Note to Editor: the prompt used to be prompt 3, but after revision following the editor’s feedbacks, It seems that it now fits more to prompt 5

Used to be prompt 3

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

Current prompt 5 below:

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

“The meaning of life is to escape death.”

It’s what I was taught, whether they admit it or not. Growing up, I was introduced to “greater purposes” such as enlightenment or ascension into paradise. When I learnt more about the world, I understood that these were flowery facades comforting us from bleak reality. Science taught that life evolved adaptations for self-preservation, History taught that ancient Chinese monks sought a potion of immortality, and I saw for myself that scientists of today spend billions developing cures for aging, cancer, and heart-disease. The meaning of life, it appears, is to escape death.

But if we are all destined to die—to fail at our common purpose—does that make our existence meaningless against the universal constant that is entropy and decay? I refuse to accept it.

I am ambitious, and my answer to “what do you want to do in your life?” would be “everything.” Yet I believe that it’s not naivety, but optimistic determination against desperate odds. I want to get into the best university I could reach to learn and one-day teach about the universe. I want to invent wonders, write books, and paint masterpieces. I want to explore the depths of the Earth, and venture beyond the stars. I want to live in humility and in abundance. I want to witness the past and experience the future. I want to do everything, but I know I lack the time—for life is short and the universe eternal. The only solution would be to live forever, but that’s impossible.

That realisation brought me existential dread. Every night I would stare at the sky through my ceiling, torn between clutching my numerous ambitions and succumbing to hopeless realism. “Does everyone else feel this way?” I thought, and that’s what I sought to answer.

For months, I inquired my peers about their feelings regarding human existence. I was relieved to find that everyone endures the same “ambition-versus-realism” as I do. However, when asked whether they would take the chance to live forever, most of them, to my astonishment, said no. They told me they merely wanted to live for a while and make memories. Some wanted to contribute to humanity by becoming scientists, entertainers, and entrepreneurs; others only wanted to settle with their loved ones. Although these aspirations weren’t alien, I was baffled. Do they not wish to discover the secrets of the universe, or to visit the planets and stars? Do they not wish to innovate—to change the world? Do they not wish to see the fruits of their labor with their own eyes?

Last year, I had an epiphany: maybe I saw things the wrong way. Perhaps that’s really all there is to it: you live, make some memories by giving or by sharing, and then move on. I realised my ambitions aren’t too different from everyone else’s. My pursuit of science, art, and literature and my desire to live every life possible is meant to leave a mark on the world—to make memories—and hence I found a new meaning of life.

“The meaning of life is to be remembered.”

It’s what I should’ve been taught. Life never meant to cheat death, only to reproduce their genes so the world remembers their existence. Those we find in history books, like Shakespeare, Mozart, and Einstein, all contributed something worth remembering. Humanity itself lives upon a grain of sand amidst an infinite ocean, and I think that is why we reach for the stars—so that perhaps one day, even within the unfathomable scale of creation, we might be remembered.

This is my meaning of life. I’ll amass as much wisdom as possible and explore the universe. I’ll inspire the world and help humanity voyage towards infinity. I’ll create memories: in papers, pixels, and everyday life. Because I want to be remembered, and I will make sure of it.

Maybe that way I could live forever.