Reflection on nature and nurture philosophy essay

The theme of Nurture v. Nature is a topic of heated debates. Different scientists in many branches of science still can not find agreement about the degree of influence of hereditary and social factors on human development. Carolyn Csongradi in her article “ Why the Topic of Bioethics in Science Classes?” explores this theme and gives her opinion on the topic. The author investigates how relation between nature and nurture influence thinking processes. The research is very interesting because the process of human thinking and cognition is another object of controversy and heated debates and the author unites two interesting and controversial topics in one article.

In the first part of the article she explores different approaches to the problem of nature v. nurture influence. The author of the article explores different theories which investigate the relation between hereditary and social influence. The article is interesting because the author gives arguments from different field of human science. She approaches the problem from different perspectives and this gives the readers opportunity to get a detailed information on the topic.

Those who believe that hereditary factors have greater influence on human development believe that genetic information determine human personalities and behavior. Of course some behavioral patterns may be nurtured but still major influence belongs to hereditary factors. According to evolutionary approach our knowledge and reactions are inborn but they may be modified by upbringing and society. Evolutionists believe that the most important knowledge about the world is selected by natural selection and passed through time and generation. This kind of information helps different spices to survive. According to Darwin, the founder of the Evolutionary

Theory, instincts which are useful for the survival of the entire spice are more valuable and that is the reason why some behavioral patterns became suitable for the life in the society. “ During the 1800’s, Charles Darwin speculated that certain rules for conflict arbitration were needed at the point in time when a species evolved a longer memory, a keener imagination and became involved in social contracts. For example, a bird, which could leave an active nest to migrate with her group, choosing that instinct over the one to nurture, would find this choice too difficult with a better memory” (Csongradi).

Neurological studies described by the author of the article show that nature prevails over nutrition. As an example the author speaks about the research of Oliver Sacks, who investigated behavior of savants – people with extraordinary artistic abilities. Oliver Sacks finally came to the conclusion that surrounding has little influence on the abilities of these people. They are not dependant on the things which surround them and on the people around them.

Then the author turns to philosophical investigation on the topic. The author turns to the opinion of outstanding philosophers, such as Hume and Kant, who underlined the important role of hereditary factors in human behavior and development. “ Kant believed we inherited certain categories or concept grids on which experiences could be sorted or organized” (Csongradi). Freud, famous behaviorist and the founder of psychoanalysis, also believed that nature became that factor which determined human behavior and reactions. Descartes, famous philosopher of the 16th century expressed even more

radical view. He doubted the existence of any objects outside of human mind.

The author of the article gives description of the simple experiment which proves that our reactions and perceptions are determined by our mind. This simple experiment very vividly illustrates that human mind determines our perception and experience. In this experiment three bowls of water are put on the table. One bowl of water is hot, another is very cold and the third one is tepid. The participant of the experiment puts one hand in the cold water and another hand in the hot one. After several minutes he places both hands in the bowl with tepid water. The sensations in two hands will be different. This experiment proves that human mind influences our perception of reality.

The author also gives arguments against natural approach. As she states there exist values which are not necessary for the survival of the spice. Certain qualities were developed not only through natural selection process and this fact raises doubts concerning natural approach. Such qualities as altruism, truthfulness or justice contradict to natural approach because they are not always necessary for the survival of the spice. Some choices may even result in the death of an individual but still there are people who make these choices.

Carolyn Csongradi made interesting investigation on the theme of relation between genetic and social influence on the development of human personality. In her article she provides information in interesting and convenient manner. Information is divided into subcategories which makes it

convenient to get the author’s idea. It is evident that Csongradi stands for natural approach. Her thesis is clearly formulated in the beginning of the article. She presents several groups of arguments in order to prove her position. These groups are: philosophical discussion, neurological studies, evolutionary view. These three sections present different kinds of proofs for the naturalistic approach. The author uses research data. She bases her conclusions on the research of the contemporary scholars. In addition, she addresses famous philosophers of the past in order to give proofs of her position. Csongradi descries neurological research and studies which give proofs to natural approach to the personality formation. In addition, the author describes simple experiment with water which can also prove to which extend our perception is conditioned by our mind. Big number of references at the end of the article proves that the author addresses multiple sources in her research. At the end of the article Csongradi describes arguments of the opposing side. She gives data which does not fit smoothly into the theory of natural approach and evolutionary selection. She gives arguments which must provoke reader for their own reflections on the topic. In general, the article gives interesting and trustworthy data on the theme of natural and social influence on the individual.

The article “ Why the Topic of Bioethics in Science Classes? A New Look at an Old Debate” by Carolyn Csongradi can be found in the site of National Health Museum (http://www. accessexcellence. org). In these site specialists and researches in different fields of human knowledge discuss questions of human health, bioethics and other important questions. The information presented in the website may be regarded as trustworthy. Despite the site

contains advertisements, it does not refer directly to the themes of the articles. The articles presented in the site are written by specialists and presented in simple and interesting manner in order to give different people opportunity to expand their knowledge in different fields.

