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Senior Project

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THINK

I wonder

I've been wondering

I'm always wondering

I wonder why I wonder

I wonder why I can't stop wondering

I wonder 'til a new thought sparks in my head

And I start wondering about this new thought

I wonder why stars twinkle

So I look at them at night

I write about them in poetry

I paint them on canvases

But they are no more than little dots of light

No different from airplane lights

So I study them at school

I learn that hydrogen atoms combine and release photons

I learn that the distance between me and them

Is measured in light years

Not the normal units like centimeters or inches

They become more than just dots of light

Or holes in the night sky

They are where chemical reactions occur

They are sending out bright lights

That can travel light years

And reach my eyes

But I still wonder

I wonder why they are there
Who put the hydrogen atoms there
And why did I start wondering about them

There
The question of the purpose of my wondering
I have started wondering about why I wonder again
I think about my wonderings
I write them down and read them
Hoping that my wonders would become clearer on paper
But they are not transforming on paper
They stop flowing like they did in my head
They become dead and stuck in a pattern
I study the brain at school
Trying to comprehend the waves of electricity
Ever moving between neurons
Trying to conclude some formula
To understand the magic of hormones
But those brain waves do not determine my thoughts
They only process whatever pops up in my head
They are the containers and media that hold my wonders
But not the wonders

There
I still don't know why I wonder
Yet I still can't stop wondering
I go on wondering
Letting thoughts come in and leave my mind
I don't have a satisfactory answer
all I can do is to keep wondering

ATTEMPTS

The radio was my earliest experience of how the manner and content of one's speech can paint a vivid picture of that person, and it gave me the opportunity and ability to hear other people's thoughts and opinions before I was able to read dense, wordy books. As a child, I wasn't allowed to watch TV or go on the internet, but I had a simple cell phone with a radio feature. The radio was the only way I connected to the world outside of my small and isolated family and school community. It brought me on journeys around the world, informed me of local and international news, introduced miscellaneous genres of music, and most importantly, allowed me to hear people share their ideas and experiences. Through the countless conversations on various frequencies, I became familiar with the hosts and fellow listeners that had methods to communicate and participate in the show, via phone calls or social media, and a whole world of thoughts and ideas was revealed to me by those people.

The magic of the radio, where thoughts are solely expressed through words and speech, kept affecting me after I stopped listening to the radio and started learning about the world mostly from the internet. Ideas and thoughts appear in my mind not as written words or images, but as sentences spoken by different voices, and unfold as complete conversations. These sentences come into my mind at random occasions: when I'm doing homework, when I'm driving, talking, in the shower, or trying to fall asleep at night. And most of the inspirations don't occur at the right time. When I'm occupied with other things, I can't pause my activities and listen to and note the imaginary conversations no matter how intriguing they sound, and the ideas don't last long enough before a new intriguing idea pops up and attracts my attention.

Only famous people's words become renowned quotes, but if anyone paid attention to the words and thoughts that people say and have in their daily lives, it would be obvious that quote-worthy phrases are being produced and spoken by everyone every day. I saw my senior project as a chance to explore and show who I am, by recording my words and finding quotes by me. Making a personal podcast show naturally became the immediate and top choice for my senior project. Having spent so much of my childhood listening to the radio, I thought that a podcast

show would not only fulfil my childhood dream of speaking on the radio but also enable me to record and share my thoughts and opinions with the world, through conversation. However, as I began researching the details of making a podcast, I realized that in today's time, when everyone can generate and host their own podcast easily, the internet is already inundated with thousands of channels on which people like me share the trivial occurrences and ideas from their daily lives. My podcast would fall into the sea of unnoticed podcasts and never have any listeners because it wouldn't convey any special, attractive topics besides my personal thoughts, and a podcast with no listeners would fulfil neither my childhood dream nor my intentions for my senior project.

