



GESSO

Housekeeping

Yes, this is a preface to a preface. I will keep it short: I have a writing syntax that is highly defined by western vocal speech patterns. I (hopefully) use these grammatical tools in their normal way in conglomeration with my modified way. Instead of conforming to whichever grammar government is in control right now, I often utilize Italics for *emphasis*, underlining for defining, and far too many dashes—for interjections—despite also using (parentheses too much). I have grown really fond of semicolons because they offer a very specific flavor of pause; enough to continue a sentence for too long without making it feel irrational. I tend to italicize important quotes and ‘use these’ incorrectly. More than any of these things, you will see these asterisks* *littering* the text. These should be seen as “*Take this with a big grain of salt*” marks; In other words, they are used for moments where I am saying something with contingency or with a great potential for error. For the sake of utility, there are some things that are better left unpacked for the time being. That is what they are for.

Not all of these* appear in this particular manuscript, but I mention them to emphasize my general approach to prose. Good prose has deep intentionality and structure behind each letter, no more or less than is required. Some argue that this is how good film editing and cinematography should be, and others leave dirty fingerprints on their work. I am towards the dirtier side of the compositional spectrum for two reasons: I like an element of the creator in their work, and I am not patient or skilled enough at this point in my life to create something polished. Much of the value of this text comes from the fact that it is a *distorted* perspective, intentionally and inevitably co-authored by naivete.

These intentional grammatical lapses are habits that have appeared out of practicality; quick journal entries often need an element of shorthand so they are able to be translated with equal meaning at a later date. I find that, despite being grammatically skewed, expressing an idea with vocal emphasis syntax can be a wonderful rhetorical tool. I hope not that this scattered dialect is annoying for seasoned

readers, but conducive to the expression of ideas to those who think by *hearing*, or those who learn with visual and tAcTiLe emphasis. If you do happen to find this dialect frustratingly out of the ordinary, I invite you to partake in the experience of this text regardless. There is almost always an element of value in consuming something out of your ordinary.

This text is generally a pretty accurate transcription of my brain's continuous internal dialogue, just far more cohesive and with far less digress. I do not have money or time or energy for an editor, so this is going to be littered with issues. I hope that despite this, there are minimal distractions from the ideas.

Thanks.

Preface

I suppose it's natural for me to begin with the context of our context, so let's.

What sits before you is a haphazard collection of

linguistic explorations which I have used as a meditative and developmental device for me over the time of my gap year.

You are a reader, and I am a writer. I am putting ideas out, and you are consuming those ideas. With this system, we are likely to run into some amount of friction; I am an imperfect author and you are an imperfect reader*. I believe that recognizing this friction gives us a better likelihood of a truthful destination.

My writing style increases this amount of friction because of my extreme garrulity. I have a compulsion towards expressing thoughts to their greatest extent. I am eager to overemphasize, I am romantic towards words, and passionate towards the pursuit of truth. This passion is most purely experienced independently; in other words, not everyone is equally excited about this stuff as I am. I want to acknowledge that I am aware of this, and do not intend to impose any of these thoughts onto you, the reader, as if I think you will gain anything meaningful out of them.

Because my messy, reckless, youthful passion gets in the way of a good reading experience, I want to ask for your patience as a reader. This is one part apology, one part explanation, and one part disclaimer.

I seem to know extremely little compared to what I could, and I feel very uncomfortable making statements unless I am certain about them. I fear cliches, but I hold high regard towards Socrates' epistemological maxim: "I know that I know nothing." I hold higher regard to the fact that Socrates was never explicitly recorded saying this. Socrates only asserted that he *believed* that he knew nothing, having never claimed that he *knew* that he knew nothing. This (much more elegantly in Socrates' case) tends to lead to a vast and messy intellectual dialogue. I am often 'clogged up' by this contemplative methodology, because it is of infinite complexity, self-contradiction, uncertainty, and recurrence. I admire those who were able to settle on a clear-cut approach towards these subjects,

(Wittgenstein, Hegel, Kant, Aristotle), though I can not comfortably settle on a clear mode of methodology or bias. This might eventually prove to be a mistake, but it seems that my passionate youth demands *some* amount of reckless intellectual freedom; similar to that of a puppy being left outdoors to tire itself out.

You may notice that I have intentionally dedicated a great deal of context, disclaimers, and exposition to this text. I think this mirrors the intention of my current life-circumstance, wherein I am attempting to contextualize myself in the world. One must *set the stage* if they want to make the show possible. In this case, perhaps consider it an improv show, as I do not have the necessary experience to put on a production of traditional value.

If I were you, I would struggle to read this. This type of dialogue is best suited for *silent articulation* in the brain through contemplation. Much of this dialogue is stuff that many people spend their life ignoring. Some of the problems I examine are ones that you might be battling yourself with, some of them may

never have shown their face in your world. I will not be offended if you choose to expend your energy on *yourself* instead of *my* problems. Again, this text was intended to help me, not you; read it only if it betters you.

I have not done nearly as well as I could have* at translating years of passionate existential rubbish into a digestible piece with some element of structure and theme to it.

I do, however, feel naturally fond of the craft of writing because my psyche has the unfortunate blessing of being *structured* as a book. I cognate as if I am reading left to right, and my life proceeds in extremely well defined chapters. I live my life with organized stages of question and answer in which I deal with a few elements of x and y and z, and then solve x y and z. I am regular enough to be human, but falling apart enough to have substance worth questioning. (in the sense that expressed ideas should have a skeleton, but are often most exciting when they break some of the bones [rules])

When I realized that I had written enough words over multiple little black journals and hundreds of apple notes pages to fill at least 5 large books, it felt irrational to not condense some of it into a meaningful capstone. The question was what parts to choose, what was it *mostly* about? Is there such a thing as sharing this work with others? Why should others care? Isn't this all for you? Do you want to share such a vulnerable, incriminating, embarrassing manuscript of such intimate and important dialogues? These answers continue to evolve, even at the moment of writing this. I've reached the conclusion that I *must* write this for me, and whatever it is will end up being deeply genuine and important. (editing note from a year later—it has)

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Because the opportunity of this gap year is so rare and extraordinary, I feel the need to justify it with some tangible means. I am aware of this time's significance—is it necessary to prove this to others? Again, I am unsure. Regardless, this book exists *if* it

is necessary for others. It was certainly necessary for me.

The decision to sink this amount of time into one thing is typically considered socially unacceptable*. Our culture seems hesitant to value things without strong names; many of the acquisitions from this time have and will continue to significantly improve my life, but are too vague to point to with your finger.

Often, as a hostage of customary small-talk at obligatory events, I am asked in one way or another, “What do you do?”. In other words, I am being asked, “What is the main activity you partake in that has consumed and defined your professional *and* personal identity?”. It is in moments like this where one stares straight into the theatrical face of contemporary social culture and craves an easy escape route. This escape route, this get-out-of-jail-free-card, is the ‘*DoubleSpeak Title Card*’. With this tool, one uses shiny and acceptable terms to describe the activity in their life with sugar coating that is likely to provoke a satisfactory response in the listener. In my circumstance, this

completely indefinable dialogue which has been the last year, can be handed over in the form of a 'book'. According to how books are typically defined, I have written a book—yet I do not apprehend these words as being 'a book'. Call it whatever you must, this is an explanation for why I was willing to let others see these words.

“At best, it's an album—a series of therapies to uncloud the understanding of the world which is clouded up by the way we use language”—Dr. Sugrue on the Tractatus by Wittgenstein

I hope that you do not find it to be too overwhelmingly overwhelming. Fortunately, this is likely to be an extremely small number of people. In no way meaning to be cynical, not a lot of people are likely to designate even a couple hours out of their day honestly out of interest of another person, let alone a self-tormented and horribly verbose 18 year old in a gap year, trying to establish what things are important in the world.

I realized at a couple points in the manuscript-condensation process that if someone were to lock me in a room eternally and keep my biology healthy, I feel as though I could write for years on end without tiring. It is how I live; through endless curiosity and analysis. A part of me believes that a single day existing on earth gives you enough to unpack for a lifetime. I have been given the privilege and the curse of living around 6,711 of them (in a row) at the time of writing this. With the statistical likelihood of living about 22,124 more days, I think it is about time for me to make a solid attempt at laying out what the heck is going on during those days, why I should care about it, how I should go about it, and some other things too.

This is a bit of a weird project. Parts of it are much too informal, and parts of it are far *too* formal. Parts of it make no sense whatsoever, and parts of it are meaningful. It doesn't exactly have a place in what we understand to be "library literature", but it certainly isn't a loose diary rant. I think this strangeness calls for some thorough exposition, and that is what I hope to give. We are going to outline

some housekeeping things, some logistics, some history, and perhaps a weak summary of what this text is trying to be.

Rhetorical trajectory has, at many points, gone into garbage. Proper grammar at many points—I'm quite confident—has gone into the garbage. This text is primarily a long-term *philosophical meditation**. This ritual was intentional and structured, and spanned the length of a year. This meditation was intended to serve a tangible purpose, and It has served that tangible purpose. Much of the true cognitive work in these dialogues are left *outside* of the dialogues. I plan to articulate the intention of this meditation, the execution of the meditation, and the syllabus of the meditation. If this sounds too vague for your liking, I urge you to read on, and you will perhaps be left even more confused. I present to you, a crumbly (and hopefully flavorful) slice of my philosophical cake.

All of these topics have been extremely meaningful to me. As a reader, I invite you to empathize with

them to your fullest ability*. Empathy is a wonderful tool for gaining sensation of that which you have not experienced, and it has the potential to provide a great deal of benefit to everyone. This is not your normal book, and I don't mean this in a positive way. Thanks for being here, and thanks for patronizing me by even reading this far.

Disclaimers

Some basic things that must be established before we dive into some nitty gritty things. I don't want to claim that anything I say has any reasonable or meaningful weight to it, because most of it realistically doesn't. Long form, methodological manuscripts are well suited for *thorough* and *leakproof* discussion, because the author is more able to emphasize necessary exposition. I have a desire to discover truth, therefore I aim towards considering nothing *untruthfully*. It is because of this that this section of disclaimers is necessary; it is here that we realize that this project is potentially completely illegitimate, and that is *just fine*.

I wish not to express this text as a sermon, but as a *meditation* designed to organize my own confusion. At many points, it may seem like I am speaking outwardly. This is not the case, I do not believe that I have much of a right to claim to speak truth in almost anything. In fact, this text largely is to reckon with my own *lack* of understanding.

A quick bullet list to get some things out of the way:

- *I am disgustingly, absurdly, idiocratically, garrulously, stupidly, annoyingly verbose.* I sound very pretentious and overcomplicated when I write. I enjoy writing. I do think I can be a good writer, but that does not mean all or most of my writing is acceptable. I do endorse many of the things I've written in here, but most of it I struggle to label as remotely sufficient to my standards. One of the consequences of replacing social interaction with academic, british, literary virtuosos is that my syntax of writing, thinking, and speaking has become extremely bloated. This isn't helped by the fact that I have a crush on words; I genuinely love the art of painting syllables, vocabulary, and prose. There is such a thing as speaking for hours and saying nothing. Eminem said it better than I ever could: "*So I wanna make sure*

somewhere in this chicken scratch I scribble and doodle enough rhymes [important ideas in this case] to maybe try to help get some people [me in this case] through tough times." To play a good melody on a piano, you must not use all the notes, you must find the ones which are most effective and compelling to the human ear. There is wisdom and beauty in expressing something with no more than what is needed; I am not wise. There are few skills which I find as impressive as the ability to compellingly express ideas with the fewest words possible. I struggle to say *only* the necessary amount, but I have chosen not to be overwhelmed by this flaw. If I succumb, these ideas would receive no justice at all. I believe that it is better to express things badly than to express nothing at all.

- *I have not properly edited this text. I have hardly read it.* Much of this will be grammatically and rhetorically flawed. Much of it will be clunky and almost impossible to understand. I'm sure that in my insane verbosity, there are entire paragraphs that *say nothing*. Within the span of even a month, my competency and taste in writing changes significantly. I often look back on writing from the recent past and find it unintelligible.

I promise that there are some decent ideas hiding behind the mounds of inefficient language. This is currently how I roll. Sorry.

- *I often interchange “I” with “we”. Please* don’t be weirded out by this—I find that there are occasionally vestiges of my previous style of prose. I often assume an omniscient attitude towards myself during contemplation. I am ultimately writing to myself, and I am part of a vast group of individuals which form humanity. I like to think that this helps reduce my sense of ego, and positions myself conceptually as a cell which exists in the *multicellular* tissue of humanity. But I (and we) like to think a lot of things which aren’t true, so I ask that you please don’t find it weird.
- *I am still in my infancy when it comes to the important books, ideas, thinkers, and history of the world.* I have done my best to cover as much of these important ideas as I can in the time that I own. Even with a rigorous reading/listening/studying schedule, I find that there is an enormous iceberg of important stuff to learn about. I hope that my citations or case studies are not embarrassingly misguided, I

have used the sources *I have* which seem to best emphasize the ideas I am considering. This does not mean that they are the most accurate or efficient methods for emphasis, I hope that not too many are a stretch. I am certain that much of this text is academically fallacious.

- *This book is incredibly haphazard.* Very little of this book lends itself to reading like a normal book. I think of this book as an endless spitball—a reformation of my internal dialogue over time. This disaster is not necessarily a product of *artistic* failure, but mostly laziness and necessity. This project got out of my hands, and despite the amount of time I have, I can not make it perfect. A piece of art is never finished, only abandoned. There is a distinct vision for what I would like this book to be, I have structures if you would like to see them. This book is not a fulfillment of this vision, but I like to think it is better than nothing.
- *I understand that not everyone thinks about these things—that's fine, I'm not mad at you.* In fact, this is one of the themes I try to establish as this thing grows: there are a lot of *big, blurry* things which we have a really difficult time dealing with. I have realized that giving these

hard-to-talk-about things some deserved love, my life has changed drastically towards what I understand to be good. The big, confusing, philosophical things are the things which can often influence the little, familiar, practical things. To me, this idea of starting from the absolute ground up makes a heck of a lot of sense, but I have to acknowledge that I live in a social world where this is a difficult virtue to implement. Our language is not suited to this practice, nor our typical forms of communication, nor our brains. I believe that this ritual, though it seems to be* tragically sparse in today's world, holds very practical, daily, fundamental implications to our lives. I would like to combat this tendency to ignore these things, because it is a valid strategy towards a successful life.

- *This book is often redundant.* Again, this book is a continually aging quilt of ideas which develop in tandem. I am not patient or skilled enough to approach this chronologically, so everything comes from different times in my life, development, and skill level. I hope I have removed most of this, but I occasionally refer to sections that don't exist or are later in the book. I hope this doesn't get in the way.

- *I genuinely don't believe in anything I or anyone else says, I just play with it.* Socrates used to say 'I believe I know nothing'. In a similar way, I am just pointing to things which help explore the ideas at hand. With figures like Foucault, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, I want to be clear that I am not endorsing or defending or arguing for their sentiments (Nietzsche is particularly and tragically misunderstood). Something we explore in *Philosophy as Method* is the fact that every *thing* contributes a chapter to the book of knowledge. These people don't have to be great or correct to contribute a valuable verse.
- *If I know you, I am not offended if you don't read this. This book was not intended to be read.* I have no clue what the audience, if any, this book will be. This book is difficult for even me to read—please don't burden yourself with the dreadful task of patronizing me for this strange, childish passion project. I know what it is worth to me.
- *I don't think any of this is new or groundbreaking.* It's pretty normal for kids my age and my demographic to be very confused and existentially dreadful. I'm sure that most of these thoughts have been thought long before

my time. It is characteristic of young passionate people like me to be convinced that they are the first one to experience the world. Every person discovers profundity on their own dime. I am trying my best to acknowledge my own experience, without advertising it as particularly *special*. I am one of an intellectual *tradition*, a cultural pattern of human brains trying to figure things out.

- *I don't like my writing, I am not proud of it.* Sometimes, when creatives make something, their initial vision overrides the final product. Because of this, the creator thinks irrationally highly about their work. I want to clarify that I do not feel this way; I have strongly debated showing this to other eyes at all. This sounds like I am pandering for compliments, and I don't like that. Please disregard my ego, don't patronize me if you don't mean it, and don't read it if you don't want to. This is not exciting stuff to most people. I wouldn't read it if I were you (but then again, i've spent too much time with this darn thing).
- *I am not actually here to share wisdom, I am here to do the opposite.* The only intellectual value I can offer at this age and experience is

my unique perspective. In other words, I have not exceeded the level of skill necessary to profess, only to wonder.

It is here that I give a representation of this existential chaos that is curious youth.

- *If you are crazy enough to read this, I invite you to jump around. This book is very haphazard, thus the rules of chronology don't apply to us.*

Reading this from front to back would be a painful task—I couldn't and probably wouldn't do it. There are good parts of this text and I don't want them to get lost in the arbitrary desire to 'retain rhetorical trajectory'. I have attempted to structure this book in a rhetorically justified way, but I fear my efforts have been futile.

This text is largely made from philosophical synthesis. This is the first philosophical text I have explored writing, so it is going to be flawed and rudimentary. Many of the things I will articulate will have long been discovered without me knowing. I will certainly make the mistake of attributing ideas to some philosophers who should not be getting the

credit. For those thinkers of the past to which I fail to give justice, I formally apologize and thank you.

Despite doing a rigorous* lap of study around what I understand to be some of the most influential ideas and texts of western (and some eastern) philosophy, I am still very new to this. In the scale of this vast tradition, I am a fetus. Regardless, this text is a necessary step to make if I wish to progress further into correct and meaningful discourse, so I shall progress anyway.

Perhaps much of this doesn't need to be said, but I will say it anyway to satiate my *own* compulsive need to touch on as many disclaimers and contexts as possible before expressing anything*. This compulsion comes from the fact that I don't enjoy saying things which are not true.

Thus, you have the right to speculate, doubt, frown upon, and not understand every inch of this book. Every person is vastly different, so they will perceive art vastly differently than the creator did. I hope to shrink this margin of distortion as much as possible. (Perhaps the effectiveness of art could be measured

by the ability of the artist to reduce this margin?) The fringes of this book are very broad and blurry, and are completely determined by the narrow margin of my own experience. Therefore, someone reading this who has lived a different life, may have drastically conflicting experiences. I encourage and acknowledge this. I am not, at any point, stating that my thoughts apply to or override anyone else's. At many points, it may look like I am asserting things to be true—I am never doing this. For the ease of expression, falsely declarative sentences are necessary. Refer back to this section if you feel I am inaccurately representing the stuff of the universe in any capacity.

Why is context necessary?

Logic is the organizational method which is more likely to lead us to a true conclusion than anything else* (this does not necessarily mean I *a/ways* follow it). The better that variables are defined, the more organized the system becomes. Once the necessary disclaimers have been put in place, any discourse that follows has no option but to inherently be more

sound, accurate, or truthful. Gaining sufficient understanding from text is difficult. With sufficient exposition, this becomes easier. It is for this reason (among others) that I have chosen to so extensively contextualize myself and this book.

I believe that there is value to discussion, consideration, and literary contribution in the world. These things are made more effective with context.

A theme that I explore in this book is this very act of defining one's fundamental limits, disclaimers, and biases, before considering any situation. To keep this theme intact, any time you see something that explicitly expresses an opinion or something similar, I want you to refer back to this equation:

This sentence:

"Pink is the best color"

Should be understood as this sentence:

"Based off of the limited understanding I have derived from my limited research through the lens of my current naivete and biases, it seems

reasonable to consider the notion that pink could possibly be the best color”

I understand that perhaps this section is unnecessary, but it certainly puts me in a more comfortable state of mind. Through the lens of creativity, I am a believer that making something is better than not making something (Most of the time... Nuclear weaponry and/or Coronavirus strains are perhaps better left unmade). With these disclaimers being said, I am left with no productive restraint or concern with the meticulous verification of empirical truth involved with writing a “book” (or whatever this thing is). Regardless if a given concept is true, I think it is better for our purposes to consider it rather than ignore it. I believe that this form of open-mindedness and willingness to *do* rather than to *cower* in your lack of confidence is a vital factor in increasing wisdom. You must start somewhere, and if you are too concerned with perfection, you become clogged with unnecessary concern and anxiety.

Intellectual Inspirations

Bertrand Russell is the single-handed creator of what is my most beloved intellectual work* than any other individual I have had the blessing to witness. I am not quite sure if this is because of his prose, his methodology, his accessibility, his (eerily similar to my own) subject matter, his gentleness, his masterful ability to articulate relevant and unspoken generalities truthfully, or a combination of the above. He is masterful, and I am lucky he existed before me.

The same can almost be said of Henry David Thoreau, though I can not confidently endorse him as being *perfect*. Most of what I have read by Thoreau has been from *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. At the time of writing *Walden*, he was only about 27 and often presented some uninformed, perhaps even naive ideas* (though I am obviously *no one* to call Henry David Thoreau

unwise). Other than those few youthful discrepancies, the writing is of such a degree of beauty that I often feel as though I am reading a sacred religious text. The writing of Thoreau has been a significant influence on many people I respect, and I can now see why. When I read Thoreau, I rarely choose to read at a pace faster than 10 minutes a page because his words are so saturated with meaning. As Nietzsche was to Plato, I am professionally jealous of his work. It is just too darn good.

Nietzsche has covered any ground where Bertrand Russell would not dare to step (and then some): the unadulterated *Gay Science* of Dionysian rapture and various *wills to power*. Russell is who I go to when I look for answers, and Nietzsche is who I look to when I want to gloriously bathe in the wretched ecstasy of questions. I fail to sufficiently identify with the poetic, antique literature of Homer, but I imagine I derive a similar sensation of *pure, visceral* linguistic profundity in the work of Nietzsche to what Goethe did with Homer. Again, Nietzsche is just *scarily* good at writing and thinking.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is a man named Michael Sugrue. I have never met him. Sugrue is a man, a mentor(...? If that's possible in this situation), and someone who earns his place in the aorta of my heavily beating intellectual heart from this *lack* of exposition I have on him. All I have is approximately 37 hours of philosophy lectures.

