Part II. Essay. Do Parents (or Teachers) Matter?

Sharon Begley, in Newsweek magazine, discussed the claims of Judith Rich Harris, author of *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do; Parents Matter Less Than You Think and Peers Matter More* (464 pages. Free Press.).

Begley summarized Harris’ claims in the following sentences:

“After parents contribute an egg or a sperm filled with DNA, she argues, virtually nothing they do or say – no kind words or hugs, slaps or tirades; neither permissiveness nor authoritarianism; neither encouragement nor scorn – makes a smidgen of difference to what kind of adult the child becomes. Nothing parents do will affect his behavior, mental health, ability to form relationships, sense of self-worth, intelligence or personality. What genes don’t do, peers do.”

What is your position with regard to the claims of Judith Rich Harris?

A. Write a personal essay in response to Harris’ claim. Try to develop a good position for yourself with regard to the nature v. nurture debate using both theory (if you know any) and personal experience (from observations and/or your own life). In writing your essay, ask yourself the following questions.

- Do I begin with a clear statement of my position?
- Do I offer good support for the thesis? Are there supporting statements reflective of an understanding of both theory and practice and insight from my own experience)? Do I use theories, theorists, and terms to develop my argument? Does my argument highlight and offer appropriate and logical reasoning and conceptual depth? Does my statement reflect personal meaning…as opposed to a series of sterile statements that I found in a book or in my notes?
- Do I offer personal experiences to connect theory to practice?
- Do I end with a restatement of my position and a good conclusion that connects theory to “experience/practice” in a legitimate way?