I considered multiple other media that could be used to record and demonstrate my thoughts, including making a personal poetry or essay collection, becoming a vlogger, organizing a reading club, conducting themed interviews, etc. All of these proposals were quickly abandoned, for they all had social or technical requirements that would distract my attention and time from my essential goal of observing my own thoughts. Over the summer, I tried some other completely unrelated possibilities such as writing a memoir for my grandma and studying Lazure painting, but none of them worked out because of timing or other logistical difficulties.

My process of trying to find the most efficient way to share my idea with the world was my attempt at finding my place in society. Even though I gave up those projects for various excuses, the fundamental problem was that I did not know which part of me defined me and what to show the world about myself. I only had a glimpse of my own mind, through those flashing ideas that I could never catch, and I needed to understand those ideas better before I could tell others about them. To capture my thoughts to further speculate them, I began journaling and writing down my thoughts as they flowed in my mind.

SELF-WORTH, JAN. 2020

Before we define self-worth and try to find its origin, we need to determine how general evaluation of things and people work. We decide something or someone's worth by evaluating

the benefit that this thing or person brings us. For example, a mansion with a backyard and swimming pool would be more valuable and admirable than a small apartment in a cramped apartment building, because the mansion provides more comfort for its residents. Similarly, the CEO of a company would be seen as more important and respectable than a normal employee at that company, because the CEO has more power within the company. The market or social value of the thing or person is not necessarily the direct representation the intrinsic quality or position of that thing or person: a photo of a loved one can be of more value than a renowned photographer's photo collection, and a criminal is dearer to his/her family than a judge in a court.

In the natural world, respect is a sign of physical power or material wealth, since the stronger and richer have greater chances of surviving, and the instinctual part of the human consciousness recognizes these two factors as symbols of respect. However, human beings have developed appreciations and needs for spiritual wisdom and enlightenment on top of the survival needs, and we value those who are spiritually or intellectually capable.

Self-worth is one's own judgement and evaluation of him/herself. While it shares some similarities with evaluation on other things/people, one's judgement of oneself is more fluctuating and less standardized. Self-worth is decided by two factors: 1) satisfaction about one's own abilities, achievements, maturity, etc. and 2) value and respect from others. Most of us claim to be or strive to be unaffected by others' opinions about us, but it is unavoidable and not always detrimental for us, social beings who live in communities, to listen to what other people have to say about ourselves. Outside opinions are not always accurate because outsiders don't know the complete stories of our experiences, but not knowing also makes them less biased.

The other determining factor, self-satisfaction, arises from oneself. To content ourselves, not only do we have to keep ourselves well fed and comfortably sheltered, but we also need to show internal growth and improvement to ourselves. Disappointment towards oneself emerges when one falls below the standard set by him/herself, although the standard set by oneself is not always the correct standard. A common example is perfectionism, which is only a problem when

the perfectionistic standard is unachievable for oneself. While excessive perfectionism prevents one from ever being satisfied with oneself, the correct level of perfectionism requires one to be constantly improving and striving and increases one's self-worth.

Nowadays, it has become a trend to express our innermost feelings with strangers on the other side of the screen while complaining about lack of privacy. In sharing and posting our insides, we are not showing that our self-worth is strong enough to overcome the negative comments; on the contrary, we try to prove to ourselves that we are likable by others because we have not yet established a concrete self-worth.

The urge to share our ideas with others is genuine, but its origin is our need for recognition from others. As social beings, we find our place among the crowd from the feedback we hear; ignorance of comments and suggestions is extremely childish and impacts not only the individual but also society negatively. Being able to expose ourselves isn't the sign of confidence or self-worth; humility and the ability to share and then listen *is. Disclosing one's true self to the world takes courage, but the harder task is to stay open for the aftermath, negative and positive. One can be confined on an isolated island if he/she shares without taking in any feedback, and one finds his/her fitting place in the world by knowing oneself and being willing to move with and for others.*

MY THINKING

I had been seeing and hearing many people around me and in the bigger world acting and speaking without thinking and therefore irresponsibly. It has become worrisomely common on the internet where a certain individual or group of individuals suddenly become subjected to blame and even hatred, resulting from the exposure of their past actions or behaviors. Exposing someone's past is easy on the internet, yet knowing the complete and true story behind someone's choices isn't. People believe or disbelieve in things without thorough consideration.

