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### Accumulative Advantage

Growing up, I had always had this strange feeling in the back of my head that keeps telling me that something is missing. I had often felt like I should have accomplished something significant or that I should be working towards something greater. In high school, I often noticed that my peers seemed to be happy and comfortable with themselves. I wondered how they knew with such certainty where they were going in life. I had often questioned my circumstances and wondered why it is that someone like myself couldn't hope to go to a decent university like Stanford. I worked hard in my studies, but couldn't reach any breakthroughs. I guess it's as the saying goes, "I've done a lot more for less." For those of you wondering why, it's mainly because I had to work twice as hard to reach the same goals. I was confused at the time because I was unaware of the concept of accumulation of advantage. Accumulation of advantage (or accumulative advantage as you can describe it) is a phenomenon whereby people who stand out when they are young or who have many advantages from birth, tend to be given more opportunities (and possibly even successes) later on in life. In theory, any advantage that one can get (be it economical, social, or in general) early on tends to grow like snow on a snowball as it rolls down a hill. This phenomenon can be observed, as I have done in my life, from many aspects, ranging from things like wealth, health, happiness, or even perceived ability in a sport.

For instance, wealth is something that you could ascribe to the accumulative advantage. I may not be rich, but I was fortunate enough to not ever have to worry about getting evicted from

my house in the middle of a school year. In high school, there was this one student who fell behind in her studies because she had to deal with eviction due to a fire accident. This was AP Gov and she underwent depression because she didn't have enough time to deal with the homework she got in class. I was also fortunate enough to be able to receive financial aid and to not have to work to complete my studies. One of my cousins had recommended to me not to work and study at the same time if I could. He explains that while he did pass his courses, he felt as if he could have learned more if he didn't work as much. I have also had peers who got put on academic probation or lose their financial aid because they couldn't focus on their studies. While I feel bad about just being a student, it has served to my benefit at times. For instance in my Physics 11A lab last semester, we had to do group projects all semester long. Unlike my partners, I was the only one who seemingly had enough time to work on the projects because I was not working a job while I was studying. As a result, I would do group projects by myself and would take the bulk of the load for my team. My partners did help a bit, but in a way it kind of bothers me to know that if I had been working a job, then no one would have had enough time for the group projects, meaning we could all have just failed the projects time and time again. While I did see it as a parasitic relationship from an academic standpoint, I had decided to put up with it because my grade had depended on it. In the end, I managed to get an A in the lab. Again, the point I am trying to make is that while I am not rich, I was in a good enough financial position to be able focus on the things that are important to me, like my studies. This was what gave me an advantage over my peers in the physics lab and in other classes as well, like with COMS 4, a communication studies course where some people had time issues and fell behind in their assignments due to having to work to pay rent or pay off loans and whatnot.

Another way to think about the accumulative advantage would be in things like skill or talent. One example I could come up with would be in Calculus. In high school I had studied AP Calculus AB and gave that course my best effort. While I didn't pass the exam, when the time came for me to take Calculus again in college, I had performed really well and found my experience to be easier than some of my peers because I had already been exposed to the material beforehand. Unlike some of my peers, I was actually smart enough to take Calculus in high school. This is just a small example of the accumulative advantage at play and its impact over time.

Apart from accumulative advantage, accumulative disadvantage is also a thing and a counterpart to the original concept. While there may be some people who are advantaged from birth, there are also people who are disadvantaged from birth. I would like to use myself as a bit of an example. While Daniel had no issues with time, I seemingly had to use all my time to the best of my ability if I wanted good grades. While it is still beyond my understanding, Daniel's mind seemed to be wired to process abstract concepts in a graceful way compared to my mind. This can be reflected in things like Calculus, physics, engineering, and even board games. He would regularly beat me at board games in high school; I only won once, and that was the last time we played together. Even if there is no direct causation, it could be a correlation with our backgrounds and with the opportunities we grew up with. I always felt like I could have gone to a better school or have used more help in my studies. While I was a hardworking student, I often felt like I worked harder than I should have just to get the grades I wanted. While Daniel was focusing on other things, I was playing catch up on my studies. It could be a systemic issue as I have often gone certain semesters without a teacher. Daniel has always had a teacher in school. I also didn't know too many people my age that were as serious about studying or significantly

ambitious when I was in elementary or in middle school. I spent my childhood in a rundown neighborhood that I was fortunate to leave. Daniel likely never saw such a neighborhood.

Another example I think with regards to the accumulative advantage is in sports. In elementary, I was part of a soccer team and while I did participate, I wasn't the best athlete in the team. I only participated for one year before never returning to the field with my peers. This can be partly attributed to one's environment but perhaps also to one's interests as well. While I didn't mind playing soccer, I wasn't exactly as big of a fan of the sport as some of my peers were. Unlike my peers, my focus was more centralized on other things, like video games and reading books like Goosebumps, Artemis Fowl, 39 clues, and the Harry Potter series. I'd like to think that the difference in performance could be attributed to who they spent time with and to personal preferences which they may or may not have developed on their own. While we may like to think that our thoughts are our own, we often forget that they may have been shaped by whatever culture it is we grew up in. I remember in high school talking to some people who wouldn't do any of the schoolwork and had retained a fixed mindset. The logic for them was that they just didn't have what it takes and so there is no point in doing any of the assignments. These people were the ones who were more socially and emotionally challenged at home. While I didn't experience the same struggles that they face, like having to pay rent while in high school or having to raise children instead of focusing on homework, I do believe that within them lies a higher potential that was lost due to circumstance.

Right now, I am currently stranded at Sac State, working towards my graduation with uncertainty as to where my future leads. As much as I would have liked to have gone to UC Berkeley, that fortune will forever be a reality long gone. In spite of this, I continue on. While I don't exactly consider Sac State to be my home, I have decided to keep working to improve

myself. I can't change the fact that I never became an AP Scholar or the fact that my standardized testing scores weren't high enough to draw significant attention from colleges and universities, but I can still choose to devote my life to learning, even if my real world accomplishments are meaningless. I still have a list of things that I would like to learn or explore, like mathematics and video game creation. If anything else, that might be the greatest motive I have apart from discontent. The motive to keep learning and improving.