I am not sure if he is alive, but the last I have seen of him has been in a virtual lecture from 2019, wherein his young, shaven, peppy, academic, dorky 90's demeanor has changed *completely* to that of a sacred deity in a leather armchair, with a *truly* sonorous voice so deep that it makes your chest shake, and an unkempt beard that puts Marx to shame. This man is such a masterful orator; I picture him immediately when contemplating *transcendent pedagogy*.

He is a pedagogical deity to me—an artist who paints no utterance which isn't of the *most precise* prose. His work produces a sensation of masterful performance that would exist only in seeing the

Mona Lisa painted with just 10 brush-strokes. His oration is completely improvisational and beautiful. Often, he stands before a crowd with no podium or cards whatsoever. He paces with his hands behind his back, and speaks with such literary intention that you find yourself wanting to stand up, cry, and clap when he is done. His performances are masterful, and some of the most effective pieces of expression and pedagogy I have had the privilege of witnessing. Thanks for giving me the language to start navigating and articulating my way through the endless thicket of human thought.

A big thanks also to;

Wikipedia, Goethe, Oliver Sacks, Pythagoras, Hamilton Morris, Wittgenstein, George Orwell, Van Niestat, Tim Ferris, Michael Pollen, John Steinbeck, Robert Sapolsky, Steven Pinker, Virgil Abloh, Tom Sachs, Marie Curie, Adam Neely, Blaise Pascal, Rene Descartes, Thesaurus.com, Carl Jung, Alan Watts, David Lynch, Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, Annie Leibovitz, Rene Margritte, Abigail Thorn, Tim

Urban, Banksy, Maharishi Yogi, Florian Gadsby,
Daedeulus, John Coltrane, Dr. Michael Yapko,
Malcom Gladwell, John (and Hank I guess) Green,
James Baldwin, Louis Theroux, Aldous Huxley,
Steve-o, Darwin (and co.), the Radiolab Crew,
Alexander Scriabin, Jurgen Habermas, Heidegger,
Foucault, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Marcus
Aurelius, Kant, Mephistopheles and Faust*, BF
Skinner, Christina Cleveland, Isaac Newton, Neil
Degrasse Tyson, Mike Tyson, Duchamp, Frank
Gehry, DOMi & JD Beck, MF DOOM, Noam
Chomsky.

If I missed anybody, I'm sorry. Most of you are dead
and none of you will see this book. I wish a majority
of you well, thank you for your role in the expansion
of my mind.

...

Gesso

“Que sçay-je?”

Dedicated to Michel de Montaigne (and his tower),
the man whose Wikipedia page nearly brought me
to tears.

I choose to begin with the words of someone who is not me. I have replaced my original essay with this excerpt from Nietzsche's *Birth Of Tragedy*. Reading this passage made my heart beat fast and strong, because it felt as if my ideas were on the page, dressed in the beautiful outfit of a masterful poet's prose.

“But the book, in which my youthful ardour and suspicion then discharged themselves—what an impossible book must needs grow out of a task so disagreeable to youth. Constructed of nought but precocious, unripened self-experiences, all of which lay close to the threshold of the communicable, based on the groundwork of art—for the problem of science cannot be discerned on the groundwork of

science,—a book perhaps for artists, with collateral analytical and retrospective aptitudes (that is, an exceptional kind of artists, for whom one must seek and does not even care to seek ...)

...

full of psychological innovations and artists' secrets, with an artists' metaphysics in the background, a work of youth, full of youth's mettle and youth's melancholy, independent, defiantly self-sufficient even when it seems to bow to some authority and self-veneration; in short, a firstling-work, even in every bad sense of the term; in spite of its senile problem, affected with every fault of youth, above all with youth's prolixity and youth's "storm and stress": On this account, if for no other reason, it should be treated with some consideration and reserve; yet I shall not altogether conceal how disagreeable it now appears to me, how after sixteen years it stands a total stranger before me,—before an eye which is more mature, and a hundred times more fastidious, but which has by no means grown colder nor lost any of its interest in that self-same task essayed for the first time by this daring book,—*to view science through*

the optics of the artist, and art moreover through the optics of life....

I say again, to-day it is an impossible book to me,—I call it badly written, heavy, painful, image-angling and image-entangling, maudlin, here and there so saccharine it is effeminate, uneven in tempo, void of the will to logical cleanliness..

...

Here, at any rate—thus much was acknowledged with curiosity as well as with aversion—a *strange* voice spoke...here was a spirit with strange and still nameless needs, a memory bristling with questions, experiences and obscurities, beside which stood the name Dionysos like one more note of interrogation; here spoke—people said to themselves with misgivings—something like a mystic and almost mænadic soul, which, undecided whether it should disclose or conceal itself, stammers with an effort and capriciously as in a strange tongue. It should have *sung*, this "new soul"—and not spoken! What a pity, that I did not dare to say what I then had to say..."

...

It is after some 380,000 words, countless manuscripts which litter my physical and virtual desktops, and months of unprecedented obsession that I find myself writing these words. I wish to confront a sensation which appears when a unique way of life becomes inseparable from the outside universe. When you do something enough, it becomes commonplace for you; perhaps to the detriment of your craft. Let me explain this further with an example: Photographers and gymnasts both deal with a similar sensation to this. In gymnastics, it is called “the twisties”, and in photography, it does not, to my knowledge, have a name. Essentially, when you edit and stare at a photo too long, or you do the same acrobatic stunt enough times, your brain loses perspective on the craft, and crap hits the fan. Any photographer might agree; there are some photos which you spend far too long working on, to the point where it is unrecognizable and you have a stained visual palette. To an outside onlooker, the piece looks distorted, confusing, and perhaps unfinished. In

acrobatics, there is a physiological threshold which is crossed after a specific number of performances, and your sensation of calibration is destroyed. In a similar way, I have spent the last year of my life sunk obsessively into a vast intellectual project which exists mostly in the form of studying and writing. Because I have spent so much time existing within this work, I have perhaps lost perspective on it; I assume that what I am doing is both understood and accepted by others. It is for this reason that I should, if I wish for others to read this authentically and contextually, take a brief retreat from the cognitive pits of this vehement affair.

I am an 18 year old individual who exists mostly in Southwest Indiana, among a drab and beautiful landscape of midwestern North America. About a year ago, I completed high school one year early, with the intention of taking a gap year before attending college in Michigan. The intentions and opportunities of the gap year were distinct, and unorthodox compared to my peers. During this gap year, I have thoroughly explored a number of things which I understand to be fundamentally vital and

worthwhile to the long-term success of my professional career, psychological well being, education, spiritual and philosophical life, practical skill sets, social intellect, academic intellect, personal awareness, and general competency.

To briefly combat the potential of you conceiving of this as “a year off”, I would like to assert that this was one of the first years of my life ‘*on*’. Having completed high school a year early meant that I was able to give authentic justice to the areas of public education which are so tragically unacceptable and ineffective. I have not been properly academically challenged before this gap year. I say this not by any means as a tribute to my intellect, but as an observational critique of the education I have yet been given. Some 90% of the days during this year have held rigorous academic study, and hours of writing. I have found, not to my surprise, that education structured by genuine interest and passion, enforced by high self-standards reaps exponentially better results than that of a typical public education.

One of the things which pains me about this passionate intellectual affair is the lack of educational *verification* that exists for people in my situation. I am certain that I have learned more information in certain months of this year than I have in the entirety of high school education, yet I have no way of quantifying or proving this. I hold an honors high school diploma which symbolizes a laughable 4 years of overly-structured, forced, virtually futile academic parlor games (This is not to scold the school, nor the underpaid teachers who are enforced by the limits of necessary standardization and mounds of indifferent children. I'll elaborate later). However, I have nothing to represent the immeasurable profit in nearly every educational and personal field over the stretch of a year's continual effort.

Perhaps what's worse is that *it doesn't even matter*. This is a self-imposed stress which intends to validate my enormous effort and passion over this stretch of time. Truthfully, I have mostly gotten over this sense of stress due to a reformation of my personal social and philosophical constructions.

However, I still like the punctuation of evidence for claims. It is this, among other reasons, why I found myself loosely organizing a mountain of my words which are the product of months of academic/philosophical contemplation and study. When someone asks me what I did during my gap year, I have a memorized script for them. But if they want a more thorough representation of some of the true *guts* of this ritual, I choose to refer them to this.

I have found myself surrounded by more of my writing than I thought possible. I have discovered that I write as a means of organizing thought over time, so that I may implement* it later. Because this has been such a long duration of intense thought, it has been a time of *compulsive* and *endless* writing. With so much time and content produced, it seems wasteful to not present *some of it* outwardly.

I express this hesitantly because I find great beauty in creating something thorough for only your eyes. Marcus Aurelius, the noble stoic, wrote a book for himself titled *Meditations*. He never intended it to be published, and used it as a means of bettering

himself. Marcus is a more humble man than myself, and so this particular work is not restricted to just one set of eyes. I am young, and this seems to be a start of a lifelong art; I have found, throughout my life, that writing and thinking are the activities I can't *not* do. I suppose this might serve as the start of some prospective portfolio.

Whatever it is, it is. However you read it, allow it to be how it is for you. I do not necessarily intend for you to take anything away from this writing. The intent of this book was quite similar to *Meditations*; a means of calibrating, fixing, organizing, and bettering *myself*. The difference between these books (despite the fact that *Meditations* is 100-fold better than this one) is that I don't care if you read some of it. It also serves as a social alibi, for the occasional social ground-feeders who don't approve of a year spent participating in unorthodox yet meaningful activity, who prefer expert *labels* over expert *souls*.

And so we begin to slide into the true grime of this text; Why is this a book? What are the logistics of

this exploration? Where does such an exploration start? Why *philosophy*?

Why is this a book

Admittedly, I acknowledge that this has become a disastrously naive undertaking, despite its good bits.

“A piece of art is never finished, only abandoned.”

This is hard to swallow, but it would be foolish not to acknowledge that the further I find myself writing this text, the more I have to write. Each answer provides twice as many questions as before, and thus I find myself in the mouth of a vast intellectual serpent. I have spent so many days sunk into these ideas, so many different drafts, that I now am faced with the difficult option of presenting the right ones, and none of them are.

Despite its inevitable shortcomings as a practice and/or art, it is/has been a *fantastic* exercise. I know this from the explicit results it has already provided. It was, is, and continues to be an incredible catalyst for thorough exploration, study, research, habit,

synthesis, and project management. I have found myself as a result of this project, in academic places with such fluency that my past self would have been in awe. I have explored the art of articulation, writing, thinking, and research to a degree which I have not yet practiced anything else.

I realized, after a month of passionate writing, that this might be called something more than what I was calling it. I considered, for the first time, that this activity could perhaps live somewhere besides my private pile of manuscripts. With this new approach, the activity became new and even more exciting. Regardless if it became something worthy of being called a book, regardless if it ever even came close to happening, it was an activity that I felt had justified action behind it. So much of my young curious life has been spent doing loose exploration with minimal rewards. I dabble with a number of things, but I have an all-too common habit of making small things, and leaving them unfinished to make room for the next. I fail to dedicate my energies into one thing fully with sustainable passion. It is not for a lack of passion, but a lack of time.

This text is the metaproject, the pseudo-narrative of all my narratives yet, the intellectual arc of which I have dreamt since a child (I'm still dreaming about it because I'm still a child). About 70% of the writing from this project was left outside of this text, because I wanted to retain some* sense of cohesion (hah). Perhaps it's good to have a couple hundred pages of essays in my backlog if I need them in the future; if not, the contemplation and practice they took must have served *some* good.

I have set some ground rules to make sure that I would not lose myself in arbitrary guilt: as I'm writing this, there is a decent chance that no one will ever read these words. At any point, I wanted to make sure that this project must not become fueled by the attention of others. This is a surefire way for my creative psyche to cower, and having this self-destruct button at hand is a helpful thing. However, the act of writing *as if* I am writing to someone else sparks such a powerful fervor of intellectual and personal progression that I encourage it wholeheartedly.

I made sure to follow any rabbit hole I found myself in to the bottom, because it usually led to the opening of another. Philosophy as a method seemed a powerful way to access many important rabbit holes of human knowledge. Strangely, (or perhaps not) I found myself *very* deep into the study of psychopharmacology and the chemistry behind altered states of consciousness. I found that psychopharmacology served as a convenient gate into understanding some of the neuroscience of the oh-so-difficult issue of consciousness, as well as significantly increasing my fluency in biochemistry. Despite this being such an obscure area of study, I found strong ties to the adjacent research of philosophy and psychology. With a greater understanding of consciousness on an intuitive and anatomical level, I became more comfortable with many of the philosophical theories of mind and existence on a theoretical and practical scale.

This gap year was a time of calibrating, learning, understanding, meditating, and exploring with an

unprecedented degree of freedom. Lets contextualize this further:

Context 1

To start off simple, and to consider those who happen to be something outside of the confused voice in my head, let me be clear about what I mostly concern myself with at this portion of my life*. This is both for you and me.

I am chiefly concerned with understanding. I have very little idea what is going on. Out of all emotions, I feel existential confusion drastically more than any other. I have been thrown into this loud world with very little orientation or calibration, and there are a number of things that one must become familiar with if they wish not to succumb to something like a mental fetal position. In order to feel remotely confident with my worldly orientation, I feel a profound obligation to figure out some big questions. These questions have to do with the following things:

Truth, development, knowledge, growth, habit, epistemology, idea, wisdom, perspective, ideology, logic, physics, metaphysics, reality, emotion, ontology, psychology/cognition, neuroscience, behavior, self, health, youth, literature, religion, morality, responsibility, asceticism, hedonism, pleasure, pain, confusion, mood, virtue, sociology, anthropology, biology, the science of sciences, language, relativism, perception, probability, romanticism, ignorance, attention, time, bias, beauty/taste, creativity, art, prudence, action, thought, meaning, and consciousness.

(These are in no particular order...yet)

These things are what I have spent a year becoming significantly more familiar with.

Let's discuss from a developmental standpoint why I am so concerned with these things. Spoken by [this guy](#), we can contextualize the work of Erik Erikson through the slightly different lens of clinical/developmental psychologist James Marcia;

“Marcia was specifically interested in the stage [where] we worry about identity versus confusion. In this stage Erikson argues that individuals will work at developing a sense of self through experimentation—commit to certain initiatives or experience some manner of identity crisis, rather than Erikson's binary argument that one has either found their identity or is confused. Marcia argues that the stage can be characterized by the extent to which an individual has explored and committed to an identity. As Marcia put his theory to the test in semi-structured interviews that would explore the extent to which individuals explored and committed to different life areas generally revolving around ideology and occupation, four identity statuses or types emerged,”

I won't bore you with the other developmental categories, [but I encourage you to look into them.](#)

Footnote

(I will digress briefly only to cynically observe that this quote comes to mind when considering some of the other categories of identity:

There may actually be puritanical fanatics of consciousness who prefer even a certain nothing to an uncertain something to lie down on—and die. But this is nihilism and the sign of a despairing, mortally weary soul—however courageous the gestures of such a virtue may look.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

This is, of course, harsh and perhaps completely inapplicable to the youth. Regardless, I am a youth so I feel comfortable saying it.)

Out of the 4 categories, I seem to be well within the 'Moratorium' category.

"The third stage of Moratorium is defined by those who are in a state of identity crisis due to their lack of commitments. Nonetheless they are actively exploring and experimenting in different areas of their life, forming their values and

discovering their interests. Moratoriums report experiencing more anxiety than do students in any other status.

...

‘The world for them is not, currently, a highly predictable place; they are vitally engaged in a struggle to make it so,’ states Marcia.

This is, nonetheless, considered to be a far more beneficial stage of development than the previous two; one that characterizes the ideal of university education. The young adult sifting through a catalog of potential careers, ideologies, identities, and relationships without committing to anything in particular. Notably, recent research suggests that more people are spending a greater duration in this stage. After an identity crisis has been worked through, Marcia suggests that the individual will reach identity achievement.”

For someone in the midst of this state, this is an encouraging and motivating thing to hear. There often seems to be some amount of relief when a discomfort is acknowledged as being real; when

someone clinically validates and acknowledges something like chronic pain or depression, it can be a great sense of justification for the hardship delt to the individual. This scheme also provokes some further considerations.

At this point in my development,

- I am highly receptive to education
- I am in a state of confusion, naivete, and struggling
- I am not fully developed, the actions I take influence my maturation
- There is no clear 'be-all-end-all' person who has the correct answers for you
- I must become familiar with the nature of commitment
- I am psychologically concerned with forming values
- I should not expect to be in a state of completed identity achievement

...

Human nature tends to follow the law of least effort*. Today's world makes it increasingly more simple to take the easiest path. When you're a young tabula rasa, the germination of habit can become quite deep rooted. What then, does youth without vigilance or luck look like, and how can we change it for the better?

Because we spend so much time in a world we understand to be commonplace, it can be useful to take a step back and look at things simply and chronologically. Here are a few descriptions of the first few years of human life;

“The first few years of our existence are characterized by a wide range of activities, beliefs and commitments that are either inherited or thrust upon us. Rarely challenged to forge a path of our own, who we are becomes more or less the agglomeration of our

environment and genetics...Until, of course, that fateful period when the training wheels are ripped off and suddenly we're under the pressure to find out the right thing to do all by ourselves. Do we go to university? Do we entertain the same political beliefs as our parents? Do we flirt with other religions and gods or cast them aside altogether? Do we rebel against the things that had previously constructed our sense of self in an effort to gain autonomy? Do we attempt to engage on a deeper level with the constructs that previously formed us in an effort to develop a more meaningful sense of identity? All of these questions, met with conflicting answers from guidance counselors, parents, teachers, friends, and internet forums lead us into a dreadful sense of confusion and hopelessness.

Waiting around, we tend to drift from job to job, relationship to relationship; pushed and pulled by the tides of fate. We distract ourselves from the dizziness of freedom with delicious escapism and occupy our

time with tasks we never really wanted to do but instead had simply snuck themselves into our lives through the path of least resistance.

—Sisyphus 55

Here's another; a great excerpt from [wbw \(start of life\)](#). I suggest you look into this website if you aren't dead.

“For most of us, childhood is kind of like a river, and we're kind of like tadpoles. We didn't choose the river. We just woke up out of nowhere and found ourselves on some path set for us by our parents, by society, and by circumstances.

We're told the rules of the river and the way we should swim and what our goals should be. Our job isn't to think about our path—it's to succeed on the path we've been placed on, based on the way success has been defined for us. For many of us, our childhood river then feeds into a pond, called college. We may have some say in which particular pond we landed in, but in the end, most college ponds aren't really that different

from one another. In the pond, we have a bit more breathing room and some leeway to branch out into more specific interests. We start to ponder, looking out at the pond's shores—out there where the real world starts and where we'll be spending the rest of our lives. This usually brings some mixed feelings.



And then, 22 years after waking up in a rushing river, we're kicked out of the pond and told by the world to go make something of our lives. There are a few problems here. One is that at that moment, you're kind of skill-less and knowledge-less and a lot of other things-less:



But before you can even address your general uselessness, there's an even bigger issue—your pre-set path ended. Kids in school are kind of like employees of a company where someone else is the CEO. But no one is the CEO of your life in the real world, or of your career path—except you. And you've spent your whole life becoming a pro student, leaving you with zero experience as the CEO of anything. Up to now, you've only been in charge of the micro decisions—"How do I succeed at my job as a student?"—and now you're suddenly holding the keys to the macro cockpit as well, tasked with answering stressful macro questions like "Who am I?" and "What are the important things in life?" and "What are my options for paths and which one should I choose and how do I even make a path?" When we leave school for the last time, the macro

guidance we've become so accustomed to is suddenly whisked away from us, leaving us standing there holding our respective dicks, with no idea how to do this."

—(The Respectable) Tim Urban

What's occurred to me a number of times (in increasingly panicked ways) is that the above blueprint is not one I want to follow. Below is the rest of that excerpt, and why I made the decision to stray from the predetermined stream of things with the gap year*:

"Then time happens. And we end up on a path. And that path becomes our life's story. At the end of our life, when we look back at how things went, we can see our life's path in its entirety, from an aerial view.

When scientists study people on their deathbed and how they feel about their lives, they usually find that many of them feel some serious regrets. I think a lot of those regrets stem from

the fact that most of us aren't really taught about path-making in our childhoods, and most of us also don't get much better at path-making as adults, which leaves many people looking back on a life path that didn't really make sense, given who they are and the world they lived in.

So this is about path-making. Let's take a pre-deathbed pause to look down at the path we're on, and ahead at where that path seems to be going, and make sure it makes sense."

—Tim Urban

Again, to emphasize this last sentence—"*Let's take a pre-deathbed pause to look down at the path we're on, and ahead at where that path seems to be going, and make sure it makes sense.*"

It feels wrong and foolish that I should continue my life without this pause.

I need an explicit *exposition* or *acknowledgement* of the utterly important and confusing aspects of my existence. I need to spend time to figure out what path I want to follow. I need to learn some fundamental things about myself. It seems to me

that I can not live a remotely successful life (in my current standards of success) without some type of retreat like this. I think many people desperately look for this 'pause' but never are given the opportunity to achieve it in full capacity.

I'm distressed by the idea that there are lives not fully lived because of the inability to take such a pause. I hope that I best utilize my own. I am saddened by young people growing old and wishing they used their youth more effectively. It is out of reverence to those who missed the opportunity to flourish when they were able that I chase this quarry.

This collection of text, this project, this practice, this ritual, this meditation, this gap year, this habit, this time (all of which I see in union), serves as my wholehearted rejection of a life not fully lived by the hand of this path; there is a path of life which is not fully lived which I can not accept, which I fight *daily* with my full energy. This is a look into this fight.

