

Ignatian Leadership Seminar Spring 2025
Capstone Discernment/Reflection
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As an agnostic, I have been very apprehensive about the concept of *Ignatian Leadership*. Would I be able to fully understand it, and would I be able to implement it in my own life and work? As the course progressed, I found all conversations and presentations to correspond perfectly with my humanist framework. This disturbed me greatly—was I missing an essential difference between the humanist and Jesuit frameworks? To my great surprise, I resolved my apprehension in a way so simple that I can summarize it in half a page.

I start with the observation that all experiences related to the physical world take place in our brains. Sever the nerves between the eyes and the brain, and we do not see. Sever the nerves between our ears and the brain, and we do not hear. Break our spinal cord, and we do not feel. Our brain is the mechanism that allows us to experience the physical world.

How do we escape from philosophical solipsism that our brain creates everything and that there is no external world? The answer is “physics,” because all sensory experiences obey the laws of physics. And we know that our brain can create experiences that do not obey the laws of physics—we experience those during sleep. Thus, when our brain processes sensory experiences when we are awake, it is likely that we are experiencing an external world. Why else would our brain be constrained when we are awake but not when we are asleep?

Next, I add a personal experience. At times when my personal world is in disorder, I find solace and help in long hikes during which I hold inner monologues. Very often, I gain valuable insights from these inner monologues and my hikes bring satisfaction and calmness.

Father Eric gave me the two final steps. First, he told me that the Catholic spiritual framework is based on dialogue—the dialogue with God. Second, he encouraged me to read the book *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* by James Martin, SJ. In Chapter 7: *Friendship with God*, the author suggests that there are many ways to pray, and he concludes with the words *So when you pray, however you pray, and feel that God is speaking to you—pay attention*.

Putting all these different concepts together resolves my apprehensiveness in the simplest of ways. We know that sensory experiences have their origins outside the body and that they reach the brain through the nerve connections between the brain and the sense organs. But where do fundamental insights originate? Atheists believe that they emerge from inside the brain itself. Catholics believe that they originate outside the body. In the same way in which there are connections between my brain and my eyes, my ears, and my hands that allow me to receive information about the external physical world, there might be a sense organ inside the brain that

offers access to the spiritual world. Instead of having inner monologues, I might be having dialogues with God. Instead of thinking, I might be praying. Viewed from that perspective, the humanist and the Jesuit frameworks are *observationally equivalent*, that is, I cannot say whether my brain generates insights following my inner monologues or whether my brain receives insights from God following my prayers, my dialogues with God. Future research about the brain might resolve this uncertainty in one way or the other. But for now, there is no conflict between the two frameworks. If we choose the religious framework, then we call that *belief*. Given the observational equivalence, choosing the humanist framework is a matter of belief as well. We are just not used to calling it belief.

I will continue my inner monologues. I will use them to reflect on the *Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm*. I will use them to consider the differences between *Jesuit leadership* and *Ignatian leadership*. I will use them to find more ways to incorporate the *Gifts of Our Ignatian Heritage* into my leadership goals and practices. I will use them to organize my day and my interactions with other around the principles of *Cura Propria* and *Cura Personalis*. I will use them to incorporate the *Examen* into my daily routine. And if my inner monologues are in fact dialogues with God, then I am more likely to succeed in making the world a better place.