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Professor Pinkham

Midterm Essay Question

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The Question

Many of the texts explore the ways an individual grows, develops, and changes. According to your texts, what is the best way for a person to become a better person? What is it that makes a man a man, or a woman a woman? What attributes are presented as most desirable in your texts?

My Answer:

Sometimes drastic things must happen in order for us to learn. In Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* we are confronted with what it means to live a good life. The struggle between living how society encourages members to live and individual wants and desires for their lives comes into question. In the beginning of this story Ivan seems to be a pious man who lives a life of shallow bonds, materialism and his own self interest. In short Ivan lives an artificial life yet he is completely content with this, or so he thinks he is, until he gets injured and has to face his inevitable demise.

While on what will become his deathbed Ivan has a nightmare where he is being shoved into a black sack. While Ivan is repeatedly being shoved deeper into the sack he never reaches the bottom, he falls through and wakes up. The dream shakes him and slowly he realizes that he didn't live as great as he thought and once he realizes this he is able to fall into the sack of his dreams. As the end of his life draws near Ivan wants to do the right thing. He realizes that life is more meaningful when we build and cultivate relationships with those close to us. Ivan goes from living some artificial life

to understanding the purpose of living.

We see growth and change in Moliere's *Tartuffe*. In the beginning Orgon is a complete fool. He forsakes the love, attention, and care for all those around him for this "holy-man" he brings home named Tartuffe. Everyone in Orgon's house attempts to tell him this man he thinks so highly of is a charlatan. Orgon does not care going far as disowning his own son and giving his inheritance to Tartuffe, calling off his daughter's engagement and promising her hand to this imposter and giving this man unlimited access to his own wife. Orgon won't listen to reason until his wife asks him to humor her and listen for himself.

Orgon's wife sets up a snare for the fraud, which in doing so almost causes her virtuous harm, and he falls for it all the while Orgon, his best friend and biggest supporter, hides and listens to this man openly covet his wife. Once Orgon is convinced of this treachery he kicks Tartuffe out only to have the tables turned on him. In the end the trickster ends up behind bars and Orgon attempts to make things right with his family, starting with his daughter, he re-establishes her prior engagement. It took death for Ivan to learn and it took Orgon almost losing everything to change. Why is it that we as humans can't seem to think things through thoroughly?