I was shocked by my realization of the lack of thinking in today's society, and I feared that I was going to live through my life as a sardine who acts irresponsibly and helps push the currents of rumors and blames because I don't make conscious decisions. I was afraid that if I

didn't begin exercising my consciousness, I would waste my entire life and never even realize my thoughtlessness. In October, 2019, I was composing a speech on a topic of my interest as the final project for my public speaking elective, and I decided to use the chance to warn people about the bleak future of a thoughtless society and remind them of the importance and definition of independent thinking. The preparation went smoothly, for I had so much to say on why everyone should think more; towards the end of the elective, I realized I couldn't include all of my points in a five-minute speech and had to switch to another topic. I couldn't deliver my speech for that class and change others, but I had heard that the easiest way to change the world is to start by changing oneself.

I made a plan to journal every day for thirty minutes in response to the random thoughts and questions that go through my mind. Although this project wouldn't allow me to share my thoughts with anyone else as a podcast would, it would enable me to observe and organize my own thinking. I restricted myself from switching to new topics every day and wrote about every question for a week, and I suppressed the urge to type everything and wrote my thoughts down by hand. Writing my thoughts on paper not only helped me organize and materialize my thoughts, but the written records also allowed me to revisit my thinking process from previous days and work with the same thought for days.

WHAT IS THINKING, OCT. 2019

Thinking is what differentiates us, human beings, from animals; it's the unique function enabled by the human consciousness. Thinking is neither having random thoughts, ideas, or memories flowing freely in and out of one's mind, nor is it worrying and being trapped in nostalgia. Being thoughtful shouldn't be a hobby or pastime, but an obligation and natural behavior like eating and breathing. We are often lazy and let others do all the thinking for us, but the process and ability of thinking is what makes us special, not the final outcomes.

Normal people are not mathematicians because we never consider or question why 1+1=2 or any other fundamental mathematical agreements that we studied in first grade. One might argue that we don't need that many mathematicians; we do need every member of society,

however, to be constantly questioning presumptions such as 1+1=2, because questioning and thinking fuel human evolution. English American physician Woods Hutchinson once said: "five percent of the people think; ten percent of the people think they think; and the other eighty-five percent would rather lie down and die than think." We tend to confuse possessing knowledge with thinking, and many people believe they are thinking while they merely collect and speak ideas from others. Oftentimes people forget that they possess the ability to think because they rarely have the chance to practice using their consciousness, and they fool themselves that beliefs and opinions from the internet are generated by their own minds.

The difference between knowing a thought and understanding it is whether the thought is simply an impression of dead points or a living image of points connected by thinking. Thinking is to consciously control and manipulate thoughts: reshape them, rearrange their orders, take them apart, flip them around, and compare them. This process might occur over the course of days, weeks, or even years, and it can be unrewarding when people lack the patience to continue their thinking until they achieve enlightenment.

BEING AWAKE

Philosophy is quite useless: not only does it not help you in any aspects of your daily life, but it also creates more trouble, for the more you think the more questions emerge in your head, and the harder you have to keep thinking. I had been enjoying my thirty minutes of journaling every day and had written down some points that impressed and interested myself, but I couldn't convince myself why it was more meaningful to record my rambles than to try to help others with this senior project opportunity. I doubted my decision of placing my focus within my own head instead of trying to connect with the community around me. Was I being selfish in not caring for others? Was I being arrogant in accusing people of being thoughtless? Practicing thinking prevented me from becoming an unconscious sardine, but it could potentially turn me into a locked tower inaccessible for those around me.