Context 2

My high school education did not provide what I believe to be an acceptable nor effective experience. There will be more on this soon.(

☰ Education (from context)) I am a highly curious person, who is driven by a voracious appetite towards worldly understanding. It is in this pursuit that I hope to manifest my best* self*. There will be more on this later.

Because this has the potential of being a dangerously ambiguous endeavor, there must be some methodological prism through which the light splits; through which nebulous ideas become concepts which we can organize, handle, and turn into action. This medium through which I focus and position my analysis is through the language of philosophical discourse*. There are moments when this text strays from this, but its essence is undoubtedly characterized by the compulsion and love towards understanding and wisdom. This is a flawed text; I say this not to lower your standards as a safety net for my ego, but because it is true. This text is a result of continual, fluctuating development.

This collection of words has been in the works for around 7/9ths of a year, and this year has caused such levels of development and change that many of my former words are meaningless, bloated, and incoherent compared to my latter. A thematic continuation of this phenomenon is, in fact, found in many parts of this text: my *current* work and activity will likely be rendered incoherent and incapable to my future self; yet I can not *realize* or *reach* my future self if I don't get my incompetency out *now*.

So with this said, we have a flawed text; a fluid text, but a personally profound and reformative text. This manuscript is a relic of this moment, which will soon be the past. It serves as soil for my current growth, and this growth, in its death, will fertilize my future growth. This text allowed me to lay out some of the most important features of my experience as a human so that they might be organized with rationality, wisdom, and intention. I believe and hope that this purposeful organization might serve as the foundation for an effective, meaningful, and prolific life. I am honored to have fallen into this position, and I therefore take this ritual as seriously as I can

(which we discover, is perhaps not very serious at all).

...

When you spend a really long time independently working on something, you run the risk of forgetting what the rest of the world might think about it.

Photographers can run into this thing (which probably has a name) where they edit a photo for too long, and after spending hours staring at one image, forget what it looks like to a fresh eye. This produces an image which is distorted, overcorrected, and potentially unpleasant to the viewer. It seems to me that the same thing happens with thoughts, habits, personality, and perspective in *most* realms of human activity. Our brains have structures which make this pattern of understanding the default; this is how we learn, this is how advertisement companies gain your business, this is how stubbornness arises, etc. Humans often use a mechanism of “first come, first serve”. You are more likely to believe something if you hear it more than other things. This is the illusory truth effect, and it is

powerful. Think about how you deal with the news; if you read one headline of a political scandal, it is your only source and perspective of the situation. Despite your *belief* in the headline, you are still *extremely* likely to regurgitate what you read in a discussion. This is not speculation, there has been much compelling research on this psychological tendency starting all the way [back in 1977](#).

I digress, though I plan on elaborating this idea further as we progress. This is all to say that I (like many) struggle to acknowledge the fact that I am living a different life than everyone else. Because my life is the singular input I know, I have a distinct psychological proclivity towards believing the lives of 8 billion are lived *similarly* to my own. In other words, our lives are (to an extent) formed by our psychology to be experienced solipsistically; I have experienced no other life than my own, so my understanding of others is fundamentally limited or distorted through my own life-bias.

I think it is important to remind yourself that the range of human experience is *unfathomably* diverse,

and we can not begin to understand the range of infinitely complex consciousness that dances between person to person. Because of this, I must preface this writing *heavily*.

Many or most of these words will be read as completely unintelligible rambling. I have a fairly intuitive sensation of the ideas I am attempting to articulate, *because I have experienced them*. What makes an effective writer is their ability to translate their ideas in such a way that the audience receives the closest thing to the original idea. I am not an effective writer, thus a large portion of this will probably mean nothing to you. On behalf of the readers (if there end up being any), I apologize. Again, I assert that this text is not intended to be an *effective* text for anyone besides myself. Maybe, however, some of this will mean something for others. If not, I hope it serves as something like verbose entertainment; a snapshot of an obsessive, young mind.

...

One of the more difficult aspects about this entire endeavor was the fact that the end goal was to present this to other people. I am not embarrassed to show a vulnerable representation of some of my internal dialogue, however I am hesitant to present something as strangely fundamental as this. *It doesn't seem to particularly hold a place in contemporary culture*, for reasons outside of my current knowledge. I am certain that there are mountains of manuscripts from identity-confused teenagers, many of them with far better insights and experience than what is being described here. However, I believe that very few of them ever make it into the light of the public eye because of two phenomena: rarely do existentially confused teenagers make something out of their embarrassingly naive ramblings, and rarely is there more than 5 people even *willing* to spend time out of their day to read them if they do happen to come to light. After all, many of these manuscripts end up sounding extremely similar to one another. To some extent, the philosophical wonderings of the youth are a very regular thing (though it varies in size and shape); these wonderings are that of an uninformed,

self-aware body put into an environment, and left to themselves to make sense of their situation. This strange situation invokes different responses, though many of them are similar.

As a metaphor, I like to consider an unlikely experiment by a psychologist with a far greater understanding of psychology than any human currently has. Imagine that a marine physiologist has discovered a pufferfish who is entirely aware of its own existence, time, and logic. (also assume that it has a basic grasp on its biological handicaps: lifespan, no opposable thumbs, can't speak, etc.) Lets now assume that this pufferfish was relocated from the great barrier reef, to a tank in a lab. This tank has one way mirrors, and the fish is only able to see itself and the reflection of the surroundings. Out of curiosity the human scientist flashes this sentient pufferfish with a *Men In Black* memory-erasing device. Now, we have a self aware body, in an unfamiliar context, with a strong propensity towards figuring out where it is, who put them there, and what they should do next.

I feel as though I am that pufferfish. I have a strange, inherent, fluency with the world because of the conditioning of my childhood—muscle memory. But now, I feel as though my sentience has finally emerged, only to have no idea what is going on. It is in this state where I have an inherent set of desires and an inherent propensity to figure out the nature of my surroundings so I might act most effectively.

I believe that a significant existential crisis* would have been inevitable in the span of my life, so it makes a great deal of sense that I designated a stretch of time to become deeply familiar and intimate with the difficulties of such an event. Scheduling an intentional period of time for me to devote full attention to the problems which leave me in severe states of existential confusion means that I am likely, if not to educate myself on the answers, become more competent and familiar with the overwhelming state of existential disorientation. This is all in hopes that my future action, now free (or strengthened) from the burden of unresolved and unavoidable angst, will be more effective, authentic, and likely to succeed in the type of life I desire.

Context 3...?

There is something annoying about someone answering a question like:

“What color shirt should I wear today”

with:

“It literally doesn’t matter, we are all going to die and fall back into the skin of the Earth to feed the flora and fauna of a future we will perhaps never understand nor consciously experience, just as we exist now, balanced on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment; the absurd, lifelong dance of toeing that line...”

If you know me, you know that I am always restraining myself from answering questions this way. I’ve come to realize some sense of identity in

this characteristic of myself which is certainly nice, but it is often incompatible with most normal human activity. Small talk, careers, most social or professional events, and even most *educational* settings do not have a place for this kind of intense discourse. This sucks sometimes, because it often seems like there is only a small demographic of people who live in this headspace. Some people enjoy talking about it for short stretches of time, others never experience this mode of thought, and others live it every second of their waking life. It can be exhausting, terrifying, enthralling, devastating and profound.

This type of headspace requires an endlessly active mind. An endlessly active mind comes with all sorts of implications. This psychological profile often shows itself in species of people who tend to face inwardly—sometimes, it seems that social interaction can only get you so far. (Of course, a common response is that ‘it is a matter of finding similarly wired people’. I would argue that it is more complicated than that).

Our *experiences* as humans are ultimately quite solipsistic, even for the incessantly social and empathetic individuals. At the end of the day, the start of the day, and the middle of the night, you experience only your narrative and no one else's. Even the moments where you are empathetic, thinking outwardly, or lost in something beyond yourself, it is your *unique* experience, and you are the only one who experiences it in full. The philosophical conception of idealism lies in the understanding of the brain being the full extent of the universe; in other words, outside of my own psyche exists nothing. When my consciousness ceases, so does the universe. From certain angles*, this is objectively plausible. When I die, my nervous system will not have the means to function; therefore, the various neurological circuitry of which my consciousness is composed will no longer produce perception, awareness, cognition, etc. To dead me, I have no means of sensing, understanding, or apprehending the universe around me, therefore it is (from my perspective) as good as buried with me. This has the potential, however, to lead into some dangerous tracks of thought, so we will pass over it

for now. The intention of this consideration is that our experience on Earth is fundamentally possible because of our brain. The way we live, the way we feel, the way we act, the way we love, hate, sleep, eat, and die is essentially completely governed by the activity which happens between our ears.

What this means to me, then, is that I should probably spend a great deal of time learning what the hell is happening up there. What is my brain made of? How does it work? What things are important for its health? What things does the brain naturally do that I don't want it to, and what things can the brain do if I want it to? How does consciousness work? What is the philosophy of the mind? Am I my brain? Etc.

Again, I will repeat an earlier mentioned phrase. A curious ('Moratorium') headspace results in an endlessly active mind. An endlessly active mind comes with all sorts of implications. This psychological profile often shows itself in species of people who tend to face inwardly—sometimes, to

these people, it seems that social interaction can only get you so far. (Within the next 4 years, this is likely an idea I will realize is mostly untrue and completely naive. Much more wise people than myself advocate strongly for the health of a social brain. I believe this is probably something which is true, but that I have not yet sufficiently experienced. For the time being, however, this solitude has served as an *incredibly necessary* feature of my development.)

[Shout out to the few crazies who have to serve as my social garbage disposal, love ya.]

For people similar to myself, who have few meaningful outlets and little desire to partake in the non-intellectually and experientially groundbreaking activities of human life (and who are *young and passionate* for that matter), one of two things tend to happen*:


- we go insane or depressed
- We position ourselves in a radical, unorthodox, and potentially harsh* new environment

The latter option seems to provide the *utterly necessary* focus, unfettered quietness, and exploratory freedom which this type of brain *needs*. This type of brain is anxious, spacious, confused, and utterly eager. Similar to a new puppy, it is necessary to let it free in a field every once in a while. Give them the time they need to get the energy out, figure out precisely what it means to be a puppy.

For me, this meant cutting most ties with normal society, lackluster education, and typical patterns of human life so that I could fervently and completely pursue the things which my young brain *must examine*. I needed to methodologically observe, learn, and intimately examine the world around me, and I needed to do so with the complete totality of my energy. This retreat is unorthodox, and *temporary*. How I have lived my life over the past year is not how I wish to spend the rest of my life. It obviously has its downsides. I choose not to articulate them right now. I am certainly aware of some of them, and aware that I am not aware of all of them. And yet, my obsessively skeptical mind

feels *confident* in thinking that the benefits wholeheartedly outweigh the negatives.

With this separation from the conveyor belt of normal human education, development, and participation, I dove *deep* into an intellectual and experiential fervor of learning, contemplating, reading, and writing.

I provided the necessary space for my incessantly curious brain to run loose, and then let it free. I have done, experienced, and grown more holistically than I previously thought physically possible. If this description is too vague for your liking, please refer to the less prose-y section where I articulate some of the tangible academic and physical achievements of this retreat. ( Logistics) This body of text will not scratch the surface of the cognitive growth which I have experienced. I hope to articulate more of this growth in this text, though it will not be enough. (In any piece of work, there is much of the creator left unrepresented. With this in mind, it is astounding to look at the works of Plato, Goethe, or Nietzsche; how could such a human exist?)

I found myself completely and entirely consumed by an intellectually ravenous mind: I woke up nearly every day with streams of cognitive trails to run down, and I spent the day and night running down them. I researched and collected what I understand to be some of the most influential writing of the human species, and I learned about many of them in great detail. I spent months studying Princeton, MIT, and Stanford lectures on physics, mathematics, psychopharmacology, neuropsychology, behavioral biology, and *especially* philosophy—watching many of them as much as 10 times over. I can say confidently that there were singular weeks wherein I acquired more practical and advanced knowledge than I did in an entire year of high school education. This has been (and continues to be) a powerfully fertile time for me in terms of cognitive, personal, and practical activity—I can not overemphasize the extent to which this is true. I have developed habits of attitude, cognition, and comprehensive health which were unimaginable a year ago. Taking this gap year, without a doubt, is the best decision and strongest action I have made in my life as of yet, and I imagine this will still be true when I am on my

deathbed. It is extraordinarily rare that such a perfect storm should occur, yet I have found myself, by chance, in the eye of a hurricane. I hope to wring the absolute last drop of value out of this experience so that I may live as effective of a life as I can.

But I digress...

More thoughts on context

I don't wish to harp on humanity, but I think it is wise to acknowledge that humans are more likely to praise themselves rather than disdain themselves. I think honesty is necessary, particularly when it comes to our personal human biases; for they are the things which distort our perception of truth. This means we should honor context where it is needed. With context, the false assumptions, uninformed actions, and human activity in general gets a *whole* lot less stupid. The anthropocene has always had a context deficit—perhaps now is the time to work on it. We have never had such facilities to provide context


in full; with the technology of our age, we have the potential for incredibly thorough long form communication, storage, and information acquisition. Then what's the catch, if so much strife could be avoided with initiative towards context, why isn't it happening? For goodness' sake, why does it seem* that context is *shrinking*?

Context seems to hold very little *economy*. Giving correct representations of products is a bad way to sell things, people are more likely to watch the news if they are concerned. Politicians will say nothing worth anyone's time, but they will use elaborate doublespeak to convince you that they are. These things flourish on a lack of context, and we have grown to unconsciously accept the amount they directly influence us. We are born into it, it's how human society is. Our language is not made for efficient context. In theory, we could perhaps map out the entire brain: explain every action as an effect from a cause; this gets people riled up on the topic of free will, but let's briefly disregard this for a second and use the sharp eyes of behavioral biology. If you are to choose to eat a panini or a

banana, your brain will make a different decision based on different context. Regardless of your stance on free will, one of the two *will* happen— and the reason for this is a specific combination of neural cells expressing biochemical signals to one another. I believe that if we respect the scientific method, this is a truth. This *does not* have to conflict with metaphysics, religion, meaning, or specific takes on free will. However, it is a powerful concept to be aware of when we consider the context behind actions. Robert Sapolsky, a fantastic neuroendocrinologist and behavioral biologist uses a wonderful example in an interview wherein he considers the action of a person holding a gun to someone's head. The person has two options, they could pull the trigger, or refrain. What Sapolsky brings to attention is the *incredible* and often unacknowledged quantitative influence there is on his decision based on if the person is *hungry*. I like this for a number of reasons, but mostly because it brings attention to how awareness of these often subconscious influences have very tangible and significant effects on our actions.

In a majority of our lives, we make our actions with the same system as the gunman. We typically fail to notice such subtle psychophysiological pushes, because one must understand a good deal about the brain to both understand and notice certain variables. Perhaps the awareness of this is a sense which can be trained over many years and controlled. I am too young and too uninformed to say.

My Personal Education Profile

(Here is an alternative essay that also contextualizes the decision of the gap year, i'm not a huge fan of it because it feels so 'scripted', but it is here if you want it:  Year Early Explanation, Childishly Formal)

My deepest desire has been, for as long as I have felt awareness, the freedom to pursue the *furthest extent* of my exploration *possible* with my given facilities. This is the case with many passionate, romantic, curious young people; for the sake of

comforting my ego, I like recognizing that I am not special.

As I began to inch my way into the stage of adolescent brain development called ‘individuating’ {*Barrett Academy*}, I found that there was a large disconnect between my desires and that which I was actually able to experience. This is, of course, another inherent feature of the young. Children want cookies, but are unable to have the amount they desire. In the same way, I found interest in sophisticated fields, but was unable to realize any amount of meaningful understanding or experience in them. I grew deeply overwhelmed by explorative thoughts of music theory, epistemology, ontology, physics, mathematics, and chemistry (these interests were entirely separate from the school curriculum, I delve into this later as well)

Unfortunately, there is only so much available time in the evenings between school days, and only so many free moments to explore Wikipedia in class. There is something to be said about the fact that desire ferments when it is repressed; the more that I felt shuttered out of my intellectual exploration by the

context of age, time, and school, the more that the pressure of dissatisfaction grew.

I grew anxious and unsettled from the fact that each meaningful activity in my life felt completely unfinished—or perhaps *unstarted*. This wasn't for a lack of curious or creative energy— every possible waking second was spent with my curious brain firing on every cylinder it had. Having yet the language to articulate the things of the world leads to a *cacophony* of intensely beautiful and complicated thoughts when you are first experiencing them. And it is true, that this was the first time I was 'tasting' much of the world—at least consciously. Personally, I remember experiencing a jarringly rapid transition from the 'physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem' portion of psychological needs to that of the 'cognitive, self-aware, aesthetic, and transcendental'.

There was not nearly enough time in a day, there was not enough detail in my research, there were mounds of unfinished ideas scribbled in journals, and a great deal of tremendously painful

unfinishedness. This was no mild feature of my youth, I was *always* creating or pursuing, and never finishing or arriving. This is a natural characteristic of a young and curious individual. However I grew deeply uncomfortable with my surroundings, because I never felt as if I had been given enough *time* to work out my bearings. I was kept distracted with the cold routine of public school, and clouded by my depression that came from my lack of health. I slept only 6 hours a night when I needed 9, I drank coffee instead of breakfast, and at night I consumed only snacks and dopamine until it was late enough for me to feel guilty and sleep. This was the routine for most of my life, and it did not help my natural inclination towards depression nor my desperate desire to understand what it meant to be a human. I think this is the case for too many people, and too many of them follow this sort of rhythm until their death. In multiple fits of existential crisis, I deemed this path unacceptable for my standards.

Most of my meaningful thinking and experiencing was done in fits of harmful hyperactivity, because they were the only periods of time I felt able to truly think at a respectable volume; these were the times

where I touched the infinite potential of my consciousness for the first time. When you are unavailable to disperse desperate desire for understanding, it becomes concentrated in brief, and dense portions of your life. After these episodes, I fell back into

I was (and continue to be) a young, self-appointed, exotic creature who was (but am no longer) crammed tightly in the cage of a non-optimal context for youth development.

I feel the need to acknowledge a far more disturbing angle of this claim: I am one of the more privileged individuals in the world. I have been provided with more or less ideal socioeconomic status, a perfect childhood, a happy family, an environment for independent growth, and so much more. I need to be clear that I am full of hate for the fact that I am one of the most *ideal* examples of students in public education, and I feel confident in saying that my high school career did not prepare me for a meaningful, successful, or pragmatic future. I think many people take some of the things they *need* from the provided resources of public high school, but there are many

things that could have been provided that would have been much more meaningful, substantial tools than were given.

I must be clear that I am not arguing for the reformation of public high school, because a proposition of this nature implies the presence of a solution. I most *certainly* do not know what the ideal anatomy of meaningful public school looks like. In many, many regards, we have reached a profoundly functional system of education for the resources at hand. For those who have managed to pull off this feat, I thank you. There is something unsavory about young people complaining about “how bad high school is” when they are unable to see the profound influence, benefit, and importance of this system in our society as a whole.

Public education is an equation with no correct answer, and best case scenario is perhaps often quite unremarkable. With this being said, it would make sense to establish what I *am* trying to articulate on this subject.

After all—Should not complaints be paired with solutions, else be it a whine?

Education

“Children shouldn’t be deceived, it [leads] to countless errors and superstitions against which they should be protected from the start, ... then I remembered that... we should treat children as God treats us, and He makes us happiest when He lets us totter along in benign illusions”
—Goethe

“The goal for public education in the 21st century has shifted from providing access to ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education. Many schools are struggling to meet this goal of ensuring a high-quality education for all, and their efforts are complicated by challenges and changes unknown to earlier generations. The reasons why public schools came into being—preparing people for jobs and citizenship, unifying a diverse population, and promoting equity, among others—remain

relevant, even urgent. Public schools reflect our values and influence our future. There are problems with public schools, to be sure. Addressing these problems will require different strategies than in the past and a national will to improve public education.”

–<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606970.pdf>,
page 7, backing from Nancy Kober, editorial
consultant for CEP (Center for Education Policy)

This document aims to articulate the issues with the current failing system of childhood development, why it is a problem, what the crucial elements are for a successful development and career, and what things can be done to greatly improve childhood development. The current education model that is widely practiced* fails to adequately educate and prepare a person for the transition into secondary education and then yet again into the real world. This system has come into place for good reason, and has no solid reason to change any time in the future according to the unfailing tendency of grouped

people to prefer novel issues over gradual issues. Youngness is important, plasticity is Gold.

- [The Functions of a teacher](#)
- [The Aims of Education](#)

I can not express the extent to which reading this series of essays by Bertrand Russell excited me; struck an *already* ringing chord. There is something deeply powerful about reading ideas that you have independently discovered, in the prose of a separate thinker. As a social creature, I am strongly compelled to yell out to Bertrand—to cry, “Yes! Yes! Exactly!!! Look here, I came to the very same conclusions independently! Hail the beautiful camaraderie of human thought!!!”

Alas, he would not hear me. Bertrand is dead, and I am an introvert with no one to meaningfully describe this to except this document. Finding proof that you were not the first to discover an important idea, is bittersweet. As I work to shrink my childhood egocentrism, I find that it is becoming more and more sweet. I discovered a selection of essays by

Russell on the latter end of a few months of deep contemplation and writing. A large section of this writing was dedicated to the very subject which Russell articulates *so completely masterfully*. The expression of my ideas on the same subject was bloated, disorganized, lengthy, and also true.

The issue with being an articulacy-concerned soul in the most passionate time of his life is that the expression of the most important ideas are often lost in translation. When you ask a comic-book nerd about the new biggest Marvel movie, you may find that they are overcome by the vast number of important things they need to express. Thus, they are *jammed* and end up expressing nothing more than a series of non sequiturs, un-cited references, and statements overcome with passion rather than diction. The same happens with me, and many other passionate young people. I should actually acknowledge that I end up expressing much *less* than average because I am so concerned with finding accurate verbal prose. In the same way that my Chrome browser has just enough tabs open so that my computer won't crash, I find that the same is

true with my speaking brain. Each word I consider speaking (before *and* after speaking) is referred through a number of cognitive thesauruses before it is uttered. The brain can only handle so much information at one time, and this often results in a display of garrulous embarrassment.

