesting from our discussion of oppression is that we all viewed it so differently when the stakes were seemingly low. We could all agree that there were levels of oppression, and the most serious was genocide. However, when discussing genocide we went back to the Holocaust, and not more recent occurrences. I have to wonder if this has anything to do with certain more recent mass killings are not as easily recognized or accepted as genocide. The low stakes examples of oppression, such as sexism, and racism, caused the most disagreement. Of course, we weren’t arguing, or disrespectful. In fact, the conversation was easy to have despite the heavy nature of the topic. We simply couldn’t reach a point where we could define, agree, and understand what we mean when we use the word oppression to answer the question. I left class wondering if we were too careful, or too aware of the riskiness of the conversation to be more open about our thoughts. I think the lack of agreement had more to do with trying to use an all encompassing term.