In November, I became unprecedentedly disappointed and helpless about my carelessness and arrogance towards other people, but I couldn't find a way to balance between pushing myself

to reach my perfectionistic standards and helping others. I wanted to escape from the confined boundaries of the sardine can, but who was I to declare that everyone around me was a sardine and that I was the only one awake enough to want change. Thus, I was stuck in this endless cycle of excessive and overwhelming self-awareness.

FEELING AND THINKING, NOV. 2019

Emotion is not consciousness, and being emotional does not promote thinking. When people think sentimentally, they are seeing the world through lenses that blur their views, and they are being controlled by—rather than controlling—their thoughts. Emotions make one ignorant about things that are otherwise obvious; therefore, an emotional thinker cannot see his/her thoughts from as many angels.

Being artistically emotional should be differentiated from just being emotional, because thinking about emotions is not the same as thinking emotionally. Artists do tend to express more dramatic feelings than normal people, but true artists are those who consciously experience their emotions. Artists process their emotions with careful examination, while normal people do not pay much attention to their feelings. Emotional experiences are creative resources for artists. It is only when the artists themselves have thoroughly understood their experiences can they accurately illustrate those experiences in their art.

In fact, emotional experiences are useful materials for thinking to artists as well as every one of us, and thinking emotionally is unavoidable for those who are used to thinking about everything. The correct way to process feelings isn't to deny their existence—and certainly not to blame oneself for wasting time over them—but to simply wait for them to pass. Although feelings can last for a long time, they will eventually transform, and every slight shift in one's feelings change their ken. Emotions blind us, but they also give us different filters through which the world appears completely differently.

BE KIND

I vividly remember on the first day of school, our first-grade class teacher told us that our purpose at school wasn't to study knowledge, but to learn how to become a good person. I

couldn't fathom the meaning of these words, but I have been trying to define the essence of a good person ever since that day. For the little Yifang in first grade, being good meant maintaining orders and fighting for justice, so I would beat up all the boys whom I thought were not behaving properly at school and respecting the teachers that I admired. As I grew, however, the definition of a good person has become more equivocal.

I have experimented with different methods, trying to achieve the quality of a good person, and my father first introduced me to one of my earliest ways of becoming good. He said that I should always follow Confucius' rule: "do not do to others what you would not like yourself," which would keep me from harming and offending others. This rule worked under most circumstances; as I encountered more complicated situations and people, however, I discovered that each individual could be so different that what I did not want might be what others needed, and how I wanted to be treated might not be the case for everyone. I could no longer decide what is the proper way to treat and be helpful to others, and I had to create a new rule for myself, which was to only mind my own business. Since not offending others makes a good person, reducing interactions and exchanges with others would undoubtedly decrease the possibilities of me troubling anyone and make me a better person. Thus, I stopped trying to be helpful and avoided asking for help altogether.

Growing up, I enjoyed sharing with others both personal stories and experiences and material resources such as food or toys. Sharing was how I incorporated myself into communities, and stopping myself from offering help, which was to share my abilities, made me isolated. I had anticipated that becoming a good person might require sacrifices, but I could not explain how goodness can emerge from my sacrifice of living in isolation. I examined the Confucian rule repeatedly and finally recognized that it is not an instruction of how to become a kind person, but that of how to be a proper human being, which is the preliminary stage of a good person. Being independent, not hurting others, and not causing trouble are only fundamental guidelines that everyone needs to follow, whereas being kind demands one to take

on additional responsibilities and genuinely interact with others. In short, it is not enough for me to be not causing troubles when I am actually able to help eliminate them.

GOODNESS IN ACTION, OCT. 2019

The action of killing people done by a soldier on the battlefield and by a serial killer are viewed completely differently: the former would be praised as a war hero, while the latter despised as a murderer. Soldiers kill people with the intent to protect more people and under the command of a leader, but serial killers do not have the excuse of justice and an entire army behind them and are seen as threats to society. However, a criminal's motivation behind murder could be to protect certain individuals or certain beliefs, which means killing is just the necessary method to achieve this goal, just as killing the enemies is the unavoidable step to winning a war for soldiers, not the final goal. Namely, the intent behind the serial killer's choice is similar to that behind the soldier's decision to join the army.