I bring light to this not because of my deeply buried childish desire of intellectual credit for the subject of these ideas; any reasonable person will understand that these ideas are not difficult to realize, that I have done nothing constructive in my previous efforts other than complaining, and the creative value of ideas is correlated with *how they are expressed*.

I bring light to this rather to *honor* Bertrand Russell for his articulation—his work on this important subject has offered me much intellectual satisfaction, clarity, and relief. With access to the projects of hundreds of thousands of much greater thinkers than myself, I am able to do something meaningful, reach further into the world of the unknown, and better myself. I wish to bring light to the beautiful figure of modern intellectual exploration. I don't hold the necessary

facilities to give justice to many of the ideas which are important to me, so I turn to the inexpressibly powerful tool of unfettered, well-documented, human thought to help me along. Discovering some of this work was an indescribably powerful experience of intellectual inspiration, validation, and justification

Education Continued

It is a common understanding that the time from age 0 to 23 is set aside for a human to develop an understanding of themselves, facets of the world, and themselves* (maybe not... I think it should be). Most often, this development is realized through a form of structured education which aims to provide the necessary ingredients for a functional human being. There is more to be said later about the goals of education, but for now we will consider this to be a generally accepted approach to human development from infancy to adulthood.

I attended public school from age 4 to 18, and was essentially as ideal of a student as I could possibly

be. I was at the top of my class, I participated in extracurriculars, I did what I was supposed to do in the eyes of the school. After less than a year on my own, I have confidently come to the conclusion that I received a highly inadequate education to be a functional human being. This instance of education did not provide me with the necessary elements that I need to be the best person I could be, nor does it for many other individuals (similar *and* different from me. There are a number of reasons why the environment of public school did not provide the necessary substrate for ideal growth. Some of these are bad for all students, and some are worsened by my particular characteristics).

This is not to say that this form of education doesn't play an ultimately beneficial role in many people's lives, or that the current system is entirely dysfunctional. I am not ignorant of the benefit schools play towards certain at-risk demographics. I have witnessed these situations first-hand. In fact, I believe that the current structure of public education which exists today is of such a high caliber* that people from 80 years ago are unable remotely

conceptualize the extent of its efficacy. I believe that the current structure which is in place is more robust, unbiased, and widespread than it has ever been*.

This is not saying much at all however, because we should* be exponentially better at education now than we have been in the past. The degree to which our education systems have remained fossilized versions of early 1900's conveyor belts *astounds* me. This, however, is not the place to outline the numerous specific tragedies of this developmental stagnancy.

I do not believe that entirely adequate education worldwide is possible for the human race*, and I believe it is even less likely that the human race will ever manage to provide adequate education worldwide within our temporal range. I am not proposing an approach to reformation, nor *could I* if I tried. What I hope to bring light to is the vast potential in the unorthodox approach to what I will temporarily call 'breathing education.'

Breathing education is a very homemade, loose, hypothetical adjective for a method of young human development which I believe holds great potential for a specific sector of individuals*. Despite being a vague descriptor, the fundamental idea of this approach is simple: education with breathing time allots a necessary portion of time and resources for *human calibration**.

This conception of young education/development is easily contrasted with the 'Western' flavor of education which is generally built from a foundation of reinforcement theory, learned helplessness, standardization, rigid structure, memorization, and other un-human features. Perhaps this is a harsh overgeneralization. This is simply a natural description of how I would characterize *my schooling* experience. Perhaps it is unfair to postulate that my high school is representative of most western public schools, despite the fact that my school district is fairly quantitatively similar (in terms of test scores, population, general criteria for graduation, logistical structure) to around 120,000 other schools just

within the US.

{<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>}

There is a vast margin of error that must be considered when addressing such a number of fundamentally diverse establishments, which hold great variety even from themselves over time. Even if we disregard these statements on a quantitative scale, *I am confident that there are millions of individuals who have experienced the same developmental deficits that I have as a result from attending a system which can never succeed.* This is undoubtedly a real problem, if not for others, for me. Then again, I am not writing these words to cater to others, but rather as a means to establish satisfactory calibration as a human being in the context of *my* world. I suppose I just needed to get that out of my system.

‘Breathing Education’ looks different for everyone, and it is impractical on a large scale. I am one of the few individuals in the world who have been lucky enough to have this opportunity fall in my lap. I am also lucky to be a *highly* receptive candidate for this

approach of development. I get emotional when I think of all the other 'me's' out there who haven't stumbled across such a stroke of cosmological luck. Not everyone is as absurdly privileged as I am. There are a *lot* of logistics and luck that go into realizing this opportunity. This is its own conversation that I hope to explore later*.

Even already, this time of retreat has allowed me to satisfactorily address a number of critical root issues. As I said, I am a particularly receptive individual when it comes to this approach of independent, free-form, unorthodox development. This is not just because I am independently motivated, highly introverted, and obsessive, but also because I deal with a number of psychological issues like severe depression, anxiety, and personality disorders. These are not issues that fare *remotely* well in an environment such as public school. I can not stress this enough, it is one of the *worst* places to be at risk of mental illness. Even some of those who are statistically, physiologically, and just generally inclined to not be at risk of some of these problems *develop* similar problems due to

the nature of young development in such a place. This form of education has a true potential to stunt critical nodes for proper human development. This is the case for social, psychological, spiritual, physiological, and professional attributes of human life.

Ideal human development requires an incompatible amount of resources, attention, and criteria for what can be found in most of today's world. If we observe human development from conception, there is a tangible ritual of organic *cultivation*—careful, intentional, *human* features which provide opportunity for adequate growth. Earlier on in human life, much of this cultivation can be seen in the world of biology; we see a biological *bond* between a mother and a child. For example, the field of behavioral biology brings light to the presence of increased hormones such as the “trust or attachment hormone” Oxytocin in both mother and child {[oxytocin, mama](#)}. This chemical mechanism influences the mother towards behavior which is likely to protect the offspring. When the mother is likely to protect a child, the child is likely to survive.

When the child is likely to survive, they have a higher chance of developing. Here we should perhaps acknowledge a model of this development as it progresses: [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#).

Using this as a visualization of motivation through natural development, we observe that humans climb the ladder from fundamental needs to elements of growth beyond basic survival. I have witnessed a large number of instances first-hand where students are malnourished, afraid, unsafe, full of self-hatred and sometimes worse. Perhaps it is a sign that something is not entirely right in the current system of development if so many people are moving in *reverse* on this hierarchy of *fundamental* needs.

What's worse is the fact that this regression is happening most during one of the most important defining regions of a human's life. Higher education revolves around the growth sectors of cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualizing needs. Without the underlying features of rudimentary aspects of living, there is no growth in these departments. Often, the attempt to grow in these departments end up being the *cause for regression in more fundamental areas of need*.

The education system obviously benefits many people by simply existing*. Despite this, there is a devastating potential for regression in more *important* departments, and with no meaningful route of escape. I understood that these important departments held significant deficits for me, and that the environment that I was in did not provide the adequate platform for meaningful youthful development.

Having taken action towards what I understand to be a far better system of growth, I have already seen more tangible benefits than what most schools provided me *combined*. I understand that my age and naivete may spark doubt towards this statement, as it makes a lot of sense to assume that I chose to spend a year dedicated to relaxation, simple pleasure, and no development at all. After all, the decision-making portion of my brain is still in its infancy. It becomes a lot easier to [eat the marshmallow](#) when you are given as many bags as you want*. I hope this book helps sway your belief in this idea.

Miscellaneous additions to this realm of thought

David Lynch talks about losing ideas and how it pushes one towards wanting to commit suicide, I think the same goes for missing other ideas which you then may no longer use for your furthering of discourse. To lose a citation is to lose your evidence, and you become a speculative figure rather than a trustworthy one. Because of this, one must be sure to mark their important concepts or provide a walkable path to finding any sentence uttered that backs up a potential observation or phenomenon that may arise in dialogue.

There is something here to be mentioned about the current misunderstanding of the benefit of education, the value of understanding where to and how to find your resources is distinctly more important than having them memorized for offline use. Though it is valuable, *priority should be on highlighting the paths to resources so that you may arrive at them when needed rather than taking them and dragging them*

along with you. This creates a remarkably lean system; it is much easier for a person to carry a bundle of leashes attached to dogs than it is to carry a bunch of dogs.

I think this is an argument to the importance of linguistic arts*, not for English, but for the skill of parallelism and connection. A seasoned 'english' student, or a reader for that matter, has developed a skill with which they learn quicker as they learn more. They have established a mechanism which provides a headstart for learning any new thing. To learn is the most valuable skill, it is like having the superpower of 'having infinite wishes'. To have this skill is to best capitalize on the resources at hand, meaning that one does not have to work harder to provide opportunity and context, but rather make a great deal out of the small things they have at hand. An important and endlessly relevant skill of intellectual versatility.

...

Becoming familiar with the experience of being unfamiliar allows you to learn quicker. One must

learn how to learn; become fluent in not knowing. The unknown often presents itself as fear. Once you have reached a sense of familiarity with fear, one finds that they have found a backdoor into confidence, not necessarily from the new tools at their disposal (though they are helpful), but rather the ability to summon anti-fear, encouraging that which one does not know. By definition, one who is willing to step into a position that most wouldn't because of their unfamiliarity with unfamiliarity.

“A feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities.”

...

“Dogmatists the world over believe that although the truth is known to them, others will be led into false beliefs provided they are allowed to hear the arguments on both sides. This is a view which leads to one or another of two misfortunes: either one set of dogmatists conquers the world and prohibits all new ideas,

or, what is worse, rival dogmatists conquer different regions and preach the gospel of hate against each other, the former of these evils existing in the middle ages, the latter during the wars of religion, and again in the present day. The first makes civilization static, the second tends to destroy it completely. Against both, the teacher should be the main safeguard.”

--Russell

As an 18 year old, I don't feel as if I hold the right to reasonably make a comprehensive statement on dogma in general. From my research and exploration of the implications of dogma writ large, It seems that it can hold* the potential of great danger to young people*. Imposing a set of unquestionable rules early on means, by nature, a restricted perspective on reality. In my romantic youth, I gain the most benefit from unfettered inquiry. Youth is the Greek Enlightenment all over again, for each young curious soul. What better way to maximize the experience and advantage of my neuroplasticity than to study ultimate inquiry from its roots up? It is not a rejection of dogma necessarily, but rather a proclivity

towards fundamental skepticism. If dogma is believing in certainty, I choose (most often) to face the other direction. (I say most often, because if I take full certainty in this motive, wouldn't I be pursuing dogmatic thinking? It smells a bit paradox-y in here...) It seems to me that this is the most rationally sound ideological approach towards growth if my goal is to be the most I can be as a person.

In my oven of youth and as the bread loaf of my brain rises, I choose to slash my dough with a lame so that it may expand to its full potential. In this analogy, we compare dogma to restricting the potential of the dough by not slashing its top. It is one of my greatest fears to misuse this terrifyingly formative time in my life. Bread dough is incredibly touchy; choosing not to proof the dough can mean a ruined loaf. I am making sure to proof my dough with ultimate care.

...

As Bertrand Russell describes, the only on ramp to genuine acceptance of *intellect* (one of the core elements of what education should provide) is to sustain a genuine love of knowledge. There is a difference between curiosity which is motivated by acquisition of ability and connection making, and that of memorization or fear.

This is why I have learned more in the gap year than the whole of high school*. I have found a roundabout way into the same content, just through the more effective pathway. All of the subjects are more or less the same, and I have eaten them up to a greater extent than was ever expected in that environment. This is all because I was motivated by the virtue of meaningful and effective education, real love of knowledge.

You notice, that because of this, even those who are determined to be the “academically helpless” those who are never expected to do more than behave enough for the rest of the class to learn, those who will struggle to meet the paper requirements of education because they simply lack the desire to do this type of work, have their own sources of success

elsewhere. Outside of academics, sometimes fueled by spite, these individuals pursue other crafts, unaware that they are pursuing a genuine love for knowledge— school has failed to foster this, and even the most “helpless” individuals find it for themselves elsewhere. Humans *must* experience this drive for *something*, or else their life is bound to be one of shallow reach.

The fact remains, that at the exact moment in which we are societally expected to begin getting a grasp on things is often where we are most confused and our grip on reality is loosest. This is a brief portion of time through a social, psychological, and biological lens. Therefore, we must designate a great deal of energy to the development of this time period as it is the golden hour in which we can make significant change with insignificant input.

...

Youth is wasted on the young

-Proverbial Quote, Unknown

To watch a young hungry brain filled with curiosity fire on all cylinders with the freedom and breathing-room to do so is one of the greatest beauties of human life.

Hunger is proportional to age on earth, the younger you are, the bigger your eyes are in proportion to your stomach. The less time your taste buds have had to get used to the flavor of being; doing learning, learning of doing, learning of being and learning of learning, etc.

Imagine the well seasoned veteran of literature in his old age, filled to the brim with most of the ideas of the world, which he is now quite familiar with multiple times over. He has witnessed such groundbreaking ideas an amount of times that they retain significance and importance of intellectual value, but are now scarce in youthful, raw vigor—hunger and excitement and adrenaline from the novel sensation of newness.

Imagine being an individual receptive to the beauty of the most important ideas of humanity, and then having the blessing of knowing none of them. It is the sensation of coming across a pile of money for the taking, a farmer coming across unclaimed fertile land, a painter who has just learned of colors. With the voracious passion of intellectual hunger, a curious young person with the freedom to do so, is able to look upon a feast of the most desirable subjects in the world piled upon a long and creaking table, and eat without getting full. In fact, the more that this person eats, the hungrier they get. The circumference of the ripple of intellect grows with the surface area it covers on the surface of knowledge.

...

As I reach the end of this section, I realize I have written far too much on this subject to meaningfully share, and am likely better off leaving you with some quotes on education by Russell. I strongly encourage you to read these essays; here are some excerpts regardless:

“Teachers are more than any other class the guardians of civilization. They should be intimately aware of what civilization is, and desirous of imparting a civilized attitude to their pupils. We are thus brought to the question: what constitutes a civilized community?”

This question would commonly be answered by pointing to merely material tests. A country is civilized if it has much machinery, many motor cars, many bathrooms, and a great deal of rapid locomotion. To these things, in my opinion, most modern men attach much too much importance. Civilization in the more important sense, is a thing of the mind, not of the material adjuncts to the physical side of living. It is a matter partly of knowledge, partly of emotion. So far as knowledge is concerned, a man should be aware of the minuteness of himself and his immediate environment in relation to the world in space and time. He should see his own country not only as a home, but as one among the countries of the world, all with an equal right to

live and think and feel. He should see his own age in relation to the past and the future, and be aware that its own controversies will seem as strange to future ages as those of the past seem to us now. Taking an even wider view, he should be conscious of the vastness of geological epochs and astronomical abysses; but he should be aware of this, not as a weight to crush the individual human spirit, but as a vast panorama which enlarges the mind that contemplates it.

...

‘On the side of emotions, a very similar enlargement from the purely personal is needed if a man is to be truly civilized. Men pass from birth to death, sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy; sometimes generous, sometimes grasping and petty; sometimes heroic, sometimes cowardly and servile. To the man who views the procession as a whole, certain things stand out as worthy of admiration. Some men have been inspired by love of mankind;

some by supreme intellect have helped us to understand the world in which we live; and some by exceptional sensitiveness have created beauty... These men have done what lay in their power to make human life a better thing than the brief turbulence of savages. The civilized man, where he cannot admire, will aim rather at understanding than at reprobating. He will seek rather to discover and remove the impersonal causes of evil than to hate the men who are in its grip."

Let's recognize some of the logistics of this exploration*.

What did my day to day activity look like? What was my academic approach? How did I implement structure and intentionality over time?

Academic and Practical

This academic exploration was independently/curiosity driven. I had a number of topics I wanted to deeply explore, and I explored them. These subjects are listed in the syllabus below. The resources I used to explore these subjects were somewhat balanced between video lectures (OpenCourseWare—Behavioral Biology, Physics, Minimal mathematics), online publications (In order of traffic: ScienceDirect, SSRN, ResearchGate, PubMedCentral (NIH), Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, OpenCourseWareMIT, KhanAcademy, JSTOR, AmericanPsychologyOrg, etc.) and physical publications/textbooks/books from the Crawfordsville Public Library. Included in the syllabus is my official reading and lecture list. This syllabus fails to sufficiently cover the comprehensive and diverse span of my exploration, but it represents the skeleton.

Syllabus

Because none of this is verified by an authoritative institution, I hesitate to even include this type of stuff. I have anyway, and I hope that if my honor is not

reputable, the writing counts for something. In terms of literature, I have explored some of the texts I understand to be accessible and important to science, philosophy, and history. Most of my time spent in 'actual philosophical texts' was with the works of Bertrand Russell and Neitzche. These are two very different thinkers and writers, and I love them both equally.

The problem with much of the intellectual tradition of western philosophy is that some of the most *basic* and *important* stuff is *incredibly difficult to read*.

People like Kant, Husserl, and Wittgenstien are (I assume) completely out of my intellectual capacity; in other words, I wouldn't be playing my cards right by diving into a rigorous study of Kant's work right now. I am trying to dial in my understanding of the *macro*, and work my way inwards. I have realized after the fact that it might have been good to dedicate this time to an official and thorough reading of Plato, but I have instead scanned the surface of most of the important figures. From this haphazard knit of studies, I feel as if I have greatly expanded

my understanding of large-scale historical/intellectual patterns.

Because so much of this literature is outside of my current capabilities or expedience, I found that *summaries, analyses, and synopses* were incredibly useful. In this format, I was able to absorb the main ideas and influence of the *entirety* of an author's work without actually reading it. Obviously, this does not earn me a sufficiently intimate education of these works, but it quickly accelerates the speed at which I can apprehend large-scale themes and patterns. For example, here is a list of texts (that I haven't officially read) which I feel I can confidently summarize the intentions and themes of; Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Goethe's *Faust*, Kierkegaard's *Either Or*, Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Pascal's *Pensses*, Aurelius's *Meditations*, and more. With the main themes of these important works articulated through oration, I am able to assign a loose understanding of the thinker to their ideas, and therefore the thinker to the larger intellectual tradition of the west. This is not to say that I don't intend on reading these works in

the future, but that there is such a thing as education without complete devotion. My intellectual eggs are in many educational baskets—when I am young, this seems to help me see a bigger picture.

I am certain that I have learned a number of in depth subjects which I would not have in high school (to the same degree or at all) and instead of telling you that “I studied”, I think it is best that I use the things I learned for synthesis. This synthesis exists in this text.

Interdisciplinary Subjects which I consider myself fairly informed on out of my own interest and own time:

- Photography
- Psychotherapy/Psychopharmacology (No I am not endorsing hard drugs, My interest in this field appeared from the overlapping realms of neuroscience, biochemistry and the incredible potential for a medicinal renaissance. There is

much to be discussed here, so please don't stigmatize)

- Specialty Coffee
 - Music Theory
 - Physics
 - Industrial/Visual Design; history/theory (?)
 - Small business ownership (...? if this counts?)
- This is turning into a list of hobbies...)

Academic Subjects which I have had strong focus on during this gap year, in order of significance:

- Western Philosophy
- Psychology
- Neuroscience
- Important Literature* (A *selection* of important literary works with fairly in-depth study. I can't read all the important books, but I can play my cards wisely. See below for my reading list)
- Behavioral Biology
- Biochemistry (through the lens of psychopharmacology)
- Physics

Gap-Year Reading list

- Animal farm
- Fahrenheit 451
- 1984
- Travels with Charlie
- The Beak of the finch
- Awakenings
- Cognition
- The sorrows of young Werther (Goethe)
- The Man Who mistook His wife for a hat
- The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell
- Walden
- Felix Ever After

Actively Reading (picking up and putting down; have read 25-50%)

- Beyond Good and Evil (Kauffman Translation)
- The Gay Science (Common Translation)
- The Birth of Tragedy, and the Case of Wagner (Kauffman Translation)
- Galileo's Finger
- The Four-Hour Work Week
- Musicophilia

Western Philosophy/Literature Lectures (Listed below in no particular order are the lectures I have watched at least 3 times and taken notes on) : The Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition and Great Books Princeton Lecture Series by Dr. Michael Sugrue and Dr. Darren Staloff

- Marcus Aurelius' Meditations: The Stoic Ideal
- Great Minds - Part 1 - Plato's Republic I: Justice, Power, and Knowledge
- Great Minds - Part 1 - Plato's Republic II-V: Soul and City
- Bergson's Elan Vital and Vitalism
- Husserl: Phenomenology and the Life World
- Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Post-structuralism
- Great Authors - Romantic Literature - Goethe, The Sorrows of Young Werther
- The Bible and Western Culture - Nietzsche and the Death of God
- Great Minds - Introduction to the Problems and Scope of Philosophy

- Great Authors - Neoclassical and Romantic Literature - Goethe, Faust
- Kant's Moral Philosophy
- Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity: The Genealogy of Morals
- Great Authors - Literature of the Renaissance - Pascal, Penses
- Great Minds - Part 4 - Hegel: The Phenomenology of Geist
- Hegel's Philosophy of History
- Dr. Darren Staloff, Spinoza's Ethics
- The Bible and Western Culture - Kierkegaard's Leap of Faith
- Kierkegaard's Christian Existentialism
- Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Idea
- The Frankfurt School
- Machiavelli
- Freud and Philosophy
- Dr. Darren Staloff, Nietzsche's Perspectivalism and Critique of Philosophy
- Heidegger: Being and Time
- Great Minds - Part 5 - The Latter Wittgenstein: The Philosophy of Language

- Conclusion: Reviewing the Western Tradition (Part 1)
- Conclusion: Reviewing the Western Tradition (Part 2)

Less Academic

As well as academic progress, much development happened in departments like physical/mental health, professional exploration, and practical skill-sets. Here is a list of bullet points that articulate some areas of intentional, structured growth;

- **Habitual, Biological, Disciplinary**
 - I earned an organic relationship to discipline
 - I observed my own tendencies in a neutral environment
 - I organically bettered my health out of my own interest
 - I had the ability to truly focus on one important task

- I became familiar with advanced meditation/yoga

- **Academic and Cognitive**

- I learned how to research in depth, read difficult texts
- I greatly advanced my ability to synthesize and write
- I learned methodological approaches based in reason and logic
- I had the ability to truly focus on one important task

- **Socioemotional**

- I discovered a better sense of identity and perspective of self
- I developed a better sense of position in nature using philosophy
- I examined and learned not just how to *cope* with my emotions, but *so/ve* them
- I had the ability to designate my energy in one direction
- I was free from social anxiety which allowed for important social deconstruction and reformation

- **Technical**

- Music/Sound Production (DAW work with Logic Pro X)
- Video Production
- Entrepreneurship (Photography business)
- Online Business management (Depop Resale business)
- Very basic Full Stack Website development (Html and CSS)
- Graphic design (Adobe Illustrator)

Self Characteristics I have discovered

- I am extremely sensitive to spaces, and their influence on me. The *physical* environment of school is *painful* to me in a way that I struggle to articulate sufficiently
- I am very independently driven; I best subscribe to a form of learning which is fueled by organic methodological *interest*. School was driven by socioemotional ‘reward’ or ‘punishment’.
- I am extremely sensitive to social atmospheres: I am vastly and incomparably better at learning, producing, and focusing when I am entirely

isolated in my own designated space. This focus is fragile, yet effective when it is nourished.

