

MEMO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, EAST BAY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

To: Dr. Farid Younos

From: Dr. Jennifer L. Eagan

Date: June 10, 2015

RE: Class Visitation Report

On Tuesday, April 28, I visited Dr. Farid Younos' class PHIL 3417 *Islam*. I walked in one minute late, and he was talking to the students about whether or not there were women singers in Saudi Arabia. The pre-class banter was lively and related to the class content. He announced a one-page paper about a DVD on reserve at the library and a quiz for Thursday's class and announced the content for the quiz. Dr. Younos also and talked about the book reviews due soon. He gave a really nice talk about how to think and write for yourself without simply rehearsing the ideas of others, a nice discussion of critical thinking within the context of writing about religion (which can sometimes be confused in some students' minds with a certain dogma). He told students, "I want your brain, your mind!"

Dr. Younos wrapped up a discussion from the previous class about the many pathways to reach God, and the problem of the notion of the infidel, both within and across religious traditions.

The topic of the day was reality, truth, and love as philosophical concepts. Dr. Younos introduced the topic of reality by asking students what they thought reality was. Students questioned each other, and Dr. Younos pushed students to justify their comments, by asking questions like, "what do you mean by subjective?" He encouraged students to just answer the question for themselves and to think beyond any particular religious tradition, at least to start the investigation.

This was a big and attentive class. There were lots of hands up and lots of engagement. Dr. Younos called on students by name, but not in a way that put them on the spot or made them feel uncomfortable. Students were prepared for the class discussion and willing to share their ideas. The students seemed to act as members of a community in which they were comfortable with each other and with Dr. Younos.

As context for the discussion, Dr. Younos discussed Abraham as establishing a principle of research, or finding the truth or something new on ones own. Abraham claimed (in all three monotheistic holy books) that by looking at the stars and the sunset, that is research that revealed a system that someone controlled the whole of and of which each individual is a part. Dr. Younos explained to his student that thinking can be seen as a mediator between reality and truth is thinking and that a goal in Islam is to align intelligence, belief, and action without distraction.

Fasting was also discussed as a way to reality and truth in Islam and other religions. Students worked through the ideas of truth requiring self-sacrifice, cleansing of the soul by way of cleansing the body, and the idea that purity can facilitate better thinking. The students asked really good questions, answered each other, and provided some really insightful comments and observations about the nature of fasting and how it can facilitate thinking/ prayer/ truth finding and serve as preparation for worship as a self denial or a closing your eyes to material things.

This was a great discussion, informative for students without formal lecture and producing an engaging discussion that encouraged students to think for themselves and model the richness of the traditions that they were talking about. In my view, Dr. Younos is an excellent instructor teaching a meaningful class.

xc: Christopher Moreman, Department Chair
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