I Think Feel Very Deeply
by Antigone Smith

My tenure as a philosophy student has been both beneficial and developmental; I dare say transformative. While I am a nontraditional student; much older than many of my counterparts, I believe wholeheartedly that I have been enlightened by my education. I also feel, and I use the term “feel” loosely and intentionally, that philosophy is remarkable insofar that it is historically the Queen of the sciences and foundation for all other disciplines.

I felt compelled to compose this piece now, since during this semester I have been introduced and exposed to so many great thinkers, many of whom I would argue are very liberal. Additionally, I have on more than one occasion in class, overheard the following statement or something to the effect of, “I feel like” from my peers when contemplating a work and/or reading. A novice of philosophy, like my fellow classmates, I am aware that in that moment, that’s their way of voicing their opinion on a subject, respectfully of course, in an effort to not undermine their professor should they disagree with their interpretation but also to successfully exhibit their perceived understanding of the work.

Fallacy of Composition
As stated, I have learned some fascinating concepts this semester, and interestingly enough many of them have been transferrable to other classes. Perhaps this was by design. In a recent class, one of my professors discussed the logical fallacy of composition which fueled my curiosity inasmuch as I inwardly disputed one of his points. This particular lecture was one which also incited questions and comments from the usual suspects beginning with “I feel”. While I typically don’t agree with these individuals, on this day I began to see things from their point of view.

The Problem of Trace
In yet another class, I learned about another illuminating concept, that of trace coined by Derrida. Trace essentially states that the traditional system of grammar and language removes the essence of the real thing or object. On the surface trace renders definitions and meanings of words, signs and symbols arbitrary. Ultimately, on a broader scale however, trace promotes a lack of trust and facilitates infinite distrust of discourse in the sense that all language can be deconstructed. Moreover, it creates skepticism of all narratives, which subsequently makes genuine connections and relationships impossible. Mind blowing right! Bearing all this in mind, when my professor asserted that people make the mistake, and err by fallacy of composition, I objectively (or perhaps subjectively) wondered how, why or if his assertion was in fact true. Could it not also be deconstructed?

Fallacy Deconstructed
The fallacy of composition essentially states the sum of parts does not equal the whole. Borrowing an example: Premise1: Atoms are invisible (atoms are the parts with the property of invisibility). Premise 2: I am made of atoms (I am the whole item/atoms the parts). Conclusion: Therefore, I am invisible (now the property of the part has been assigned to me, the whole thing). This is a fallacy, regardless of whether it persuades or fails to persuade and regardless of whether people agree or disagree with the conclusion.
Counter argument/similar example: Premise 1: Images of atoms can be found on the internet. Premise 2: Images are defined as a “visible” impression obtained by a camera, telescope, microscope, or other device, or displayed on a computer or video screen. Conclusion: Therefore, atoms are visible.

While I realize my weak attempt does not prove anything. Nonetheless, it does illustrate how language and grammar, can be manipulated to support an argument. Trace affects words, signs, and symbols and extends to concepts and theories as well. Nothing written, spoken, defined, or described resists trace. Per Derrida, from the moment we assign meaning, the so-called object is reduced to a mere sign, thus rendered imperfect.

Subjectivity is Absolute
One of the primary reasons I love philosophy is that it’s extremely subjective; one person’s perception will and can differ with another’s. Inquisitiveness is a virtue of philosophers. Thus, my fellow classmates which feel compelled to present their perspectives should be encouraged to do so and are, regardless of how irksome the constant child-like question “why?” repeats itself.

While I respect those who paved the way with their insightful theories and my professors’ task of imparting such knowledge, I wonder, in the case of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Aristotle, and all the others now gone, without the ability to ask them firsthand what they meant by a particular work, are we not left with nothing more than someone else’s interpretation of that work? When everything in language can be deconstructed, what makes a professor, like Hegel however respected more of an authority than a Kierkegaard? Additionally, is not the point and consequence of presenting us with grand-narrative theories, to give us an opportunity to formulate equally valued intellectual assertions of our own?

Subjective Point
In another class, I learned about another great thinker. John Stuart Mill, a classical liberal radical philosopher whose groundbreaking ideals and beliefs paved the way for freedom and liberty. Mill passionately argued for freedom of opinion, freedom of discourse, and individuality. Per Mill, tolerance of expression of varying points of views is healthy and necessary for society and ultimately beneficial to humanity. Intellectual discourse of differing views, the more extreme the better, is prescribed in order to prevent stagnation, complacency and social tyranny.

This semester philosophy has been edifying; it has piqued my interest and inspired intellectual examination. My intent is not to argue that any philosopher or theory lacks merit, nor is my subjective point to assert that all theories and ideals are relative. I am simply suggesting that truth is not absolute, rather it is always subject to interpretation, thus, trace. This notion, not at all original, is supported by numerous rebuttals and criticisms of philosophical assumptions. Searle discounts Derrida, Kant disputes Anselm, Tillich opposes Descartes, Margolis refutes Rorty and countless others. If the goal of my education here at Armstrong and the aim of my professors was to facilitate, inspire and evoke liberal ideas and intellectual thought, then Success? To my fellow budding philosophers, keep arguing your subjective points as reasonably as possible of course. Your truth, when genuinely felt, is just as deep as anyone else’s.

Multiple Choice Pop Quiz
Assuming for the moment that one is genuinely committed to the claim “truth is not absolute, rather is always subject to interpretation”, which of the following do you choose next? [Notice: the question is NOT which of the following is objectively correct.]

(a) I choose not to choose since there is no absolute truth on which my choice can be based.
(b) I choose not to accept one interpretation as more valuable than another since there is no absolute truth possible in any text.
(c) I choose to be skeptical of all narratives and by doing so make all genuine connections and relationships impossible.
(d) I choose not to genuinely feel deeply about anything since that implies some choice is more valuable than some other choice.
(e) I choose to be ultimately and genuinely concerned with Truth even though there is no basis for this choice.
(f) I choose to avoid this quiz by distracting myself with some comforting pleasure or other (–the next best thing to truth).
(g) Other ______________________________

Bring your genuinely felt answers to GAMBLE 106, WEDNESDAY, NOV. 29 @ 4:3PM