There is an element of thought-translation which is necessary in social spheres, which doesn't exist in isolation.

- I violently ebb and flow in my productivity*. I am unsure and indifferent to whether this should be clinically labeled as 'mania'. Regardless, it's an important pattern of my being which I have familiarized myself with.

Habits I Started

- Diet has gotten significantly less processed and more macro-based after learning more about nutrition and behavior
- I drink a lot of water; it turns out the body really values water
- I meditate daily; this has tripled the goodness and effectivity of my days
- I read a physical book daily
- I do yoga at least weekly; I also learned how to properly breathe. It turns out this is significant

- ‘If it takes 5 minutes, do it now’; spaces are much cleaner now
- No coffee past 3 PM
- No screens the first and last hour of the waking day
- Keep lists; always make a list at the start or end of the day (do longer term planning on Mondays)
- Physical activity; the brain and body really likes this
- No more than 3 hours of daily screen time; google documents on the computer doesn’t count
- Watch a movie every week*; consuming good art is good for you
- Make something every day
- Clean something every day

Some General Helpful Wisdom I have discovered throughout this process

- Nothing makes sense, don’t kid yourself; Confusion is King
- Realize the philosophy of perspectivism in full, and you will be a lot less distressed

- Every second you are moving closer to your death; this can be motivating or horrifying, you choose
- There will always be someone unimaginably more competent than you
- If you can't control something, being upset about it is unhelpful and irrational
- You *can* change and control your mind, but you must first play by its rules
- Cleanliness and order of your mental and physical habitat is vital for success
- I do not know what I do not know
- Your future self will probably regret your actions now; keep this in mind
- Pursuing a form of success defined by someone other than you is ontologically irrational
- Your pain is always bearable*, and if it isn't, you'll be dead—it won't matter. Be wise in avoiding or inviting pain*
- Don't overcomplicate it
- Your mind speaks in habit
- Pleasure is contextual
- Context is everything
- Time moves much faster than it seems

- You are what you eat
- You are designed for *biological* success
- Comparison is the thief of joy
- Boredom is the root of all evil
- Cowardice is the root of all evil
- Consciousness is fluid and generally solipsistic
- Education is the biggest social problem
- We are learning how to die
- Organization is not inauthentic nor inorganic
- It is often better to say nothing than something
- We can't answer some questions
- Our language determines our discourse
- My world is different from those around me
- My perception* is a weak representation of reality
- I believe that I know nothing
- To *know thyself* is a reasonable endeavor
- Success requires discipline
- It is useful to follow principles but rarely doctrine
- You are significantly insignificant
- Human Nature tends to follow the law of least effort
- Contradiction is King

The brain as the basis

First and foremost, I must recognize that I can not experience anything without my brain, and my brain has a specific way of experiencing the world.

There is something beautiful and terrifying that a single organ which my body carries with me at all times is responsible for my entire awareness and therefore recognition of an entire universe. With no brain, there very may well be a universe—but there very well may not be. I am not here to argue this. What I do know, is that there is one small bottleneck between the entire presence of literally everything that ever was, is and will be, and my experience and awareness of it. By nature, there is no way that I may consider anything other than myself as the first course of action. I am hardwired to be thinking about myself, and should—as it is the only way I am capable of even being any help to others. This is not an argument towards egotism, in fact it is the opposite. Understanding the limits and fundamental nature of your biological and conceptual self leaves

no room for ego, and it dies*. I have obviously not completely understood the limits of myself yet, and I think few people ever do. This is all to say that there is one facet of my existence which inherently is and should be the initial focus of my energies. My brain. Essentially, I have one variable to consider which influences my entire universe. I have one soldier to attack to win the war of my human experience. Yet, a single bullet can shatter this bottleneck faster than I can blink.

The awareness of both of these things motivates me and brings me to clarity and peace— a place where I can work. This is not to say that I should close myself off in a room and just think, but then consider what things allow the brain to be. Without an ideal diet, my brain will not function as well as it could function. People think of it as maintenance of a machine— I think it is more accurate to think of it as keeping the clay moist as you sculpt. It is not a predisposed mechanism, it is changing significantly by the second. It is a constant creation and destroying— therefore you must be attentive to the responsiveness of specific actions. It is not a

machine where you dump into it and have a guaranteed outcome. The brain is a volatile and warm clay, spinning fast on the wheel, susceptible to catastrophic collapse at any second. With an attentive potter, the system may continue to develop. Elsewise, entropy will take hold. Whether you believe in free will or not, I may argue that this is an unavoidable facet of *human health*- psychology, basic health, cognition, habit.

What should I DO between points A and Z? Point A: the present moment, Point Z: Death

Here's an idea I want to explore: The life I am currently living, the things which I think I know, my sense of the world around me, the beliefs which are embedded into my psyche, the memories, the feelings, the cognition, every intimacy and familiarity of my reality is unique*. This is true for every person, and it always has been*.

It is from this perspective, paired with the powers of skepticism, that one begins to realize the scale of *newness* and thus *uncertainty* through which we continually swim. In other words, I know very close to nothing. I hardly even know this. The very 'banalities' that we constantly apprehend; time, space, consciousness, mood, self, and reality, are actually quite confusing when you try to familiarize yourself with them. I was born into this world, as we all were. I grew and I learned, and I continue to grow and learn. I will do this until the inevitable moment of my death. Through this span of time, I will experience some iteration of a human life.

This is common knowledge, but something which is rare to hear explicitly discussed*. To bring up death in conversation is to bring attention to an ugly thing which most people would prefer to dance around, despite its *eminent relevancy*. (Perhaps this is far too general a statement, it is actually pretty common for entire cultures to revolve around the passage of life and death. I suppose my bubble of morbid discussion is just too small for my liking).

I know* (excuse me if I use this word for the sake of speech) this axiom (of life leading to death) to be the case; I am living, and I have some time* before I die*. What exists between these two moments, the present and my last breath, is *potential*. In other words, there are a given number of things that I might experience, do, create, destroy, etc. The stuff of the world is available to my paws in the space precisely between *this moment, and the moment I die*.

What this leads me to wonder is the following question; what the hell should I do with this potential?

How should I approach this contradictory, divine, absurd, chaotic, spatio-temporal awareness that is me, here, now? Particularly, how do I definitively judge which things are correct, when everything is uncertain? How do I live a life of *true virtue*, when the definition of *true virtue* changes between every single person I speak to? What a strange, experimental display... I feel like we are all actors in a play that hasn't been written... feigning our

confidence in little charades so we can wring some comfort out of our daily activity; getting lost in this, and ignoring the profound beauty of a life *enhanced* by the certainty of death. I would rather not get caught off guard by death, I would rather accept it confidently. A new problem is introduced when we consider this next variable; I don't know when I will die. I could die within the minute because the trajectory of an unlucky meteorite. I could die tomorrow in a car accident. I could die in a year from an unlucky decision. I could die in 10 years from a random heart attack. I could die from natural causes* at age 102. The likelihood of each of these deaths occurring vary in mathematical probability, but they are effectively equivalent to my knowledge; in other words, I don't know the exact probability of any of these deaths occurring, so they can be thought of as all equally likely*. If we recall something from earlier, I don't want to be caught off guard by death. Thus, I must be ready for death at any given moment*. To be ready for death at any given moment, we need to radically change some things. It seems appropriate that I should recognize this quote by Emil Cioran;

“Man accepts death but not the hour of his death. To die any time, except when one has to die!”

Though we will explore this in greater detail later, humans are very good at avoiding death (See *Memento* in [biological success](#)) . Because of the depth to which this hardwiring runs in our behavior, there is significant work to be done to overcome this. Again, however, (and more importantly) there is *much* more to be said about the philosophical angles here; the *intention* of our relationship to death is our first priority.

“I must be ready for death at any given moment”.

This does not mean that I encourage, advocate, pursue, or wish to die, but that I ought to realize the constant possibility of this happening. This does not invoke fear, nihilism, sadness, or tiredness, but a ravenous appreciation for life. I do not have time to see all of the amazing things in life, thus I ought to find joy in the banalities as well. I will explore this more later on.

Obviously, this is not nearly enough to resolve this aching curiosity; I still feel like there are too many ways to go about this life to confidently go in any direction... I feel as though everything is up for question, even the act of questioning... I often feel as though I can not listen* to one person without ignoring others... I feel as though there is a question: “What *is all* of this, and what *ought* I do with it?”

I would argue that this is one of the most fundamental ‘questions’ a human might ask*. It has everything to do with everything, and no one yet has a definitive answer or verification that this is even ‘worth’ asking.

It is difficult to think about these things. This realm of thought gets very scary, very quickly. Once I started exploring this realm of thought, I realized it was difficult to get out of. It is more comfortable to ignore this realm of thought. It is easier to ignore this realm of thought. It is a blessing and a curse to be concerned with this realm of thought. It is challenging to examine questions that might not

have answers. It is a blessing and a curse to be conscious. As far as we know, rocks don't have to deal with the discomfort of these things like we do.

In my experience, most people* tend to ignore or distract themselves from this realm of thought in various ways. Let's look at why, how, and what that means for us.

Distraction By Distraction From Distraction

I've built an unsavory reputation for being the guy who talks too much about absurdity, death, philosophy, romantic literature, infinitudes, and uncertainties. This type of person is not fun to be around* in the normal wavelengths of life.

Sometimes, grocery shopping is best paired with silence rather than existential rapture.

Part of me wants to apologize for all the times where I have inadequately read the room and judged it a time for incoherent, passionate, existential rambling.

That part of me says sorry. The other part of me needs to give justice to these things because they are real. Yes, it is not ideal for me to point out that “you are going to die, and I am going to die—and in the span of the universe, this will occur very quickly” when you ask me to pay rent. I am not ignoring this. Rather, I am attempting to satiate my particularly introspective passions with the outlet of writing; this is the time for this often harsh, macabre, realistic, romantic, melodramatic, dramatic, youthful, imprudent, and unpleasant dialogue.

With that being said, let's talk about death, and how humans love not to think about it.

Ernest Becker, the denial of death

Partially to remove the spotlight of existential dread and melodrama from myself, and partially because he is more cohesive than I could ever wish to be, I am going to examine the ideas of Ernest Becker; particularly his book *The Denial of Death*. In this book, Becker develops a theory of sociocultural

development with a focus on *death* as the driving catalyst. This is another example where I feel as though I am only regurgitating other's ideas. Every bit of credit where it is due (To both Becker and Sisyphus⁵⁵, the guy who initially informed me), I just needed to get these ideas on paper in the best way I could; this particular excerpt is just so darn good that I couldn't bear to ruin it with my own syntax.

Humans don't tend to embrace the natural state of living; we build houses, we bask in air conditioning, we sterilize our food, we cover our bodies and blemishes, we separate our feet from the ground with shoes, we like to see our food to come from a box rather than the bloody body of prey, etc. We prefer not to live in a state of survival and death, but often one of abstract and arbitrary construction: art, entertainment, clothing, structure, judgment, rules, etc.

"If anything, we have spent a great deal of our history avoiding the anarchic state of nature, building laws, institutions and a supply chain so as to never have to really worry about our own

needs. Nonetheless the threat of death can never be truly extinguished”

–Sisyphus 55

And yet, when we follow the journey of these human-made rituals designed to avoid the natural lifespan, we can not avoid death. We often forget how easy it is to die; 1.35 million people die every year from car accidents. Cancer can strike a healthy individual with little to no provocation. We regularly shove food down the only passageway responsible for our intake of oxygen, without considering asphyxiation.

Even the most healthy human, the luckiest human, the strongest human, the smartest human, the greatest human will die* (for anyone reading this in the future when/if death has been avoided*, I acknowledge you).

“The terror of death is universal and present across all cultures. This carries with it some evolutionary logic; in primitive times those most scared of death were the most realistic about

their precarious situation in nature and thus were more likely to survive the result would be a higher chance that their genes would be passed on. Thanks to our hypochondriac ancestors, we now have ‘a hyper-anxious animal who constantly invents reasons for anxiety even where there is none’”

-Becker and Sisyphus 55

And yet, as Becker also explains,

“We live in a creation in which the routine activity for organisms is tearing others apart with teeth of all types—biting, grinding flesh, plant stalks, bones between molars, pushing the pulp greedily down the gullet with delight, incorporating its essence into one’s own organization, and then excreting with foul stench and gasses the residue.”

And yet, we are certainly more than mushy, smelly, machines which consume and excrete. We are conscious creators, observers, artists, appreciators,

destroyers, mothers, sons, families, theists, legends, and philosophers. Becker explains it perfectly:

“Man has a symbolic identity that brings him sharply out of nature, he is a symbolic self, a creature with a name, a life history... this immense expansion, this dexterity... gives to man literally the status of a small god in nature...yet at the same time, as the Eastern sages also knew, man is a worm and food for worms. This is the paradox; he is out of nature and hopelessly in it”

This is the paradox. What do we make of it? How do we move forward?

“Not everybody can be a hero and to deny my idea of what will make me immortal is horrid; either I'm right and you're wrong, or I'm destined to become worm food and that's that... It just makes you shudder out of fear and confusion doesn't it...”

We transcend ourselves only to realize we are mortal animals. Doesn't this guarantee madness? Kierkegaard and Becker want us to push through this madness. The school of anxiety that will destroy our vital lie of character completely, the self-defense mechanism against our existential dread, must be entirely disposed of. Only then can it see beyond death.

And what is beyond death?

Kierkegaard answers to infinitude to absolute transcendence to the ultimate power of creation which made finite creatures. You open yourself up to the world in all its beauty and ugliness

despite one's true insignificance weakness death one's existence has meaning in some ultimate sense because it exists within an eternal and infinite scheme of things brought about and maintained to some kind of design by some creative forces

this isn't an appeal to a god it's an appeal to the fact that anything exists at all and that it continues to exist and that you're a part of it

The invisible mystery at the heart of every creature now attains cosmic significance by affirming its connection with the invisible mystery at the heart of creation. this is the meaning of faith

you aren't this isolated unit that needs to prove to the world that you're actually a god—that you actually matter. You already do. Your uniqueness and potentialities and creative urges contribute to this crazy eternal world”

...

Again, It seems to me that these are important questions, if not *the most important* questions to consider. And yet, as we explored before, this doesn't *win* an argument where the opponent isn't listening. With *reason*, I am arguing that we should

be ultimately concerned with these questions. With *action*, I could just ignore this, watch TV, and eat Doritos. The latter is more likely to win out*, because our biology tends to prefer that type of short-term activity.

And yet here I am, pushing against this tendency, because the life of TV and Doritos led me towards horrible discomfort *over time*. My frontal cortex (which is large compared to most other species of organisms) allows me the privilege of valuing something *other* than this short-term behavior.

As we have explored before, I am looking for a state of authenticity. It seems to me that this state will not be realized if I am ignorant of this inevitability/paradox/contradiction.

I struggle to accept the notion that I might live a life where I will love, hate, hurt, destroy, create, observe, ignore, and interpret this experience *on an untrue basis*. Let me examine a visual that might help explicate this point;

Arbitrary Robots

Let's imagine a human born into the world by robots. The human was raised by robots from an infant to an adult. The robots are weaker than the human, and can not move. Because the human can do things that the robots can not, the robots tell the human that he is destined to mine rock all day, every day, until he dies. The human could do two things with his life:

One, he could listen to the robots, and mine rock until he dies.

Two, the human could inquire about the robots, himself, and his position in the world.

Through the latter inquiry, he learned that he has no solid obligation to mine rock other than the arbitrary word of the robot. The robots have no authority to define his livelihood, and can not stop him if he chooses to leave. Because of this, the human leaves his arbitrary life, and lives a life of learning, loving, creating, exploring, etc. The human lives a life of

greater knowledge, experience, and action than he would have if he stayed, unquestioning, with the robots.

The human was expected to accept his position without questioning. The life of the human was defined by arbitrary limits. By choosing to examine his position, to question that which he understands to be commonplace and intuitively familiar, the human avoided a life of pain, shallowness, and stagnancy.

The act of learning one's surroundings, the act of understanding one's self and the system in which it exists, has the potential to save, transform, transcend, and *fulfill* the potential of a life. I fear that if I accept that which is put under my nose with no questioning, I might be missing a better alternative. In this pursuit, I am chasing both wisdom and the definition of wisdom; the soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment.

I do not know if there is an 'objectively wise life' to be lived in the first place. But, I know* that there is a

span of time between now and when I die. It is my goal to most fully implement my potential for wisdom.

Where to start

To pursue anything, one must start somewhere. I have started with organization* and definition*. Understanding the human experience is a difficult task. I do not believe I will sufficiently succeed at this task, but I am *aiming* to do the best I can. To navigate this daunting task, I have first chosen to *define my variables*. In other words, I am taking the things of this life, and doing my best to examine their particular natures. With a better understanding of what this life is composed of, I am better equipped to act on it.

If I were immortal, I would be more lenient on my approach towards this pursuit, because I would acquire all the necessary knowledge within a satisfactory time-frame—forever. Unfortunately, I only

have about 60 years if I live to the age of the average American. Right now, my brain is about as fertile and plastic as it will be, so I am spending most of my energy figuring out some of these big questions. With such a short amount of time, and with factoring in the flaws of human behavior, I have a frighteningly little time to figure 'everything' out. And so, I should be somewhat organized in my approach if I hope to maximize my efforts. In other words, I am going to *offensively and systematically* inquire about things, rather than passively absorbing information, because the former is more likely to lead to a *maximal* quality and quantity of wisdom. It is important to clarify that this is a pursuit of *wisdom* not knowledge. In other words, I am pursuing a maximally *lived* life, rather than a life most known. It seems to me that wisdom requires action, failure, experience, and interaction *in tandem* with knowledge.

At this moment in my life, when I am most receptive to learning, I have designated my energy towards asking and answering questions. I am similar to a baby who puts everything in their mouth, I am

desperately and passionately trying to understand everything around me. This is a time that prioritizes inquiry, contemplation, exploration, education, deconstruction, familiarization, etc. Later on in this text, I consider the case of the theoretical 'reading man', who has only ever read books about everything. This man does not experience the world, he only knows about it. This man has a deficiency, and is not living the holistic life of the wise man*. Right now, I am that man. I have effectively locked myself up to ravenously consume ideas and knowledge. I have organized* this knowledge through the medium of writing. This is not to say that this writing is an organized representation of the things I know; this would be very misleading. This text is the vessel for contemplation, meditation, exploration. Writing, for me, has been a form of thought— a way to tangibly represent the material of confusion, and to bring something more certain out of it. This text is a mess, but it is important.

Coarse Intentions

“Camus recommends living as much as possible rather than as good as possible for the latter is restrictive of our freedom and relies on a relative conception of good”

-Sysiphus55

My goal in life is, to the best of my abilities, make some sense of the universal and human condition and act according to this understanding . It seems unlikely that I will be able to transcend in the way part of me wants; I will never be completely* what I want to be, I will always want something more, I will always not know *something*. My goal, however, is to get as close as I possibly can to this margin. To do this, I will not change my efforts to achieve the goal, but change the goal itself. In other words, If my standards of success are more realistic, I am more likely to achieve them.


I am putting this amount of energy into this project for a reason. I conceive of two potential selves: one version of me chooses not to utilize his passionate

energy and exists in a confused stupor for the rest of his life. The other is passionately spurred into thorough action by the notion that he may very well exist only once in the history of the universe*.

(*Science has yet to determine conclusively whether there are multiple universes, or if reincarnation is a thing, so I choose to not hold them out of the question unless proven untrue)

The latter chooses to pursue a clear goal to attempt to satiate what he understands to be a strong desire in him to *know* what all this is about, and to make *something* out of it.

The former scares the heck out of me.

Here is why* ( Ignorance/Cognitive bias)

When you learn or experience something new, you are (in theory) the most knowledgeable and experienced as you have ever been. Humans push forward on this spectrum of knowledge or experience at different degrees and in different directions. Each has a different attitude about the whole process, each is pushing in a direction that

has never been explored in the history of the universe.

