Thoughts

Oct 15 2024:

I often find myself thinking about how I got to where I am. All the little things that had to happen. The millions of years of ancestors all the way back to an amoeba in a pond, my parents meeting at their work, getting assigned to the same case. I know it's a statistical anomaly that I exist the way I do, at that existential level, but also on the biological level. I mean the odds anyone's sperm becoming a person is unimaginably low. And the fact that only the one unique sperm and the DNA it carried that did make it wholly defines me now. I believe people are the product of their biology and environment, and I'm also a determinist. I think everything is predestined, not by some god, but by just the nature of who we are. I think people like the idea that humans are some complex creature; that we are on some separate level from the animals we eat every day. But when I look at humans, especially myself, and try to really understand why we do what we do, the list of factors that could be affecting us seems near infinite. I can't help myself from thinking about how my decisions are affected by previous decisions and factors outside of my control. Even things so core to my identity, like my atheism or leftism, are direct results of the places and ways I was raised. If I had been born to racist devout Christians, would that atheism and leftism still be there? Are those identities really me or just a product of the conditions I was put in?

I take pride in the academic success I've had during high school, I tried hard, I learned how to work through my learning disability, I did extra when I didn't have to. But, isn't entirely possible I was only capable of that because I was born to a wealthy white family who had the resources to get met tutored at a young age, pay for private education, and give me the security to only ever have to worry about school. I mean how much was really me, am I special or would any kid given the same opportunity have done the same. Or maybe my brain was just predisposed to succeeded in our institutions and other kids weren't so fortunate.

I don't know if guilt is quite the right word, but it's not completely wrong. Part of me feels guilty about having things so good. I see news stories about people in the Gaza Strip, which has become an open air prison, and I think holy shit I'm absurdly lucky. Those people are living through war crimes and meanwhile Im spending all my time on my phone and thinking about whether or not I have free will. I mean how dare I focus on such petty insignificant things while people are dying. I want to be able to defend myself, I am just 18 years old, but so are those kids in the Gaza Strip being bombed. I still have my whole life ahead of me to do something meaningful with my privilege, but isn't that just another privilege itself. I think I would describe my guilt as a sort of predictive guilt. Im worried I'm going to waste the incredible advantages I've been given in life.

I've decided computer science is what I want to study in college and it is something I really enjoy. I like to think that it's also a means for me to not waste what I've been given, that it will somehow allow me to make up for my position in life by doing more good. I guess that's the only way to overcome that guilt, both on the existential level and the more individual level. If i can somehow, someway, make the world just better enough that more kids in the future have the same if not more opportunities than I did then they did before I was born, then maybe I can rid myself of that guilt.

However, if im going to be true to my beliefs I have to acknowledge that even if I do manage to do all of that, I cant take full credit, or even any credit; it was all predestined.

Aug 15/17 2024:

I have been very fortunate in my life in many ways but specifically in the lack of loss. All the trauma my family has been through happened before I was conscious. The most extreme sort of loss was my brother suffering from and recovering from a heroin addiction; this was incredibly hard for my family, but I was hardly 5 years old when he started getting help and getting better. I feel a sort of guilt about that, in that I was spared suffering that everyone else had to deal with, even my sister who was just a few years older than me. I know she took it harder because she was actually aware of the situation, maybe not in all the specifics but she was old enough to remember Kevin before the addiction and was aware enough to notice the changes in how often we saw him and in the experiences of our parents, but for me my only memories of Kevin are after he got better. I don't blame myself for not being old enough to understand what was going on, but in many ways I feel I was spared a great deal and that seems so immensely unfair. Especially, because I think it impacted my sister so deeply; she has always had deep anxiety about not succeeding in school and I think in many ways about not "disappointing" our parents. Emma was probably 7 or 8 when the most intense parts were going on and she saw it all, she saw how hard it was on our parents and she became deeply afraid of inflicting anything like that on them.

The point of that tangent is for me to make it clear I don't have a lot of experience with loss. So, as I'm getting ready to leave for college and more importantly seeing my friends leave I think I'm getting my first true experience with loss. It feels like a loss of everything, like as each friend leaves I lose a piece of my world, and because college still seems so foreign and unknown it's hard to imagine something filling those voids. Even though I know its just temporary and I will see all my friends again I can't help but mourn the loss, almost as if they are dying.

A thought my therapist articulated to me that I had heard before but I hadn't really applied to myself is that the mere fact that I feel so deeply connected to these people mean even if I am away from them, they are never truly apart from me. If I carry out the logic of my belief in determinism, that our entire existence can be explained by a series of cause and effect then in a very real way I will always have those friends with me no matter how often I see them. I am only who I am now because of my experiences with my friends and if every future decision of mine is dictated by my past then those friends are still in so many ways a part of life.

I've also been thinking a lot about how my environment is going to change. Like the other day I was driving with a friend along the parkway and I was saying how he and I had probably driven on this road on average at least twice a day for the last 6 six years. We both took it to and from high school and most of our friends lived around our school so If we were ever going to do anything we were probably going on the parkway. This made me realize how subtle the effect of the constants in our environment are; it was only as I was preparing to not drive on the parkways for months at a time that I appreciated how it had served me for so long. How I had listened to countless songs on my drives on it, and how comfortable I felt moving in and out of its lanes. I got a similar feeling at a party a few days ago. A couple of people from my grade came up to me to hug me goodbye because they were leaving for school in the next couple days. These weren't people I was particularly close to, but I was friendly with them and had known them for 6 years. I was surprised by the emotions I felt from those goodbyes. It wasn't the same as when my closer friends leave, but it was certainly something. They were people in my life like the parkway that were just a given, I would see them just about every day and even if all we ever did was say hi and joke around for a minute they were still a constant. I knew even without thinking about it that they would be there the next day. It was safe and comfortable. I think that is why change is so difficult for me and so many people, there is deep comfort and security in knowing exactly what your future will hold. I knew I would drive down the parkway, see the same people at school, drive back on the parkway, see my family, and do it all again. It's not necessarily that I think my daily life will be any worse at college and that's why I'm scared of the change, I'm simply unsettled by the incredible lack of certainty, its insecurity. I have no routine, no anchors for my mind to comfortably rest on when looking into the future.

The thought that has helped me the most with that insecurity lies in my own existence. From close friends to the parkway to random classmates there is one constant: me. I have been the one experiencing it all, through all the good and all the bad. I was always there, any sense of comfort I had was created by me; I was able to create and experience that comfort once, so there's no reason I can't do it again.