Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (250 words limit)

I used to worship rationality, praising pure reasoning as the ultimate solution to every problem. I disparaged those involved in writing and painting whose work was not to be trusted. Moreover, I engaged in programming, a procedure totally based on numbers and facts.

It was when I studied Machine Learning that I realized the limitation of computer. The "real" artificial intelligence, creating procedures imitating human reasoning, had long been considered an impossible solution to challenges like translating, gaming in chess - all feasible solutions rely on boring statistics. What makes us special on this planet is quite the opposite of what I am proud of – the emotion.

So I swerved focus. I started to involve in areas more humane, like literature and art. I stopped repressing anger, fear or depress overtly to maintain a statue of composure; I scuffle and tremble and cry as my mood directs. I spent less time struggling in dilemma; I follow my gut feeling whatever to its end.

And I find a whole new world, a simpler one without having to work out everything thoroughly. I start to see things in a more vivid way, rather than piles of cold facts. A bird sing or scent of spring will drag me out of quilt to start a colorful day. I trust my inner compass more, though sometimes messes up, but every setback can be treated as a reinforcement, and confidence come as a result.

Unlike computers that never make wrongs, emotion makes me vital, biologically and intellectually.

HI Mike,

While certainly a form of intellectual development, to claim you previously blocked out all emotion—and that you were successful in doing this—seems a bit of a stretch, perhaps overstated for literary effect, and it comes off to the reader. It’s hard to believe that you looked down upon all forms of writing, books and all the authors of them. Surely, you listened to music and sang along with the tunes?

I think this essay topic is workable, however, you will need to develop concrete examples of where your enhanced EQ benefitted you in solving a problem. How would you measure this intellectual development?

The main point is that it is unimpressive to portray your acceptance of emotion as the peak of your intellectual development. Stanford here is asking for your most intellectual and interesting thoughts. So, apply this lesson in a creative way to some of your concrete experiences.

Regards,

Pei

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