With this in mind, let's consider the fact that everyone exists at different points on the spectrum. The range of difference between knowledge and experience between people is often *vast*. It has the *potential* to be even *more vast*.

Let's observe two hypothetical people at different points on the spectrum:

—

Our first person is a professor of 6 years at Harvard university, teaching something along the lines of Anthropological Neuroscience or something. Other than social anxiety, this person deals with no diagnosed mental disorders. He takes Propranolol before big lectures. He is 39 years of age.

...

Our other person is an employee at a Sunoco gas station in Northwest Arkansas, and he works at the cash register. This person was vaguely diagnosed as being on the Autistic

spectrum when he was 13, but has not received any related clinical care since the time he was in a car crash that was caused by an episode of overstimulation from the radio volume.

Sometimes, his aunt gives him vodka to quiet him down. He has not had formal education past his freshman year of high school. He is 39 years of age.

—

Here, we see people who have been born into different socioeconomic atmospheres, who deal with relatively similar people to themselves in their respective socioeconomic strata, and have grown to have a very different set of career opportunities, cognitive freedom, social status, intellectual reach, and all sorts of other things. If we were to follow both of these people throughout their average day, very few activities would look the same.

I'm choosing not to approach the quantification of how these lives are different because I feel it removes the vital sensation of *human experience* and *value* which is necessary for this observation*.

The fact is, if their consciousnesses were to swap for a day, the experience would be utterly foreign and terrifying for either party. For the sake of this thought, we are focusing on the *qualitative* feature of these people's existence in relation to their position on the spectrum.

I imagine that if the professor were to thoroughly examine and contemplate the life of the gas station clerk, he may be overwhelmed with a wave of emotional thought*.

(Keep in mind, that these thoughts are not necessarily of pity. Pitying others *exclusively* because of their existential position can lead to a false sentiment of superiority* Nietzsche may argue that the professor is innately superior to the clerk, because he is quantitatively more educated and capable of more advanced things. However, I find that this view does not cooperate with the contemporary world for a number of reasons. In this discussion, I hold the stance that the "value" of a person is not directly correlated to the qualitative features of a life, eg; IQ, accomplishment, job status,

monetary status. Just felt that I needed to clear that up because talking about superiority leads to some potentially volatile discussion if not done thoroughly)

The professor may experience a sense of poignancy and thankfulness for the numerous opportunities he has been given just by birth, he may gain perspective on the intention of his career, he may choose to act differently in social interactions.

He also does not wish to be the clerk, for he has seen the *power*, *profundity*, and the *sanctity* in advanced intellectual inquiry. The notion of living a life *without* this sense of furthered awareness, is to live a life compromised from what you understand the universe to be. In other words, the idea of losing knowledge is scary. (We encounter this also with degenerative brain diseases and the elderly). To have your knowledge removed is a morbid notion*, and it feels to me like a form of death.

With this in mind, we naturally must think *forward*, and with a mindset focused on *potential*. If I am young and there are others that know more than me,

then I am comparable to the clerk in the eyes of the professor. I acknowledge that I am still in the first few chapters in my development as a human. I

recognize that I will probably see these very words as a childish attempt at making something profound. I am attempting to develop my sense of *potential* so that I may effectively reach it. If I step away from my sense of time and my sense of self, I understand that I am a *compromised* and *incomplete* version of my potential self.

In this sense, to not pursue my *most* complete self is to accept intellectual death.

I find this to be a powerful idea for this reason: as biological creatures, we typically avoid death to the absolute best of our abilities, we are fundamentally *built* to defy death. With this in mind, what better motivation is there to pursue my goals? If failing to achieve my goal is conceptually equal to death, I am exploiting my *wiring* to succeed. Instead of flexing the universe to my standards, I attempt to flex *myself* to be most effective.

Now that we have conceptually legitimized the necessity to pursue a complete version of myself, we should define our next steps.

The game plan for our game plan:

- Define desires and goals
- Define my handicaps and how to combat them
- Devise a general understanding of 'the game'
- Define necessary action

Step one: desires and goals. It can be fatal if I do this incorrectly, so I should probably be intentional.

Desires and Goals

I wish to be as separate from bias* ('bias' requires its own special essay) as my facilities allow*

I wish to be as effective and lean as I can be*

I wish to best understand my position in the universe

I wish to best understand the nature of the universe

I wish to understand my self

I wish to create things which are diverse and meaningful

I wish to appreciate things which are diverse and meaningful and not meaningful

I wish to live in accordance with nature*

I wish to be in power over myself

I wish to hold an orderly conscience; clarity of mind and cognition

I wish to best understand morality* so I may act in accordance to virtue*

These effectively sum up into: *I wish to be as much as I have the potential to be*

(for the sake of discussion, I often end up calling this “being the most I can be”)

Influence, Youth, Bases

The name of the game is to choose *what is wisest to be influenced by*; it is not a matter of “whether we are influenced”, we are nothing *but* influence. We are born *from* influence *into* influence. The motion of

the cosmos is X influencing Y. We are *literally* what we eat. We will talk more about this later.

So, with the rational facilities I seem to hold—the most authentic part of myself—wouldn't it make the most sense to pursue that which is most wise? To find the honorable features of humanity and steep in it? For now is the moment where my *self* is stained with what I do. Neuroplasticity, cognitive development, and youth are no joke when it comes to life over time. My life defines much of its structure here and now; it is not unchangeable, but deeply rooted. What more logical thing as a young person to pursue than to spend your time studying that which your elders *wish* they did, or *glad* they did, or *ought* to have done? Now is not the time for pursuing shallow pleasures, however new and available they may be in the petri dish of youth. This is the time where my actions influence my life the most, the water in the clay, the foundation for the building, the gesso for the canvas.

I feel as though I may only get one life on Earth, the gamble is too high to risk failure, not making the

most out of it, not milking the human experience to the greatest extent I can. This fierce desire of ‘completion’ should not get in the way of the *optimization of my experience*.

This passionate compulsion towards maximizing my experience can come off as sounding harsh, dogmatic, and potentially sad—in the same way that a soldier might shrug his shoulders, grit his teeth, and go off to a war he knows he will die in. In other more direct words, I am heading towards a certain destination; it is now just a matter of *learning how to comfortably die*. It is a harsh and unchanging duty, but this does not mean it is a morose burden or a chore. In fact, this is a blessing of almost infinite beauty, absurdity, life, and unlikeliness; this is (to my knowledge) the closest the organic molecules which compose my body and soul have gotten to the opportunity of transcendence*.

Realizing this has been an inspiration to an unimaginable expanse. There is a primordial joy of realizing at least what you are *trying* to do in life. In other words, I have explicitly recognized the

unavoidable destination to which my life will lead, and thus I am more comfortable and effective in examining the bits between point A and Z.

This is not a task which I work to complete at a deadline and then consider myself done and pleased with my work. I no longer endorse most behavior which follows this model (I refer to it as the 'Finish Line' attitude). I have become familiar with a different mode of thinking, a far more sustainable, effective, and realistic one; it is a mode of comfortable acceptance with my position of *progressive* development. In other words, I am no longer running a marathon in order to cross the finish line, I am like a nomad who moves by the hand of necessary, natural, authentic, and organic movement. The only way to succeed as a human is to treat yourself like a human, not a robot. Humans aren't built to feel satisfied, so don't aim for a system wherein you can't achieve it. In this I have found immeasurable benefit and excitement towards life. I hope to hold this sentiment with me for all of my days.

Intentional Isolation

The world is hard to figure out. Where do we start? It seems to me that the most reasonable answer is with a thorough examination of the self. The self is the framework through which we find meaning, and the bottleneck between the cosmos and what I call 'me'.

I can not emphasize these quotes sufficiently, I only hope that you read them and realize their profound significance and influence on my situation.

- *What [Husserl] is trying to say is that we must go back to ourselves. It's very interesting to know about the things in the world external to us, but the real important thing is for us to know ourselves. Once we know ourselves then we will be able to construct our knowledge of the external world on an individual foundation. If we start with the external world and its contingency and its messiness and its lack of certainty, all our other intellectual activities including our knowledge of ourself is going to reflect that*

same contingency and uncertainty. -Dr. Sugrue on Edmund Husserl

- *“If the doctor wishes to help a human being, he must be able to accept him as he is. And he can do this in reality, ONLY when he has already seen and accepted himself as he is. Perhaps this sounds very simple, but simple things are always the most difficult. In actual life, it requires the greatest art to be simple. And so acceptance of oneself is the essence of the moral problem, and the acid test of one's whole outlook on life. That I feed the beggar, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ, all these are undoubtedly great virtues.*

If I wish to affect a cure for my patients, I am forced to acknowledge the deep significance of their egoism. I should be blind indeed if I did not recognize it as a true will of God...I must even help the patient to prevail in their egoism. If he succeeds in this, he estranges himself from other people...It is, as I has said, a true will of God which sometimes drives him into complete

isolation. However wretched this state may be, it also stands him in good stead. For in this way alone can he get to know himself and learn what an invaluable treasure is the love of his fellow beings.

It is moreover only in the state of complete abandonment and loneliness that we experience the helpful powers of our own natures. “—Carl Jung

In these quotes lie the majority of what I feel I should say on this matter, though I might add a few elaborations.

“It is moreover only in the state of complete abandonment and loneliness that we experience the helpful powers of our own natures’

I would add that it is within this state that we are *also* potentially made available to the meaningful power of *intimacy* with reality. As someone who is only able to feel genuine peace when they are alone*, a life

completely surrounded by people can be horrifying. It is in the sacred comfort of solitude that I am able to act *offensively* rather than *defensively* towards the world. In solitude, I am more capable of experiencing* unique strains of aesthetic beauty, unfettered expression, *abstraction*, and dionysian freedom. Up to the time of writing this, I find that these things present themselves to me almost *exclusively* in a state of complete isolation. This is a flaw in my character which I hope to remedy, because it often results in a loss of the other profound beauties which exist in social life.

Ego

Another clarification I should make is that this glorification of the treasures in solitude is not a *vilification* of the social life, nor is it a justification for narcissism. The intention of this solitude is entirely separate from appreciating oneself, and entirely concerned with *bettering* oneself with necessary focus. This focus is vital for a life sufficiently* examined, and more importantly, lived.

When appreciating oneself, it is common nature to measure yourself with the people to which you are exposed. To me, I struggle to find utility in this procedure; I consider it to be a dangerous flirt with irrationally quantifying the value of a human. It is outside of the realm of social comparison where the ego can finally lay dormant, and spare us from its displeasures.

“Ego goes both ways; tell yourself you’re great, that’s ego. Tell yourself you suck, that’s ego too. Best to ignore both.”
—Van Neistat

I do not aim to live a life of complete isolation*. I wish to implement it where it is just, necessary, and beneficial. (This may end up being often, and that is ok as it is beneficial on the whole*, including the inevitable variable of other people).

Big Childhood questions and why we need to answer them

Many young people have big questions. These questions are often completely justified, and very difficult to answer. Everyone has different answers, everyone has different ways of going about answering them, and rarely are people led to satisfying answers. Some people (not all) continue to get older until they forget about the profundity of these questions that are often introduced in youth. Typical secondary education fails to answer most of these questions. Tertiary education seems to do a better job, but is often cut short, and the individual is thrown out into the world with many big questions left unanswered. Experience fills some of the gaps, luck fills others, and personal initiative (if present) fills more.

The logistical necessities of human life often do not leave sufficient space for unfettered* inquiry or exploration. *“Philosophizing requires leisure”--Dr. Sugrue* I believe, for some people, unfettered inquiry/exploration (to a sufficient degree*) is necessary for a maximally successful, effective, happy, and meaningful life. I strongly believe that the

opportunity to satisfactorily examine important questions and subjects such as ontology, philosophy of mind, epistemology, spirituality, habit, identity, human society, important literature*, physical and mental health, and a strategy towards your ideal life is of ultimate importance. I believe that without a fundamental grasp on some of these things, you are missing some of the most significant facets of the human existence. Having examined some of these questions and subjects, it seems to me that an individual is *significantly* more equipped with the variables necessary for a life *best* lived.

Most people have to intentionally strategize activity so they can sufficiently outfit themselves with necessary features of life. There is often an attitude that effort over time will result in reaching a 'finish line', wherein you might achieve happiness or peace or *eudaimonia*. This attitude has a number of faults that render it ineffective, which we will explore later. Regardless of your attitude, there are things in life which require significant attention and energy if you wish to sufficiently sustain them. Strategy can often only go so far, and the path of life requires continual

attention when you cross the threshold into adulthood. It is because of this that education provides an incredibly significant importance; if an individual does not have the opportunity to acquire answers to some of their most fundamental questions, it will likely be difficult to get the chance to answer them again. And so, these questions are often swept under the rug. What becomes prioritized over these fundamental philosophical inquiries are the unavoidable demands of life; attitude, fatigue, energy, money, obligation, responsibility, misfortune. This renders the instinctual desire for understanding, romanticism, and passion as privileges rather than, say, rights.

It seems to me that these questions do not lose their importance over time, even if they are given increasingly less attention over time (in one way or another) as one grows older. Often, in youth, these questions are most exciting and nagging to us because we are still in a phase of acquiring a basic understanding of the world.

In this contemporary world, where more information is available than in history, where distance is meaningless, and where my potential is perhaps at its greatest, it seems *vile and wrong* that I should succumb to a lifelong journey absent of effort towards momentous inquiry, creation, synthesis, or exploration. I hope for a maximization of potential. I hope to create, answer these questions, learn, and explore to the *greatest degree that I am able*.

It is because of this that I have begun to strategize, and take preemptive action. I realized that this desire might best be achieved if I take advantage of my youth; my brain is fertile and plastic, my body is strong, my passion is ripe, and for goodness' sake, *I have time*. Many things in human life seem to be receptive to compounding interest; in other words, starting something good early and spending time on it is almost always good. Investments, exercise, mental health, careers, attitude, knowledge, skills, etc.

I am utilizing these resources as I best can (I hope).

Synthesis

“It takes a thousand men to invent a telegraph, or a steam engine, or a phonograph, or a photograph, or a telephone or any other important thing — and the last man gets the credit and we forget the others. He added his little mite — that is all he did. These object lessons should teach us that ninety-nine parts of all things that proceed from the intellect are plagiarisms, pure and simple; and the lesson ought to make us modest. But nothing can do that.”

-Quote attributed to Mark Twain

When discussing the topic of synthesis and authorship, it is certainly helpful and perhaps necessary to define a vital facet of most of creation: “intertextuality” (we may later refer to this as “sampling”).

The process of “intertextuality” is a somewhat inevitable feature of human expression: *“to shape the meaning of a text by another text, either through*

deliberate compositional strategies such as quotation, allusion, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche or parody.” (Hebel, Udo J (1989))

For our purposes, let's articulate a definition that this term corresponds with, which we touch on at multiple points in this manuscript: The reorganization of *existing materials* in order to create something new or meaningful. (This is earlier or later spoken about through the lens of curation)

This facet of creation has interesting ramifications, particularly within the intellectual property climate of today's media. For example, music theory Youtuber Adam Neely explores the consequences of a lack of understanding in this necessary aspect of composition with a Katy Perry song-theft lawsuit. As Neely describes the situation,

“There is a similar but not the same melodic ostinato that is shared between the two songs, however because the melody is so simple and so short, you can find similarities between any number of different songs through hundreds of

years of music. In other words, the composition that was being sued over was so minor and so similar to other pieces of music that the lawsuit made absolutely no sense.”

Artistically, he argues that a lawsuit of this nature sets a dangerous precedent for the understanding of “original ” expression, particularly in the realm of an art form largely characterized by the reformation of previous pieces.

In the video, [Adam Neely](#) displays a number of melodic ostinatos from musical pieces (which predate both tracks) such as Bach’s *Violin Sonata in F minor (adagio)*, *Jolly Old Saint Nicholas*, *Go Down Moses* which (to the untrained ear) are quite similar, if not indistinguishable, from the track which is being claimed to “first originating” this musical idea. In a wildly ironic twist, the Youtube creator was copyright struck because he played a portion of *Dark Horse* in the video. The portion which was highlighted and claimed to contain copyrightable material was in fact, the melody to Joyful Noise, *the incorrect song*.

As well as complex situations like these, one must consider another variable as a result of this time period: human knowledge is *as large* as it has ever been, and as *accessible* as it ever has been. In other words, there has never been a more difficult time in history to produce something that isn't already widely known and available to a great deal of humanity. This has the potential to leave a yearning soul (such as my own) quite discouraged in the practice of exploring the progression of knowledge, *particularly if one is fueled by the motivation of finding something new*. Once again, this is a reason to pursue intellect for the love of knowledge rather than ego. In the chapter I analyze, Russell states that one is more intelligent if they pursue the means to gain more knowledge rather than pursuing the "knowledge of facts". The intelligence of a figure is determined by the willingness to learn rather than the degree of lust they have towards quantitative facts.

In a biographical section of one of his works, Russell describes the atmosphere of a time which perhaps had more intellectual *potential* than 2022:

“I found a group of contemporaries, who were able, rather earnest, hard-working, but interested in many things outside their academic work-poetry, philosophy, politics, ethics, indeed the whole world of mental adventure. We used to stay up discussing till very late on Saturday nights, meet for a late breakfast on Sunday, and then go for an all-day walk. Able young men had not yet adopted the pose of cynical superiority which came in some years later... The world seemed hopeful and solid; we all felt that nineteenth-century progress would continue, and that we ourselves should be able to contribute something of value. For those who have been young since 1914 it must be difficult to imagine the happiness of those days.”

I'll admit, I had to work pretty hard not to feel a bit cynical about whether I have something meaningful to contribute to the progression of humanity after first reading this, though I'm over it now.

Moreover, I had a bit of a second punch to the gut

when I found his chapter on the aims of education. I read this chapter, after a lengthy week or so of dense, emotional, vast quantities of writing on the things I found valuable in education, and the philosophical backup for such things. Though I knew it wasn't perfect, I still felt that I had broken some sort of ground with my perspective. I felt that I had articulated something that had perhaps yet to be written so meaningfully. As I made my way through the chapter, time and time again I was confronted with the exact ideas that I was wishing to express, only far more established in reasoning and prose. I found this to be equally frustrating as it was thrilling. In one respect, I was vexed that this person had arrived at these meaningful ideas almost a century before I had. In another respect, I was thrilled that someone of such stature and reasoning shared the same fundamental discoveries that I had arrived on on my own, personal facilities. I had reached an annoyingly validating artifact of the past, and it is not the first time this has happened to me. To my knowledge, this "realizing-that-you-are-true-in-your-formulation-but-to-o-late-syndrome" has not been given an explicit

name, but I am certainly (of course) not the first to experience it*.

In some folks, there exists a sentiment or a belief in a theory which argued that there was a limit to the number of things that humans could express, discover, and make. While this may be mathematically true, it is perhaps meaningful to consider that this sentiment was particularly loudly expressed at the turn of the 19th century with figures like the Commissioner of US patent office in 1899, Charles Duell.

Duell was famously known for stating: "everything that can be invented has been invented".

If we look for this concept from a bit earlier, we should also acknowledge this:

*"What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
There is nothing new under the sun."
-Ecclesiastes 1:9*

Perhaps it is reasonable that there must be a theoretically quantitative limit of the amount of

meaningful things that humans are able to create. Perhaps this is particularly true in the age of technological modernity, wherein the majority of human knowledge is available to your whim within a matter of seconds. It is because of this, that a creative must find peace with the fact that a great majority of the fundamental regions of human reasoning has been explored. This is not to say that there isn't a vast ocean of unknown to be sailed by human curiosity—the prediction of cell phones in the 70's would have been an unlikely guess. This observation is rather intended to stabilize the motivation of an inquiry. When I explore ideas and reasoning, it can not reasonably be out of the motivation to find something new. There is a childish underpinning to much of the excitement I often feel when I fall into a detailed pit of research, out of the subconscious possibility that I may discover something that may earn me respect or esteem. I find, however, that once I have trained myself to pursue intellect in the name of genuine love of knowledge, I become far more effective in the quality of my methods, production, and energy. To more realistically approach the procedure of exploration is

to better your chances of actually going deeper into unexplored territory. One must not be distracted by the pleasures of “reaching an end point”, for it is then that the ego takes hold of the individual. The ideal pursuit of knowledge is often a journey with no destination, but a surefire way of going somewhere valuable.

Why Its so Hard to Talk About This Stuff

First off, I think it is important to acknowledge the bias of my personality profile. In terms of ‘personality theory’, I am significantly more *intuitive* than I am *observant*. What that means is that I value the theoretical, the potential, the future, and the abstract equally, if not more, than the present. I am concerned with information that can reform and change things for the better*. This is not to say that ‘observant’ people are not concerned with making things better, but that they concern themselves with a different approach; one that is based on tried and true methods, and who prefer to deal with the things that are tangible, here, and now.

“Observant people are more comfortable with information that is “right here,” and they process it in “what is” terms. They prefer to deal with things as they are and in the present. That doesn't mean that they ignore the past or the future, but mostly they view things through the lens of now.”

–[personality](#) project.

I like to describe this difference as being similar to the epistemological terms ‘a priori’ and ‘a posteriori’. *A Priori* means that you know without directly experiencing (through theorizing, deduction, reason, etc.) and *A Posteriori* is knowledge that is known on the basis of experience. Similarly, my personality profile lends itself to forms of thought which are cerebral, abstract, and potentially out of this (seemingly) ‘here and now’ world. To me, I conceive of the world as a potential rather than a reality, and that is why the following garbage is so difficult and nebulous.

“Can it be that we do not love to be reminded that we are very young and callow in a world that was old when we came into it? And could there be a strong resistance to the certainty that a living world will continue its stately way when we no longer inhabit it?”

I was keen to hear what people thought...Those whom I had met did not talk about the subject, didn't seem to want to talk about it. It seemed to me partly caution and partly a lack of interest.

Now I don't say that an awful lot of people have this man's sense of things. Maybe they don't, but maybe they do—also in their privacy or in non-business areas.”