The above example is hypothetical, but our society struggles with similar issues of identifying good and evil every day. Furthermore, not only do we have difficulties deciding which side is evil, but we also question the validity of good deeds driven by mixed intentions. The strictest definition of a good deed is that the people behind it sacrificed selflessly with no desire for benefits in return, but is any decision ever completely made altruistically? If evil actions can be made less evil by pure intentions, shouldn't the value of good actions be undermined by selfish motives?

The unfortunate truth is that most kind deeds are, at least partially, driven by our desire to feel accomplished and be praised for our actions; therefore, very few qualify for the strict description of good, while the majority are merely "good enough." The reward of doing good is not necessarily material benefits or approval from others, but it is often the need for the knowledge regarding the existence of kindness within oneself that appeals one towards the good. For this reason, it is inevitable that one experiences self-reassurance and satisfaction from acting kindly. Hence, kind people should be appreciated for their kind deeds even if they are not

driven entirely by altruistic reasons. Similarly, murderers should be given the right to explain their intentions, for they might not be absolutely evil.

The nature of an action can be thoroughly good or evil, but the nature of a human being cannot. The intention doesn't define whether a deed is good or not, but the intention is what demonstrates whether a person is good or not: a soldier on the battlefield not fighting to protect his/her people but enjoying killing others is never a hero, and a murderer committing a crime out of the need to defend somebody is not evil. Scottish writer and theologist Rev. John Watson constantly reminded himself and people around him: "be kind, for everyone is fighting a hard battle," and this is what we all need to remember (Nicoll). The lack of compassion is where evil emerges, and compassion can only exist when there is human interaction.

SELFISH NATURE OF HUMANITY, FEB. 2020

Human beings are not born good or evil, but born to live and last in this world, which require us to protect and sustain ourselves. It is only natural that we prioritize ourselves during decision making and appear selfish. Infants cry for milk when they crave for nutrients, and mothers, without any intention to starve their own babies, wouldn't know when to feed them. After infancy, we keep learning that speaking up is the only way to let others know our needs and that being quiet makes us invisible. However, in early childhood and before we learn the concepts of good and evil, everything we do are just good or evil by coincidence. Small children are not perceived as evil because of several reasons: 1) they are not powerful, enough to seriously harm anyone, 2) they do not yet have as many people or beliefs that they cherish and need to defend, and 3) they can't clearly separate themselves from the world and don't have as many desires.

Children have not yet established definitive boundaries between themselves from the world, which causes them to appear less selfish than adults. In fact, children are less selfish not because they are kinder, but because they don't have a limited definition of self. In their eyes, there is no "you" and "I," but only the world and us in it. The instinctive selfishness was present for survival needs, and this selfishness transforms as our sense of self narrows from the whole world into one human being. As we grow up, we discover that each one of us is a unique

individual separate from the world and that every independent individual has unique needs. We learn that strangers are not part of our community and are to be treated politely and distantly, and we are told that every person has his/her own possessions and we do not share everything with everyone.

The inborn selfishness does not make children good or evil, but education could potentially transcend young people into kind-hearted individuals or turn them into isolated and uncompassionate beings. Some learn that being kind and willing to sacrifice for others is the most rewarding choice and naturally become (seemingly) selfless people, while others learn that the only way to provide for themselves is to be strong, or even cruel, and grow into more self-centered people. Regardless of childhood and education, becoming overly self-centered and egoistic is an inevitable stage of maturing. The ideal social system for children would be a utopia that offers no accommodations for anyone and ignores individuality, but as mature human beings, we need to express and be recognized through our individualities.

