Reading Response #5: Extended Response

The piece *On The Sacred Disease* by Hippocrates, translated by Francis Adams, discusses a different approach on creation than most religions. Hippocrates describes the search for purpose and origin of life as a disease. A way of solving the unsolvable to the point of seeming ill. Men spend so much time fretting about such things, even though there is no known answer to the universe. In this text, Hippocrates describes this so called “disease” and how the shaman or “medicine man” try to make sense of it.

In ancient times, and still in some places today, tribes and civilizations had people called shamans. Shamans were wise members of the people that served as healers. Today their jobs are split up amongst other jobs being preachers, doctors, and storytellers. These shamans were very important and had to remember all the stories of the past in detail, as well as how to cure the body and the soul. Shamans are said to know all the knowledge of the world. In Hippocrates’ writing, he states, “For they purify those laboring under this disease,” (SD 112-113). In this, he discussed how the shamans cured people of the most common disease, the want to know the origins of the earth. While it is unknown if the shamans made up stories, or if they told the truth, shamans gave answers to the people to put their souls at peace and help them remember they have a purpose. “But these they ought to take to the temples and present to the god, if a god be the cause of this disease.” (SD 119-120). In these lines, Hippocrates mentions a potential cause for the disease of human curiosity, theorizing that if there is a god, then maybe god is the cause of curiosity. While a god caused this suffering, a god must fix it, as seen by the shamans referring people to sacrificial temples. However, it may not be an illness given by the gods.

The nature of the aforementioned disease is questionable on its own. While it may seem to be like any other illness, the curiosity in humans is purely a mental game. It can drive us to madness, cause physical and mental anxiety, give us existential crises, and tear us apart while we try to unravel mysteries that have no answer. While we search for a cure, the cure we find is a belief that makes sense to us. This is a character trait that is not only described in one, but in all people. “But this disease seems to me to be no more divine than others […] has become stronger than the remedies applied. Its origin is hereditary, like that of other diseases.” (SD 130-134). This disease of curiosity is within us and will always be passed down for others to be driven mad. It is a part of human nature that will never die.

The brain is a complex organ. From it comes all emotions, the capacity to take in knowledge and remember it, control the physical and mental stability of the brain’s owner, and is one of the most important organs to life. It is our personal control system. Sometimes, that system can get messed up, and when it does, the effects are bad. This usually happens to everyone. First, we start contemplating our future, then our purpose, then the purpose of mankind, then finally we lose all meaning of the entire universe until we don’t. We drive ourselves mad until an idea either comes to us or is taught to us to make the world make sense. This disease isn’t just curiosity, it is the nature of humanity. It is the essence of who we are and who we are is also the cure. What we believe about the world, and about ourselves, shapes us into the people we are today. Hippocrates shows how we create problems from thin air, when the answer is inside of us the whole time. The illness is life, and the cure is life.

You need to make sure your argument is supported by the text. It needs to be true to Hippocrates’ original, overall argument, and all of your points need to have specific textual evidence. For example, where is the textural evidence for where Hippocrates says curiosity is a disease? The sacred disease is literally epilepsy.

Your writing style is smooth and fluid. You do a good job of integrating the quotes into your sentence/paragraph structure. The overall flow and structure of your writing is good.

In your last paragraph you get away from the text, and you start to draw your own truths or opinions. It’s important that you stay in the text and only use the conclusions Hippocrates draws.