-Steinbeck

Normal day-to-day discussion doesn't offer much room for properly *real*, sufficiently *weighty*, and *profound* discussion. In day-to-day life, I would say that most people* tend to ignore, repress, or distract themselves from this type of dialogue. This makes sense; if you were in math class and had the option to spend your time solving either easy multiplication tables or integral calculus equations, it is more comfortable to choose the former option. And yet, there are those who are voluntarily *thrilled* by the challenge, importance, profundity, and legitimate relevancy of advanced calculus. It is unreasonable to expect the average person to have this passion towards advanced calculus; perhaps the same should be true of intensive philosophical inquiry. Here, I'll acknowledge again, the psychological relationship between what a person spends their time around and what their reality looks like. For a business man, reality is a territory defined by economics; for the physicist, reality is composed of describable causation; for the obsessed, young, passionate, uninformed philosopher and writer, the world is a profound, contradictory firmament brought to awareness through literature, thought, and

phenomena; reality is the difficult-to-define stuff which we swim through by the means of a glorious and seductive apparatus called idea.

Any individual who finds themselves *too* far into one corner of thought and activity encounters an inevitable and frustrating imbalance. For the focused, passionate person, it can be a struggle understanding how others can live their lives *outside* of what seems to be such a personally defined reality. I am inclined to talk about perspectivism here, but we will leave that for later.

It is difficult and rare to satisfactorily discuss the cavernous questions of philosophy with the average of society in the same way that it is difficult to discuss *anything* far out of line from the normal. And yet, unquestionably, these questions present themselves to me as the undoubtable priority of consideration. I struggle to understand how others might partake in the distractions of their life without questioning them; why go through the dread of working at McDonalds until you are confident that you exist? It seems, from my limited and deviatory*

perspective (and according to reasonable logic and attention), that this world of philosophy must be explored before I move onto anything else.

In addition to the problem of perspectivism and context, it seems that the *form* of discussion also plays a role in this philosophical drought*. Where do ideas usually live? In other words, how much of our life is spent trying to answer questions, and where are the difficult ones? What are the different ways we try to answer them? In what ways does culture serve as a vessel for ideation?

Where do people go to play with their opinions?

My first (and uninformed) answers would perhaps be the following:

- Social media
 - Short form soundbites
 - “Opinion Pieces” or tweets
 - Reposting or supporting/liking or disliking
 - Comment sections or threads
 - Trends/movements

- Movies, other media
 - News outlets; low context, headline-based user-interaction
 - Cable Television (rare..)
 - Streaming Services and corresponding trends
 - Movies/Shows
 - Music, art, etc.
 - Literature/long-form journalism
- Educational Contexts
 - Secondary school English-classes/social life
 - College or university life (academic and social)
 - Initiatives, clubs, movements and issues associated with the community/school
 - Academic research and publication
- Professional Contexts (and political...? Is that even worth including these days?)
 - Workplace interaction*
 - Institution/company initiatives, movements, and issues
 - Political and socio-economic activity

This is, of course, a very rudimentary outline. If we categorize these forms of discussion by *depth*—depth being loosely defined as how thorough, detailed, careful, and time-consuming the given form of discussion is—we might notice some patterns. It seems to me that a majority of these discussions are in one way or another, *short-form activity*.

The units of media that we consume are perhaps becoming increasingly smaller*. We have gone from oration, to theater, to long form literature, to magazines, to audiobooks, to movies, to television shows, to 5-second clips of video and sound—one after another in immediate and endless succession. I think this has surely had its effects on social interaction—in some generations more than others. Increasingly, discussions are being held virtually. The discussion that is not virtual in some way, is undoubtedly becoming restrained and/or influenced by the hand of technology*. It is here, the land of micro-information and negative context, where discussion is mostly being held* (Perhaps this is far

too a general statement. Forgive me for the time being)

Even the longer forms of cultural and social discussion—movies, books, news/journalism, and political discourse (maybe even music? The advent of Tik-Tok sounds has me wondering...)--are being shrunk to complement this unprecedented emergence of a digital world. Twitter is now where our political leaders debate, Facebook is where people are getting their news, movies are starving into television shows, and don't get me started on books.

As I explain more later, language has some pretty significant limits—therefore, *if one aims to properly navigate communication and ideas*, it should be used carefully and intentionally. Wittgenstien wrote volumes upon volumes so he could completely, confidently, and truthfully express a few simple ideas through the fragile means of language.

There are real questions, problems, and discussions that should be of our concern*. I would argue that

most people reading this would agree. I want to get answers, I want to make progress, I want to know what is right and what should be done. To speak about these things with the attention that they deserve, I think it is crucial that we use the most effective language possible. We should be aware of situations that lack context, we should strive for truth, and we should not become overwhelmed and reduced to a lower state of discussion because of an outside force. We should not discuss important issues with childish language. We should not sacrifice reason to unthinking rage. I think that all of these problems* require long(er?)-form media*, patience, and articulacy if they are to get better.

But this does not apply to everything, just some important stuff.

Obviously, most of our linguistic life exists outside of formal methodology and logic. Our lives tend to play out very differently from our rudimentary apprehensions of it. Not everything in our lives demands such caution and weight behind it—not everything must be profound*.

Environment and 'Anti-Philosophy' assumption

Environmental context also plays a significant role. In some situations, I make the mistake of assuming that some people are *anti-philosophy* because they have a harshly indifferent attitude towards certain things. What I fail to consider in these circumstances is that these people may not be in the mental realm, social environment, or 'temporal atmosphere' for them to be reasonably concerned with philosophy.

Sometimes, I've wondered if people can become conditioned to neglect curiosity over time. It makes sense, in theory, that when you grow old and have spent 50 years of your life with these questions, they end up being swept under a rug. This is reasonable; similar to living, treading water demands continuous attention and energy. If you want to go somewhere, you exert *extra* energy in one direction. If you leave your attention towards something other than swimming, you sink. Humans are creatures of habit;

when you are used to swimming, you tend to naturally focus on swimming rather than something else.

To earn the privilege of contemplation, you must first feed yourself. To feed yourself, you need money. To get money, you must work, and so on. It is in this way that exploring these questions no longer becomes a case of taste, but logistical necessity. As a young privileged person who has negligible experience in the world of genuine responsibility, I suspect I have a terrifyingly oversimplified understanding of the weight of 'logistical necessity'. In this next section of my life, I hope to *effectively* condition myself to this challenging reality which so much of the world has had the displeasure of living with while I have comfortably been goofing off for 18 years.

Too much meta...Insufficient language

This stuff is also hard to talk about because philosophy often creates weird, circular, meta-examination wherein the *work is what the work is about*. The *subject* is the subject. In sentences like these, we start to see that we are dealing with a tricky rift between idea and language, which lends itself to a challenging but potentially profound cascade of events. Linguists, for example, often practice their art *through language*. Ontology is the discussion of existing, and it is practiced through existing. This phenomenon reminds me of when I was a kid, trying to conceive who made the first tool. If you need a tool to make a tool, how do you make the first tool? “If your hammer requires forging, how does one forge the hammer?” and so on. It seems to me that the process of philosophy is burdened with similar roadblocks.

Philosophy happens to be very natural to my psyche; I have always been analytical, skeptical, and curious—a combination which tends to create mental feedback loops. And yet, even outside of the philosophical mode of thought, I can’t help but

realize it's direct relevancy, weight and influence on our experience as humans.

And yet, it is a bit like biting your own teeth.

“Being—the small b being— of tables and chairs and podiums and carpets and things like that...we all have a kind of intuitive everyday knowledge of what it means to say that the grass is green or the podium is made of wood or the cup is blue. All those uses of the word, we kind of feel like we have an idea of what's going on there. But there's a problem. Even though we know these local and particular uses of the word is, we don't know what being is on the whole, we don't know what Being—capital B— is; what it is that holds all these little beings together—the small b beings—and that's because being itself is not like any of the beings that being discloses... Are you following this so far? In other words, light is not like the objects that we see in the room—it's a unique kind of a thing. And here I just mean it metaphorically because I don't know

how to literally talk about this in any kind of sensible way, but the metaphor discloses the idea roughly speaking that somehow being is different from all the other stuff of our experience.

Do you see how this is going to get awfully circular and strange and that we're going to have whole chapters and perhaps whole volumes of 'being talks to itself and projects itself into the future of being,' you're going to get a lot of what appears to be circular reasoning on account of the fact that we're stuck within the internality [of thought, untrancended human knowledge]—what I call the intracosm. And it's very hard to break out from the intracosm into the exocosm... “

--Sugrue, Husserl's Phenomenology

So, with this section, I hope that I have appropriately acknowledged that you might not be in the same headspace as me. Because of this, you might not

find these things worth your time, or they might be particularly difficult to read through*. If this doesn't help you in any way, I hope that it, at least, asks some important questions about the nature of contemporary discussion, linguistics, and philosophical thought.

Tree Analogy

A couple of minutes ago, I experienced a vivid model of my psyche: I looked at a tree, I found it beautiful. I wondered how parts of it work, even though I understand most of its biology. I understand the components which assemble the tree, cellulose, tissue, water, carbon, tubules. Despite this understanding, the tree is unique from all others, and has parts of it which I don't understand. Is there an algorithm which determines the direction the branches grow? At what point does a branch start to branch? Does the tree treat the spindly, outer regions of the tree in the same way that it treats the larger branches? Which pattern of small branches

allocates the best dispersion of leaves for maximal surface area seen by the sun?

There might be accessible scientific answers or theories to these questions. Perhaps some of these questions don't have answers, and we are asking for an answer from nature which has no natural answer. Perhaps we are thinking about it all wrong. We don't have much way of knowing; perhaps* In the world of true knowledge, all we have is an ignorant opinion or resignation. Again, I hear Socrates whispering in my ear "I *believe* I know nothing".

Regardless, I find myself analyzing the tree with some of the facilities I hold: loose cognitive schemes, theories, empathy, experience, and categorization. I take a (very human) methodological strategy, put gradients in boxes. I see the range of size between the trunk which *blends into* twigs, and I think, "three categories should do: small branches, medium branches, and big branches. From there, we can determine the qualities of each, and then we are closer to understanding." Naturally, this is a pretty rudimentary approach, and it only gets me

further into the confusion of my own psyche. You will never be able to satisfactorily take grey and label it black or white, yet this is the *absolute first* tendency of most humans. The branches do, in fact, grade in size—yet I feel the need to put them in sharp, distinct categories.

When I acknowledge my tendency as a human to do such a thing, I believe I am now heading closer to truth and understanding of the tree as best I can as a human. It seems to me that this mindset is perhaps useful for making the most out of an individual life, scientific or shamanic. Acknowledging the human distortion which is innately responsible for the approach we take towards understanding the world allows us to edge towards authenticity and truthfulness in our lives. As a society made of individuals, we largely fail to do this.

...

I was drawn to this form of thinking as early as I remember trying to make sense of things. There was

an immense sense of satisfaction in understanding that there was indeed a guaranteed way to achieve a specific conclusion if you started at the right place with the right ingredients. Though I didn't realize this at the time, this was a great motivating factor into why I so enjoyed taking apart things such as speakers or pens as a child. A pen had an established end point where it functioned as a pen. If I put the ingredients in the correct places, the pen would work. If I did not put the ingredients in the correct places, the pen would work. The appreciation for things that followed this pattern of analysis, exploration, and synthesis, has carried over to now. Philosophy and behavioral psychology particularly appeal to me; any activity may be understood with the correct starting point and all the correct ingredients. Taking these things apart with the 'safety net' of knowing that there *was a conclusion* allows me to confidently and energetically pursue a topic. Whether I 'put the pen back together' correctly is (at this point in time) not my biggest concern (I suppose it never really was—ask my parents about the number of working pens in our household in my youth). What *is* valuable to me is the process of deconstruction and observation that comes with the sometimes harsh and naive development of this time. I believe that romanticism and prolific, messy exploration is a vital element to healthy human

growth. As I transition into adulthood, however, I must begin to consider the fact that this notion is gradually becoming less true. I make sure to often remind myself that, “there is no such thing as a worst case scenario, you really don’t have much to lose”. In many regards, this is true. My net worth is extremely miniscule, my assets are negligible, and my health is (at this point) incredibly regenerative. However, I am now legally at risk of going to jail if I choose to break the law. I can no longer poop on the floor in the living room—I have a reputation. I have clients, I have investments, obligations.

In a fit of what I hope is mature, long-term, consideration, I have put myself in a position where I believe I am able to supply a deeply meaningful education in the balance between these two states of mind.

With the opportunity of a gap year, I have more time than *ever* to slack off and do the things that give me simple pleasure. Despite this, never in my life have I experienced such strictness of schedule, diet (of both food and media), or discipline. All of these things, of course, are entirely self imposed. I have every right to sin myself into misery, yet with the option between this and a severe step in self development—I have wholeheartedly chosen the

latter. This is a wonderfully self-sustaining system, as I hold myself to (unreasonably) high standards. Before, the only consequence of my behavior is lowering my reputation to an institution I hold no respect for. Now, the only person I work for is myself. I am the sole devotee of this strict activity, for I reap all the reward and all of the consequence. I believe that the introduction to this particular chapter of life is offered far too late in most individuals, particularly (and vaguely) in the western world of today. There are mountains of accounts of young and newly independent adults who, upon being introduced to involuntary self-sufficiency of the real world, have realized they were never taught the reality of the beast of genuine autonomy.

It would, of course, be entirely unreasonable of me to claim that I am currently standing face-to-face with this beast because I am not. I exist in a wildly privileged position of time, money, and general freedom. I live in an apartment* (a cool room in a pole barn which I call my studio) which I afford on a negligible cost of rent, I have virtually no expenses, and I have no institutional or social obligation. This is the introvert's paradise, and it is not reasonable in the real world. The reason that it may exist, is the fact that it is in a wonderfully idyllic buffer zone of growing up. I am on just the other side of high

school, and I am just before the world of college. I have learned what it means to be responsible for my own obligations from my days before college. In these respects, I have a substantial head start on my peers. I also have *privilege* over many of my peers, and this is something I have spent a great deal of time trying to reckon with. I will spare the details of this particular dialogue at this moment (This type of subject often leads to the complicated question of quantifying pain and things similar. Considerations of this nature—particularly from the interested party—are extremely necessary in contexts that value the virtue of equality). This discourse has assisted in the development of the desire to advocate for this opportunity for others like me. If this manuscript perhaps doesn't serve this purpose, I hope that it widens the current literature of the incredibly disorienting and chaotic time period of development in youth today.

My mental and physical health has never been better. The feeling of genuine grasp on the path of my life has never been so strong, and every day is filled with continuous effort in bettering myself—pruning the negative aspects of my being. I spend more time studying, writing, and researching than I ever did in the structure of high school, and I

am most certainly *absorbing* what I am aiming to learn. Kant, Steinback, Orwell, Lyotard, Habermas, Sacks, Bertrand Russell, Robert Sapolsky, Goethe, Descartes. Advanced physics, theoretical cosmology, chemistry, biology, philosophy, western and (some) continental literature, neuroscience. The more that I consume, the more that the rest makes sense, the more I take in and the more I seek. I am ravenous for understanding, and the increasing ability to make connections that I was unable to make before is the ultimate pleasure. It is not of lustful nature, but of organic, virtuous hunger for wisdom, and I feel closer to being full than ever before (and paradoxically more starving than ever).

Something I must acknowledge because of my nature is the fact that I am predisposed towards thorough reasoning. I feel an increase in comfort and pleasure the closer I am to certainty. Therefore, in my pilgrimage towards logical ultimacy, I now proceed to critique my own reasoning. This is a form of inquiry literally known as *metametaphysics* (or metaphysiology or meta-ontology... philosophy sure gets pedantic sometimes)

My predisposition towards philosophy is logically distilled into a concession unto faith. I have chosen this method of exploration because it ultimately makes me *feel* like I am closest to correctness. The only measure I have to establish the value in this method is using the method itself. Where did this faith based methodology come from?

I am hardwired to collapse into fundamentals. This is the most fundamental I can get in any field of existence. The human brain has no potential for reaching as far as it can unless it has a strategy of traveling there. The love of wisdom is my strategy. People who live in faith argue using faith, those who believe in logic argue with logic. There is a divide between those who conceptualize an ideal life with understanding of experience vs nature. We naturally see this divide even within the field of philosophy in the mind body problem—monism or dualism, materialism or metaphysical, one world or two world, theology and physics, so on and so on.

I am confused

From what I've heard (i'm paraphrasing):

You *must* take life seriously. If you are not careful, you can die extremely easily and quickly. Every second you are moving closer to your death. We are not remotely capable of “understanding” the first *bit* of what the universe is, and yet we feel narcissism. Your brain, your very perception of the universe, is holding on by a fragile thread. People hurt and die and suffer and living is often excruciating. We are quickly approaching an irreversible threshold of climate crisis which might end our species, and I struggle to find faith in humanity solving an issue of this size. Sometimes it's much more appealing to stay asleep to escape awareness. Etc.

Also,

You *must* not take life too seriously. People fart, and they also exchange green paper rectangles for things like cheese (which is liquid mammal protein gone bad). A plastic cover (made from dead and ancient plants and animals) on the cheese displays symbols that represent the idea that it is, in fact,

“made with real cheese”. It's absurd. People comment their opinions on facebook.com and think they are participating in rational discourse, humans used to drill holes in our skulls to prevent colds, and some people believe that the earth we live on is shaped like a frisbee despite their belief that Mars is spherical. Depending on how you look at it, most everything is *entirely* ridiculous. None of this makes *any* sense at all. The idea of “making sense” doesn't make sense. The idea of “idea” is potentially arbitrary. The closer you look at things, the more questions you get. The more you question your question, you find out that everything is utterly bananas, and it's often easier to just ignore everything.

Also,

We know so much. We have created so much. At this very moment, we are standing on a higher point of intellectual capability than any species which has existed on this planet. “If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe.” According to piecounsel.org approximately 186

million pies of all sorts are consumed every year in the US alone. We *have* invented the universe. Meticulously. *Multiple times*. To attempt to articulate the vast, exponential progression of the human species over the last *100 years alone* is perhaps a naive and vain exercise. I could spend a lifetime of continual effort, and not scratch the surface of an accurate description of humanities achievements in full. To our ancestors, the world we live in is unfathomably advanced. A 5 year old with the internet could overtake entire civilizations of the past. Those civilizations toppled entire ecosystems, harvested the power of agriculture, and introduced disciplines like philosophy, linguistics, economics, and religion. We are powerful, and more powerful than ever before. We are dogged, genius, good, and so much else.

All of these statements are true. The truth is (I think), it is completely *irrational* to pretend that I have any grasp on the reality I inhabit. Everything is up for grabs; there is a *fundamental* uncertainty in *everything*. Truth itself is a notion made by flawed creatures.

All these things are true, and that leaves a young person like myself in a *disastrously* confused state.

I prefer to be in a state of understanding rather than confusion.

I am overcome by this preference. I am obsessed by this desire. I starve for wisdom, not out of virtue, but instinctual necessity. The 'desire' is less equivalent to that of dessert than air. To not pursue understanding is morbid (*explain why I like Urfaust yet?). Thus, it makes a great deal of sense for me to figure this out. If not for bettering myself as a human being, for my sanity.

With that being said, there are a number of things that I must regretfully sweep under the rug. As we know, I have an urge to spill everything that is in my head at any given time. This does not serve advantageously to the act of intellectual discourse. I respect completely precise and thorough articulation deeply, but I am restricted. I feel the need to completely break down and methodologically justify this statement, the nature of my obsession, and *all*

the implication and reasoning behind these things. At this moment, I can not indulge myself. This pursuit of understanding, I have come to realize, is more than a desire; it is *pragmatically* what determines my effectiveness and experience as a human being. We can rationally justify *this* part, because it can get a bit hairy if handled incorrectly.

...

I deliberately chose non-controversial examples today to help you get a grasp of the metaphysics without getting bogged down in questions of justice or pushing my own views. But it's worth remembering that that is an artificial separation. When you leave the classroom, politics and metaphysics will come at you at the same time.

*We're not just doing philosophy for the hell of it.
We are tinkering with the engine of the world here.
So drive safely.*

-Abigail Thorn

Art of Philosophy

When this began, I was primarily concerned with ontological clarity. Out of pure survival instinct, I was reaching for anything in sight that could help my existential disorientation. As with most things, I found that this string brought others with it as I pulled further. Because of this, I find myself concerned with subjects which were entirely out of my interest even a year ago; things like theology, politics, ethics*, history, mathematics, formal logic, and influential literature. I contribute most of this to my interest in philosophy. I have said before it seems to me that philosophy is the mother of all knowledge. Whether or not this is true, it has cultivated a vast garden of interests for me to wander and harvest for my

nutrition. It is through this concern with the 'study of everything' that an omnipresent *willingness to neutrally explore* flourishes. I am endlessly curious, and philosophy has allowed me the necessary nucleus and vessel with which I navigate and articulate my way through explorations.

When I say philosophy, I am referring to a distinct mode of life which is characterized by an examination of one's experience, the attempt to organize it, and the pursuit of wisdom. Often, this is practiced through reading, writing, discussion, contemplating, and meditating.

A couple words on the aesthetic value of philosophy: the thing which draws me into my interests is, more often than not, the *craft*. I get excited by the motion of a creation, the ritual of exploration, the methods and tools with which we manipulate the universe in various ways. In each art form, there are unique themes, sensations, and communities.

In woodworking, there is the scent of different woods; the adjustment for the kerf of the blade;

consideration of the margin of flexibility in moist wood; the technique for pushing flecks of sawdust to a less painful part of the eye; the texture of your fingernail when it grazed sandpaper.

In photography, there is the heat, sour, sweet, and coldness of tint and warmth; the compression of a long lens; the soft texture of bokeh; the shallowness of an f/1.4 prime lens; the itch of noise in overexposed shadow.