Young people who have recently developed distinct boundaries between themselves and the world tend to overly emphasize their personal identities, yet it is this recklessness that causes problems and awakens the immature individuals. Rejections from society would teach young people that forcing their opinions onto others is not as effective as actively incorporating new viewpoints and accepting differences. Once adolescents have overcome the stage of arrogant egoism, they can establish relationships and expand their sense of self. When one can think of the self as a community of people and not a single individual, he/she can utilize the instinctual selfishness for society instead of against it.

The selfish nature of human beings is reflected within our society as well as in our relationship with other species and the earth. In the earlier ages of human history, people viewed themselves as a part of nature and were more intimate with animals and plants. Ancient civilizations and primitive cultures existed in harmony with the rest of the world, just as how children never have intentions to harm or separate themselves from their surroundings. As humanity evolved, we became more independent from our environment and acquired knowledge

that supposedly made us more enlightened than animals. With the new wisdom, we began exploring the world and imposing ourselves onto other creatures, similarly to how teenagers eagerly expose their insides to strangers. We place humanity on top among all other beings, and presume that we are obliged and able to change the world. As a result, we have broken our connections with the earth and even harmed our neighbors.

Animals and plants have more balanced relationships with the earth: animals are in the prime of their years, during which they are aware that they have to cooperate with other beings and are working hard for the entire community; plants, on the other hand, have entered the last stage of life, where they no longer actively participate in benefiting the community yet still lovingly and gently share their wisdom and resources with others. It is time that humanity wakes up from childhood and realizes that it is not the only conscious, living species on this planet, for it needs the maturity to start mending the troubles it has created for itself and the environment.

SOCRATIC THINKING

Journaling every day was an enjoyable experience during the first weeks, and words emerged under my pen like water oozing unstoppably out of the fountain. When I reexamined my writing, however, I found that I concluded every question without solid answers but with vague terms and empty proposals. I said that one needs to find balance between logic and emotion to think clearly, and that the right amount of selfishness is necessary for personal growth and independent reasoning; but I never specified how to achieve the exact balance or what the right amount was. To overcome the inaccuracy in my thinking, I turned to the philosophy of Plato and Socrates, who were renowned for their strict manner of enquiry and deduction. I hoped that if I studied and implemented the Socratic manner of reasoning, I would be able to produce direct and exact answers.

I read several dialogues by Plato, in which he recorded how Socrates, his idol and mentor, faced the Athenian people's judgement in court when indicted for religious innovations and corrupting young minds. In one of the dialogues, Socrates enquired Euthyphro, who claimed

to know the exact definition of holiness. Responding to Euthyphro's statement that holiness is the result of the gods' love, Socrates explained that:

> "[the holy thing] is loved because it is holy, not holy because it is loved…By contrast, what is loved-by-the-gods is in that state—namely, being loved-by-the-gods—because the gods love it. Then what is loved-by-the-gods is so because the gods love it. It is loved-by-the-gods by virtue of their loving it; it is not because it is in that state that they love it."

Thus, disprove Euthyphro's theory convincingly and with exactitude. Furthermore, Socrates used multiple simple examples to demonstrate the validity of every statement he made. For instance, he clarified the differentiation between being loved because of certain holy qualities and being holy because of the gods' love with the following examples:

> "something in a state of 'being seen' is so because someone is seeing it…some does not see a thing because it is in a state of 'being seen', but on the contrary, it is in that state because someone is seeing it; nor does someone lead a thing because it is in a state of 'being led', but rather it is in that state because someone is leading it."

And eventually arrived at the conclusion that: "it is not because it is in a state of 'being loved' that an object is loved by those who love it; rather, it is in that state because it is loved by them" (Plato). The process of Socrates' reasoning is repetitive, yet it is the repetition and moving forward slowly that make his logic so unarguable like mathematical formulas.