Csongradi, Carolyn Why the Topic of Bioethics in Science Classes? A New Look at an Old Debate

http://www. accessexcellence. org/LC/SER/BE/whata. php

Why the Topic of Bioethics in Science Classes? A New Look at an Old Debate by Carolyn Csongradi

What Is The Relationship Between “ Nature” And “ Nurture” In The Acquisition Of Knowledge?

“ Nature” is more influential than “ nurture’:

Knowledge arises from genetic information honed by a process of natural selection. Some portions of this knowledge might be nurtured, but genetically determined forms also may modify how we categorize our experiences.

Evolutionary view:

From an evolutionary point of view, certain things we know about the world are innate, although modifiable by interactions with family, education, religion and society. This knowledge about objects and what is valued is “ natural” having been selectively reinforced over time. For instance, pack behavior observed in wolves is a form of collective behavior which supports

kinship preferences and caring, while perpetuating a common genetic pool. These core values, associated with social groups, were used long ago by individuals who were successful in their primitive world and had the greatest chance of procreation. Accurately understanding the world enhanced both group and individual survival.

During the 1800’s, Charles Darwin speculated that certain rules for conflict arbitration were needed at the point in time when a species evolved a longer memory, a keener imagination and became involved in social contracts.(29) For example, a bird, which could leave an active nest to migrate with her group, choosing that instinct over the one to nurture, would find this choice too difficult with a better memory. He argued that certain instincts, such as caring for young as opposed to making a rapid decision to leave, were preferentially selected in any conflict because those values had longer lasting consequences. (30) A reasonable alternative interpretation might be that those behaviors encouraging the survival of young also perpetuated those genes which might select for altruism at least among relatives. This form of altruism enhances the survival of the genotype of the altruist. Altruism for non-relatives is quite a different story because the personal pay-off or gain is less easily discerned.

Neurological studies:

Oliver Sacks, author and neurologist, has devoted much of his recent book to describing the unique behavior of a group of his patients who are savants. (37) A savant is someone who demonstrates an extraordinary talent in a particular field such as art, music, or mathematics. A large percentage of

savants are autistic with limitations in their ability to personally relate to others. Sacks became “ friends” with a young boy named Stephen, who was an autistic savant, capable of memorizing complex scenery at a glance and retaining the information for months. When asked he would accurately construct a pen and ink sk etch from what he had observed earlier. He started his pictures at one edge of the paper, working across to the other edge, filling in the framework and all the details without an outline. While drawing, “ the house could come down” and Stephen would not notice. He sometimes took artistic license and added features which did not originally exist, but the basics, the original flavor, remained. In a sense, having demonstrated his enormous talent at an early age, he had little need for nurture – from the environment or from other humans.

Philosophical discussion:

In examining the relationship between what was inherited and what was learned from experience, philosophers Hume and Kant were echoed by the behaviorist, Freud, when they spoke of nature’s contribution as a force to be reckoned with, educated or subdued. Human nature was always a “ fact” to contend with. In a more extreme view from the 1500’s, Descartes questioned whether anything existed outside of the mind. He finally conceded that if there were real things instead of only our thoughts about them, God was responsible for the interpretation. Kant, who realized that Descartes’ position made all knowledge subjective to each individual, tried to move away from this restrictive view and proposed that the mind was an active participant in knowledge acquisition, constructing certain aspects of an experience. Kant

believed we inherited certain categories or concept grids on which experiences could be sorted or organized. (5)

To understand how the mind might “ construct” an experience, the following experiment should be helpful. Obtain three bowls each holding about a gallon of liquid. Arrange them so that the first bowl contains hot water; the second, tepid; and the third, very cold water. Simultaneously, place your left hand in the hot water and you right in the cold. Wait one minute and immerse both hands in the tepid water. What has each hand told you about the temperature? Additional examples of the mind’s involvement in interpreting experience are seen with optical illusions, the unnoticed retinal “ blind spot” and other adaptive behaviors found in the nervous system.

One of the problems with a purely “ nature” based argument is how to explain the existence or continuing survival of certain values which may involve actions for which there is no obvious natural selection pressure. For example, why should a choice be made contrary to an individual’s stated preferences or which may result in actual punishment? Altruism for non-related individuals, truthfulness and justice as fairness are values difficult to support from an evolutionary view, particularly when some choices cause the death of an individual, effectively removing those genes from the pool. Hypothesizing these as primarily inherited values would generate a requirement for a very complex set of genetic directions having a large common human base of reference. The search for a potential common morality has provoked more debate than agreement among anthropologists, theologians, and philosophers.(33)