1. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

The meaning of life is to escape death.

It’s pessimistic to most people, myself included. How can something as precious as life be nothing but an endless struggle against the inevitable? Throughout time, humankind has always comforted themselves by nominating other meanings to existence: enlightenment, ascension, or salvation. Growing up in a catholic household, I am no stranger to this cliche.

However, as I grew older and learnt about the world, this bleak meaning seemed ever truer. I learnt that life evolved to flee from their demise, whether by intricate immune-systems, adaptable brains, or the fears that haunt humanity: of snakes and spiders, thunder and lightning, or failure and death. I learnt that the earliest stories ever written described an ancient king wandering the world searching for a cheat to death. I learnt that Chinese alchemists sought to concoct a potion of immortality. I learnt that even scientists and visionaries of today spend billions to develop cures for aging, cancer, and heart disease. The meaning of life, it appears, is to escape death.

But does that mean that all are destined to fail? If existence is futile against the universal constant that is entropy, decay, and death, is it all for nothing? I refuse to accept it.

I am ambitious. If you asked me what I wanted to do in my life, I would say: everything. Yet I believe it is not naivety, but an optimistic determination against the desperate odds of reality. I want to enroll into the best institution I could reach, and attain as much knowledge and experience as possible: to learn and teach more about the universe. I want to invent, and build new wonders of the world, to write books and paint masterpieces. I want to explore the depths of the Earth, and venture towards the stars. I want to live a humble life and one of abundance. I want to see more of the past and experience the future. I want to do everything, but I know that I lack the time: for life is short and the universe eternal. The only way to do all that is to live forever, but that has thus far been impossible.

One fateful night, I partook in a philosophical discourse with my peers. Given the opportunity, I asked whether they would take a chance to live forever. To my astonishment, the majority answered no. They told me all that mattered was to live for a while, to make some memories. Some wished to join the scientific endeavor, some dreamed to entertain, while others merely desired to settle down with their loved ones. Although these aspirations weren’t alien to me, a part of me was baffled. Do they not want to discover the universe: to learn its inner-workings or to visit the planets and nearby stars? Do they not want to innovate: to build a new world? Do they not want to see the fruits of their labor with their own eyes?

Then it came to me. Maybe that really is all there is to it: you live, you do something for the world, and you move on. I realised I am not too different from everyone else. The purpose of my pursuit for science, literature, and art was to contribute, to leave a mark on the world. I wanted to explore the cosmos to create memories, and prosper to help those I met along the way. I realised that I want to be remembered, and I want to live to see that I was.

The meaning of life is to be remembered.

That is a better one, and it seemed ever truer. Life never evolved to cheat death, only to preserve their genetic information so that they would be remembered. I thought about those we find in history books: whether it be Caesar, Shakespeare, Mozart, or Einstein, they all contributed to humanity so that we would remember them. Humanity itself lives upon a grain of sand amidst an infinite ocean, and that is why we reach for the stars: so that one day, even within the unfathomable scale of creation, we might be remembered.

I think this is my meaning of life. I want to amass as much wisdom as possible and explore the universe. I want to create new wonders for the world, and help humanity voyage beyond the stars. I want to create memories, within papers, pixels, or everyday life. I want to be remembered, and maybe in that way I could live forever.