I took on popular debate topics such as life quality vs. quantity and pro-life vs. pro-choice, hoping to practice what I had gained from studying the Socratic enquiry. In spite of strictly planning each of my arguments and choosing specific words, I couldn't achieve the accuracy of Socrates. Moreover, I talked in circles with myself and established no interesting thoughts except for the preexistent and strong opinions that I had already had about those issues.

ORIGINALITY

Creating original pieces of writing wasn't my initial intention of journaling, but since I incorporated large amounts of personal experiences when exploring my thinking, I

unconsciously assumed that most of my points would be original and personal to me. The lack of originality in my thinking first concerned me in January, 2020, when we were studying Goethe's *Faust* and had extensive discussions around various themes from the text. I noticed that many of the themes matched the topics about which I had been pondering. I found that several sections from my journal perfectly fit into our in-class discussions, and I shared paragraphs from my journal entries in class. I convinced myself that the resemblance between my journal and Goethe's book was coincidental, because the shared themes were commonly debated philosophical questions such as good vs. evil and the purpose of life. The explanation of coincidence became less convincing, however, when I began reading Rudolf Steiner's *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*.

As a Waldorf student, I had always admired Rudolf Steiner from a distance, because I had never directly studied his philosophies. I regarded his books as deep, sophisticated reading meant for teachers and especially studious parents, and never have I dared to open any of his books. Jason was the first person to suggest that I read Steiner's *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* when I talked to him about my senior project during the earlier stages, but I avoided reading the book for the reasons described above (Gross). Besides Steiner's constant presence in my academic life, his philosophies appeared frequently in my family conversations as well. My mother, having been a Waldorf teacher for over ten years and my class teacher in elementary and middle school, is always reading something by Steiner and adopted his theories in my upbringing both at school and at home.

I was surprised and excited when Beth invited me to join the teacher study group around *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (Weisburn). At first, it was gratifying to know that I had been questioning the same things which Steiner considered in great depth as important parts of his philosophical system. But my excitement soon became overshadowed by disappointments. I grew increasingly disappointed because Steiner thoroughly covered almost all of my thinking in his book, and everything that I had thought was original had been put onto paper a hundred years ago.

I had believed that I had gained some capacity to think independently after practicing for months, yet I realized that I am no more than an inevitable and expected product of my education. It was not a coincidence that I was able to grasp Goethe's thinking, because Goethe was an influential inspiration for Steiner, accordingly to whose ideals I was brought up. All of the thoughts that emerged from my mind had been planted in me by my parents and teachers, and I saw those thoughts as my own because they have been in me for such a long time. Moreover, Steiner presented his thoughts more clearly and thoroughly than I do; reading his words made me feel predictable, for he not only stated what I have written, but he has also matured the thoughts further and knows how my thoughts will evolve in the future.

For instance, I wrote, last October, in my journal that "the difference between knowing a thought and understanding it is whether the thought is simply an impression of dead points, or a living image of points connected by thinking." And later I found in *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* that Steiner describes philosophers as artists who impart abstract thinking "concrete individual life" and turn ideas "into life-forces." He also says that when we truly think, "we have no longer merely a knowledge about things, but we have now made knowledge a real, self-determining organism. Our consciousness, alive and active, has risen beyond a mere passive reception of truths." Although worded differently, we both describe the necessity of transforming dead knowledge into a living system of thoughts. Furthermore, Steiner goes beyond this realization and points out that philosophers, who are well-trained thinkers, are able to utilize thoughts as "life-forces."

ORIGINALITY, OCT. 2019

Every person is closely connected to society, which is the composition of individuals; therefore, every person is related to every other person in this world, and this relationship bunds us tighter together than we realize. We are unconsciously influenced by the words we hear and read, which we collect in our memory and eventually incorporate into our personal thinking. If thinking is the process of preparing a dish, then the ideas we accumulate through life are the ingredients. We store words in our mind just as we store food in the refrigerator, and just as chefs don't grow

their ingredients, we generally don't have any completely original materials on which we could ponder. In other words, no thinking is completely original and separated from old ideas. However, there must be the possibility to innovate undiscovered thoughts, for new technologies and philosophies are born every day.

