**‘Know Thyself’-** This was written on the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Legend tells that the seven sages of ancient Greece, philosophers, statesmen and law-givers who laid the foundation for western culture, gathered in Delphi to inscribe ‘know thyself’ at the entry to its sacred oracle. The adage subsequently became a touch-stone for western philosophers and extended its reach as the influence of Greek philosophy expanded.

We began class with this adage, and we will end with it. Ralph Ellison said, "When I discover who I am, I will be free”. There is considerable truth in this maxim. This exploration to find the genuine self is difficult, and often lengthy with the expected trials and tribulations such a journey will bring. Finding yourself will come from experience, trials and errors, and honest and fearless introspection. I have had this struggle personally and what helped me more than anything to get to a place where I can say with certainty, “this is who I am” was philosophy.

When I created this elective in 2011 it was my hope that introducing high school students to philosophy would provide them the tools to find themselves. Some students utilized these tools, others didn’t. I think back to Plato’s Cave and end class believing some students are in the light and others are still looking at the shadows on the wall. It is my hope that in time, all students will exit the cave. I’m optimistic that they will.

It is my hope that you have learned the following things:

1) In epistemology I hope you deeply reflected upon your thought processes and questioned why do you think like you think? I hope you explored the fundamental nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity." These epistemological exercises hopefully don’t end with this class and that you continue to self-evaluate.

2) In Aesthetics, I hope that you improved your ability to seek beauty in this world and develop your own sense of you. The clothing you wear, the way you cut your hair, the romantic partner you seek out, the automobile you drive, the music you listen to, the home decorum you decorate with, the movies you watch, and art in all forms you imbibe hopefully goes through a personal aesthetic criteria that becomes you.

3) Through the study of Ethics, I hope you developed your own moral compass on what you consider right, and what you consider wrong. It is my hope that this compass is grounded in evidence and philosophical bedrock, compared to emotion, copying others, and grounded in philosophically loose soil. Ultimately, it is the hope that this moral compass guides you and that you conduct yourself ethically throughout your life.  A simple maxim from Aldo Leopold stated that “Ethical behavior is doing the right thing when no one else is watching." No matter where you go and what you do, you’re going to have to live with yourself. Has your ethical compass produced an internal result where you can live with yourself with a clean conscience?

4) In Logic, I hope that you improved your ability to formulate arguments that are cogent, grounded in evidence, with solid premises. There was a ton of emphasis on logic fallacies, because they are so prevalent in today’s society. It is my hope that you don’t commit these and illuminate others who commit them. It is my hope that you are more proficient in applications of both inductive and deductive reasoning processes. You will use those processes throughout your life.

5) Finally, through our study of Metaphysics it is my hope that you explored the deep questions all human beings contend with. God, love, death, time, happiness, the afterlife, the purpose of existence. These are challenging philosophical topics at any age and certainly for high school students. Coming to philosophical grips with these things I feel produces a better life. Wrestling with these items in uncertainty causes considerable duress.

I feel philosophy is the most egalitarian of all the academic disciplines. Philosophy puts us all on a level playing field. All human beings contend with trying to figure out what life is all about and how to live life the best way. On a personal note, I can say that I found my genuine self at the age of 33. It took a while and the process to get there was at times challenging and messy. There is no timetable to philosophical enlightenment. I hope now that all of you are equipped with some philosophical tools. With these tools, I hope they bring you to your respective enlightenments before I came to mine.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, To the philosopher, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine. He fully grasped the magnitude of what possessing a philosophy provides you. Philosophy literally means a love of wisdom. Embrace this. As you age and hopefully become wiser, love how you’ve gained this wisdom and what you went through to achieve it. Socrates famously stated, “The unexamined life is not worth living”. I hope philosophy got you to examine your life and that it results in wonderful, satisfying, self-actualized lives. I sincerely wish such lives for all of my students.

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