To cook accordingly to a developed recipe is not an art; culinary art is to thoughtfully arrange the ingredients to generate new flavors. Correspondingly, philosophy, as the art of thinking, is to create new thoughts out of existing concepts. The chef adds personal design into the dish during the cooking process; similarly, philosophers put in their personalities when piecing together existing ideas and establishing new systems of thoughts. It is the personal and unique perspectives of the philosopher that brings originality.

The interpretation of originality cannot be set on too high a standard, for complete originality is the result of disconnection and separation. One could believe that a thought is original, but as soon as he/she learns that this thought had been previously proposed, the originality becomes nonexistent. On the other hand, if we lower the standard for originality and qualify anything created out of one's personal experience as original, every sentence and decision every person speaks and makes would be original. But this is dangerous and would undermine the importance of originality. Creating originality should require deliberate consideration, and valuing originality should be the appreciation of the creator's intention and thoughts, not praising random and unintentional behaviors. A poem with only three lines could be classical literature if it conveys the poet's intention and thought, but the same three lines spoken by a small child could not, because the child's words were formed coincidentally. Originality arises from intention and the will to share a story or thought, and only one who has experienced the world—and not an innocent child—has stories to share.

NOW

When I was in kindergarten, I used to make up stories in my head to engage myself during car rides or naptimes. I cannot recall the plots of those stories anymore, but I remember exactly why I wanted to tell my own stories: the existing fairytales were either too short or boring and never

ended the way I wanted them to. I kept generating new series of stories, and as I learned and read more, I included more details. Eventually, I graduated from thinking in the format of stories and started considering miscellaneous topics. A few years ago, I finally arrived at the three life questions that have troubled everybody at some point: who am I? where do I come from? and where am I going? Of course, these questions first appeared in other forms such as "what is the point of going to school?" or "why do I have to wake in the morning?" And as most teenagers, I went through the phase of asking myself: "what is the point in anything?"

I dedicated my senior project on pursuing answers for these life questions. I was satisfied with my journal entries in the beginning, and reading them made me realize how sophisticated and deep my words could be. Just as how I became my own story-teller to fulfil my desire for interesting stories as a small child, I regarded myself as the philosopher with whom I wholeheartedly agree. However, I soon realized the limitations of thinking alone and had to seek advice and opinions from the outside. Other people's voices provided fresh perspectives as well as disagreements and disappointments, by making me realize the shortcomings and problems of my thoughts.

I had addressed the issue around originality before it became a problem for me. The previous section on originality was one of the first journal entries I wrote in October, 2019, when I felt confident that I had prepared myself to face the problem of not being innovative enough. Unfortunately, personal experience has taught that me one cannot be prepared for the realization of the lack of originality in one's own work. At one point, I even concluded that I should stop pursuing independent thinking and let fate lead me forward, for life, the most unpredictable thing, is the only special and completely original gift I possess.

After multiple attempts to accept my inability to achieve originality, I still couldn't embrace my theory that uncontrollability gives life meaning; on the contrary, I have now established that it is the intention and human will to change the current status that makes life meaningful. Working over the past months on this project, I did not suddenly become enlightened with answers to the intimidating life questions, but I have learned that even though

thinking can be frustrating and unrewarding, it is an engaging activity and should not exist only in the esoteric minds of philosophers but that of every individual. Although I have not yet overcome the problem of not having any original thoughts, I hope that one day I will achieve true originality, so long as I keep on thinking.

I'm trying to achieve something
A goal I do not yet know
On a path no one has walked
I keep stumbling
Fumbling in the haze
Getting lost
Not realizing how far astray I've gone
Until I notice the silent darkness surrounding me
And look up at the clock
The hour hand points at three
I'm here
Thinking, alive

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