In philosophy, there is the artistic, poetic, and scientific dance of *idea*; the sacrifice of certainty to arrive somewhere new; the willingness to dismantle the familiar; the sensation that nothing is off limits; the compulsive lust for voluminous methodology; the sensation of approaching truth; the nobility of *true, infinite* exploration. The act is so similar to painting—choosing to sacrifice some portions of the canvas for others with instinct—but with scientific, rational methodology. A gorgeous ritual...

In science, there is a mitigation of the ego. Susan Greenfield, my favorite Australian neuroscientist, says in a talk about

 The Neuroscience of Consciousness : “We all

know the whole essence of science is objectivity--it's impartiality. You would never say 'I made up a solution' because that sounds fishy. You'll say, rather torturously, 'a solution was made up'".

In science, one phrases their words so that every statement is true—meaning the scientist often acknowledges their own inevitable margin of uncertainty. There is a sentiment that whatever work has been produced, is not the be-all-end-all; a reduction of the self by virtue of the craft. Similarly to art, we do not scold the painter for painting something un-real from their imagination. It is a creative *suggestion*, one of infinite potential representations of the cosmos. Each painting adds another limb to the tree of art. Similarly in philosophy, the philosopher suggests a position on the intellectual world. To suggest a theory, you don't necessarily have to *believe* in it, (Some do, and quite dramatically so. But my point remains).

The act of scientific exploration lies in unbiased, methodological suggestion. Even the 'wrong' suggestions allow us to move forward; sometimes the progression of knowledge involves sacrifice.

People like Freud or Ptolemy or Schoepenhaer, despite the objective legitimacy of their theories, hold a necessary chapter in the book of human knowledge.

It is about expansion which moves by a reverence towards knowledge much beyond ourselves. In this way, I find philosophy, science, and thought to be an intellectual honor; like a soldier going to war. We explore at the risk of shattering what is dear to us, melting comfort and familiarity, in the effort of pushing this *Geist*—the eternal human soul—forward. “Das Ewig-Weibliche”, *The eternal feminine leads us aloft*. (this was the last line in Goethe’s *Faust*, and there is a whole separate book to be written about it)

Skepticism

And so we are now led to one of the deepest rooted features of scientific inquiry; doubt. Science understands *nothing* as completely true unless it has been proven; sufficiently validated by empirical evidence. I believe that this ideology has a place in both degrees large and small. If I am going to administer a potentially fatal new medicine to a

person, it seems reasonable that there is thorough and rigid justification behind its safety. Much of the greatness of our world, things we take for granted, have come directly from this mechanism towards understanding the universe. I believe that this form of methodology has proven itself to be one of the most powerful things that humans have access to; in terms of knowledge and power over the external world. If anything, I heir on the side of skepticism as a navigational mode, because it tends to get me places. I could flop on the floor like a fish, but I choose to read and write; the latter option provides a more interesting experience.

I also believe that speaking with harsh scientific skepticism to an emotionally unstable, trauma-inflicted individual, could lead to a morbid outcome. We are living in a fundamentally uncertain world. To search for objective and universal certainty would be a Sisiphsian task. I believe that there are times where things *must* be *anti-rigid*. We are psychological creatures, to which mood tends to have greater influence than reason. I see a utilitarian need for sanity*, if not for necessity, for

self-preservation*. In other words, I have every reason to go crazy in this crazy world, but I choose to read and write. Perhaps, in absurdity, these actions are equal in weight.

I mentioned that we are dealing with morbidity here; wherein the very meaning of life, or if there is one, is up for question. It seems to me that most people go through some form of this inquiry. What I have found in utilitarianism is a way to bypass this potentially frightening series of implications; an intentional utilization of ignorance. Ignorance is bliss, and bliss is necessary for the preservation of a successful human life.

Ignorance, however, is volatile. Similar to consciousness, it holds a number of dangerous implications with it. A state of complete ignorance means that nothing is of your conscious concern. This sounds simple, but can be infinitely dangerous to a human life; if *reason* has no influence, *wisdom* is out of your concern, things go south very quickly. It is for this reason that we should wield ignorance with great care and grace, through things like

intentional meditation, mindfulness, creative composition, socializing, rest, and recreation.

I don't believe it is of great use to yourself or the world to be a complete nihilist. For a successful life*, it seems necessary that one should be protean, allow things to ebb and flow where they are most effective, in order to make the most of a given position. To be fluid means that I must appreciate the place for inflexible skepticism, as well as undoubtful living. A balance between the two means that I am able to retain sanity for the use of inflexible skepticism, and vice versa. The tradition of philosophy exists in a strange halfway-house between occasional *horrifying* and *bitter* lines of thought (see Schopenhauer, Emil Cioran, Machiavelli) and unfettered romanticism, intuition, and emotional enlightenment (see Goethe, Confucius, and—perhaps again—Cioran).

Perhaps this fluid nature allows philosophy to cover more area than hard sciences or forms of harsh dogmatism, like hyper-gnostic faith. Graphically, I picture hard sciences and unquestioning faith as tall

spikes in a graph which go deep into one area of information, but cover a limited diameter of subject or potential. I visualize philosophy with a widespread diameter with varied heights of spikes along its surface, profoundly overlapping both faith *and* science simultaneously. Philosophy has the potential to utilize from each what is most applicable to a given region of inquiry. If doubt keeps us from an unexplored corner of thought, a philosophically curious soul would do away with it. It is about expanding our consciousness, knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the world in *all* directions.

And so, skepticism is a tool best played by eye and ear. I would rather not live in a state of continual doubt, for I might either become insane/useless or find myself deep into a dangerous forum on the internet. (I regret to admit that at some points in this retreat I have found myself deep in the former state.) Nor would I like to live in a state of unrestrained acceptance and ignorance, not wondering who or where or what or why or how I am; else I would be an intellectual infant. We must value where the presence or absence of skepticism most

meaningfully shines, in reference to the matter at hand. Skepticism is a quick route towards increasing chances of certainty, so I find myself steeped in it during the stinging confusion of my youth. Despite this truth, I must acknowledge that after a fundamental deconstruction of your world, it is absolutely necessary to balance this with care. For intellectual and human health, one must meditate or *re-accept* your livelihood in its *essential* state of confusion.

Kierkegaard, The certainty and truth issue, an elaborated meditation on confusion

We can not critique the faithful man for his belief, if we do not acknowledge our own fallibility of logical reasoning. One of the most disturbing discoveries that many young philosophers find themselves stabbed in the hopeful heart is that, without some degree of sacrifice, there is no certainty. There is no *a posteriori* justification for an axiom, there is no conception of certainty other than the definition given to the word by our own, arbitrary standards.

The point, I would argue, is that it is human nature to *go somewhere*. If it is (axiomatically) true that the expansion of the human mind and soul is a virtue, shouldn't we pursue the method of exploration which *bears the most fruit*? Many scientists and philosophers might agree, and many romantics and believers might disagree. It seems to me that there is wisdom in the acceptance of *all* these modes of thinking, for they all grow from the same substrate of entropy, confusion, and uncertainty. As we are, perhaps all we will truly ever have is the uncertainty of certainty. Others are more comfortable and aware of this than others, but it all boils down to the fact that our conceptions of truth are *entirely* homemade, no matter how compelling they may seem.

Let me explain further: If I say the glass is half full, I may or may not be right. The reason why I can not be *certain* of this, is because my *only methods of knowing* how the glass exists comes from my senses—the biochemical activity of synaptic firings in my brain. The very question may be flawed; what if there is no such thing as 'full'? What if the very

language I use to construct these ideas is arbitrary? The more you examine it, the more you start to think these things are plausible. A slippery, but necessary slope, for those who concern themselves with the world of philosophical inquiry.

This problem is best defined (in my opinion) by the work of Kierkegaard, and his *fervent* desire to find a system of thought which does not have a basis of presupposition. Kierkegaard contrasted religious faith and intellectual reason. Dr. Sugrue explains it best:

“ [Kierkegaard asserted] We have to choose between religious faith and rational certainty. The question is what criteria could we possibly offer for either decision that we were to make? To make the question even more difficult, what possible grounds for this judgment could we offer that doesn't presuppose what it's trying to prove?

In other words, if you presuppose a naturalistic ontology and if you presuppose that rationality is the key human fact and that you want to orient

your philosophy towards human life rather than some sort of metaphysical construct, well then you can go you can start there and then show that it makes sense...

If, on the other hand, you want to adopt a position like that of Saint Augustine or Luther who think that if there's a conflict between reason and faith, well then faith wins out every time...They prefer to emphasize faith as opposed to reason."

Once you start considering this, you start realizing a great deal of why discussion between two differing parties is so clunky. No matter how strong an argument is made by the reasonable philosopher, the listening ear can always adopt a position of, say, complete indifference. Reason has no sway to those who don't honor reason. You might give a grizzly bear a completely justified and reasonable argument, on why it *wouldn't* be best for it to eat you. The bear eats you nonetheless.

In Plato's republic,

“[To the men holding them hostage] Socrates says, ‘Well isn't there one more possibility—that we could *persuade* you to let us go?’ and one of the men that have come up to arrest them says well could you persuade us if we don't listen?”

One's method for argument is centered around their fundamental cognitive orientation towards 'truth'. If a devout theist argues an opinion with justification based in faith, someone who thinks in scientific reasoning is *unlikely* to be convinced by their argument. This is because the theist is arguing with justification of an alternate and incompatible *system* to the opposing ear. When two people with different systems of justification try to converse as though they are using the same language, dissonance is likely. Acknowledging fundamentally different constructions of belief systems opens the potential for more effective dialogue between two opposing systems. (What I hope to explore later, is the idea that the potential for this effective dialogue is *decreasing* in today's world as a result of our contemporary forms of language, discourse, communication, media, consumption, etc.)

And so I express my reasoning through an arbitrary, self-justified system; philosophy argued by philosophy. With this, I must acknowledge that this very well may not be the medium of truth which you subscribe to. I acknowledge that Euclidean geometry might not be as compelling a representation of the universe as poetry is to a poet.

I prioritize an exploration of my own psyche, because my brain is the single most influential variable on every aspect of my livelihood.

Philosophy has allowed me to examine the very elements of my self and the world I inhabit. The relationship between me and me, and me and the universe, is directly governed by my psychological profile. When my brain ceases, I cease to *be* or to know of being. Therefore, I hold the human psyche to be of extreme value in reference to every single aspect of my livelihood. Through the eyes of philosophy, we realize that this ideological landscape goes so much further than it first seems. It is natural to assume things, such as our existence, our experience, our memories, and our thoughts or

actions. Many people have and will continue to live lives without being skeptical of the nature or validity of these things. I believe that it is one of the most direct routes towards my fundamental goals (which I have previously stated) to follow the thorough and reason-based method of philosophy; to examine the fundamental structure of existence and experience in a way which bears infinite fruit.

Examination of Certainty

It seems an intuitively reasonable thing to look at a glass full of water and think that it is full of water. In most of human life, this particular assumption causes few issues. However, in the pursuit of all *possible* truths, to leave nothing unconsidered as a means to drive deeper into fundamental certainty, it is of use to hold the potential for doubt.

Here comes the less fun part;
Who is to say that the glass is not empty? I might argue that my eyes see water in the glass, and my

eyes offer an accurate representation of the world. This begs the question, How do I know *this*? When have I ever experienced truth other than what I have assumed to be true? In other words, which thing in itself *is* a thing unquestionably? Any thing which I perceive (Everything) is experienced through my brain. I do not experience the world, I experience the *sensation and representation* of my experience in the world. Is there ever a moment where we are removed from the human self, to see the uninfluenced and true nature of our world? Do we have a verified sense which knows a Thing-in-itself? As of yet, it seems there is not. It seems that we are stuck in the human dimension of confusion and infinite uncertainty no matter how we feel, or what we do. It seems worthwhile (if nothing else, for my sanity) to become comfortable with it, and not to ignore it.

In the vein of F. H. Jacobi however; who are we to say if there is a thing in itself, if we have never seen it? What is this a priori nonsense?

Yet another part of me—the Cartesian part—cries, “But you experience *something* true in itself nonetheless! Certainty lies in your experience, because it *is*! There exists a ‘show between your ears’. You would not be having this conversation if there was not some sense of certainty that *something is* to make this happen in the first place! *Cogito, Cogito!!!* I think, I experience, therefore I *must be*. In this exists the precious nectar of certainty”.

What if a computer is sending information into my brain, producing a hyper-detailed simulation of the glass in front of me? Does the glass exist? I search for any single, irrefutable way of knowing if this is not true.

Regardless how seemingly absurd and impractical and over-the-top this idea seems, it is (under the roof of reasoning) something we must look into if we would like to exist without presupposition. Again, the tradition of philosophy leads us into the *uncomfortable world of examining the banal*—the

facets of reality which we take for granted, and would like to leave unquestioned.

This idea of “thing in itself”—that which we can never see or understand—is perhaps the stuff of the entire universe, and *I'm not the one who came up with it*. Let me elaborate such terrifying notions with a brief analysis and acknowledgement of some established projects from the thinkers of the past.

Arguably, the most well known thinker on this subject is Immanuel Kant. Kant was (to my knowledge) the creator of “*Ding an sich*”, or “Thing-in-itself”.

{  Ontology }

In Kant's ontology, we see the world through an unchanging lens—the *human* experience:

“Think of the human mind as being a room. Say that the room has one window and *only* one window and the doors are locked you're never going to get outside this room—that's the human mind itself. Now when you look at the external

world, when you observe and experience external reality, it looks to you like external reality is shaped exactly like the window. Of course it is, because that's your only access to it—literally speaking, the shape of the window, as far as you're concerned, is the shape of what's outside the window. In other words, the light that comes in is precisely shaped by the opening that lets it in. In other words there's a form that the mind imposes on external experience and this activity of imposing these forms is a far better, more accurate, truer representation of the human cognition.”

-Dr. Sugrue

By default, we have no option but to experience things through the necessary forms of space, time, causality, and the hardwired, marginal perception of the human form. Thus, we do not know what things are *in themselves*, but we experience the various illusions or projections of our senses on the subject. We know not the thing, but *our particular experience* of the thing. TS Elliot once wrote: “The roses had the look of flowers that are looked at”.

Cognitive Biases

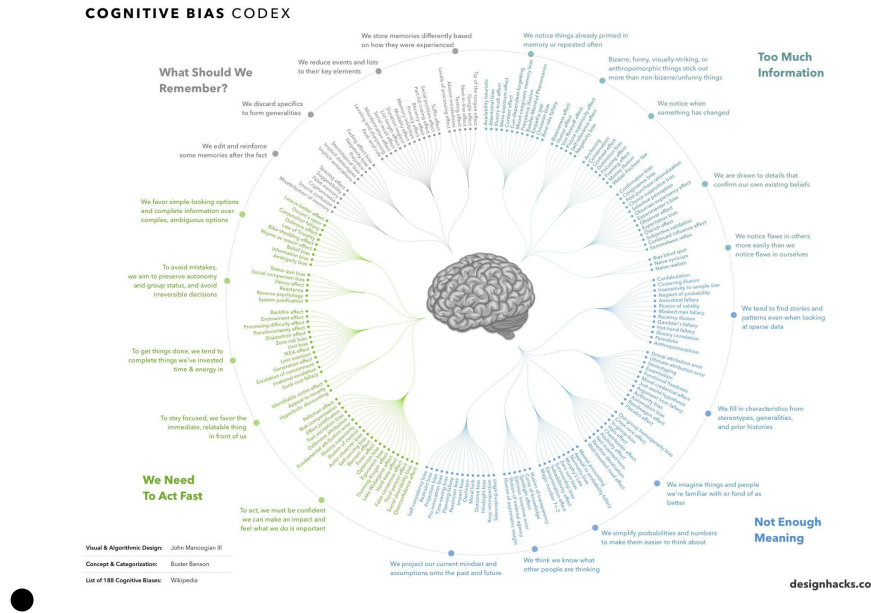
With this in mind, I find myself returning to the emphasis of studying my cognitive biases; for if the outside world, to my knowledge, is experienced through the window of my psyche, I ought to be aware of the limitations and distortions of the window. If the window is made of red glass, the external world is not red, the window is red. When I understand that the external world is being falsely or inauthentically represented, I gain a more accurate understanding of the true nature of the external world.

Through the obsessive study of the brain and the complex gunk of which it is composed, I have greatly increased my perspective towards psychological tendencies and the direct relationship they have to our lives. I have realized the importance of things like nutrition, physical activity, rest, I have studied the various mechanisms and anatomical schemes that allow this organ to function, and which determine our experience. I

have closely examined theories of consciousness, and learned

This education has directly influenced my apprehension, behavior, attitude, habits, and health more than any other school of thought I have found myself in.

Originally I wanted to do a substantial report and analysis of the most prevalent cognitive biases of my psychological life, to relate them to my current and future activity. In many ways I have done this, but I am choosing to instead move forward with the philosophical deconstruction at hand. I fear that this would be a distraction for me which holds no tangible forward intellectual movement. Here is my favorite diagram for cognitive biases, many of which I have elaborated on in other portions of text that aren't shown here.



Indifference

The following idea haunts me and keeps me at the heels of skepticism: When we look at the glass of water and we have the option to doubt it, we might choose a third option. We might simply drink it. What does all this questioning matter if we are thirsty? It makes a great deal of sense to take the action which causes us the most pleasure, which is most familiar, and of which our bodies are designed to act. But what if our experience isn't as it seems? What if this conception of familiarity or pleasure is an illusion? Again, we have no certain proof that our bodily perception is not a stimulus fed to our brain from a computer.

I am not arguing this point to be true, nor do I believe it's a great use of my time. What I am proposing is a nagging presence of uncertainty in the very things which we intuitively feel to be most *real*. I do not propose this as something to invoke paranoia, nor conspiracy, nor fear. This is meant to emphasize that there are, indeed, fundamental things which are left unanswered. It might feel natural and good to frown on this intellectual project—for dedicating so much thought and time to such things. I argue that it is not a trivial thing to study the human brain. Simple misconceptions of the human psyche have and will continue to be the cause of some of the most significant human sufferings. Basic familiarity with philosophy of mind, neuropsychology, language, idea, thought, and existence, provides access to a *vast* ocean of life-altering tools.

...

Some things on philosophy, and the way it plays with the man: each philosopher looks for a deeper

certainty, looks for a thing which undermines all other philosophy before it. We see some heroic examples such as the Categorical Imperative of morals from Kant, perhaps one of the more successful “laws” of the philosophical tradition. We also see less successful (but perhaps equally exciting) conceptions of history, like Hegel, with his conception of Geist over time. There is a deep desire in many existentially frightened creatures to find a needle in the haystack which is responsible for threading the fabric of everything. There is a lust for a metanarrative, the fundamental equation, the conception which breaks and explains all before and after it. One of the issues with this, is that most people end up at the realization that the most honest thing you can say about all this are things like, “it is and isn't” or “there is only the eternal now” or “you are it”.

This—in one sense—is infinitely cathartic and beautiful. In the other sense, it doesn't *do* much if you want to do anything other than be peaceful.

In the words of Alan Watts,

“The philosopher says [about these universal statements], ‘Yes I don't see why you're so excited about it! What do you mean by that?!’

He asks that question because he wants to continue in a word game; he doesn't want to go on into an experiential dimension; he wants to go on arguing because that's his trip. All these great mystical statements mean nothing whatsoever. They're ultimate statements, just as the trees and the clouds and the mountains and the stars have no meaning, because they're not words. Words have meaning because they're symbols, because they point to something other than themselves.”

The human language does not usually allow short statements to be completely true, and when it does, they don't have much of a place in forward-moving conversation. They do have a place in sanctity, in peace, and in beauty. These 'words' are the language of meditation, and not the language of the

politician, because they do not move anywhere, nor do they say anything more or less than everything.

There is a fundamental inability to transform words into *things in themselves*. This is the neverending game of philosophy, a game of turning fog to stone. Journeys with no destination, however, often prove to be those which bring us to unimaginable and important places.

There is the importance of distinguishing truth from wisdom. Greek: *Philosophia* means the love of wisdom. Wisdom is the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment. Wisdom is not *perfect* judgment, nor is it *exclusively* knowledge of truth. It is about *experience, action, and knowledge* combined. To love this, and to pursue this, is to get closer to wisdom. This is how I want to live, because it is what I love. I find it poetic that the deepest mires of erudition and extensive reasoning all come back to *experience, action, goodness, and knowledge*. In other words, the definition of the craft is not much different from the universal statements from before. It is about the elements of understanding, being, and

knowing. It is about life and death and everything and nothing. It is the science of all science, the language which speaks about everything, and the ritual of humans who know not their place, but know their pursuit of it.

At the end of the day, I exist in a world which (to my knowledge) does not consist of words. Perhaps it doesn't even consist of ideas. From the beginning, this was a notion I meekly held in the forefront of my brain. Any mode of exploration, whether it is writing, reading, substance abuse, verbal discussion, art, sports, politics, or work, is one of many. To falsely present your reality as the sum of all others would be solipsistic. To some natural or human extent, this is unavoidable. But we do not encourage it.

...

I will likely not ever understand the best way to navigate this world. At this young and fertile moment of my life, with undeveloped reason in one hand and unfettered curiosity in the other, I constructed a

temporary cognitive retreat. The intent of this ritual was to wring the most out of this beautiful opportunity, to utilize the maximum potential which sat before me. I do not wish to live my life stagnant in the mires of exclusively words, philosophy, contemplation, ideas, and skepticism. I wish to survey in detail the muck, vegetation, and ecosystem of this world—for it is a cognitive frontier from which all else grows. My brain, an organ occupying less space than a watermelon, is the single object which is responsible for what was, is, and will forever be, my experience on this Earth. Deconstruct my brain, and you deconstruct my life. I felt it deeply necessary to lock myself up and study it intimately and thoroughly.

I don't have to do this. I could pursue life without strategy. I don't want to. The life I desire requires an absurd quantity of time, effort, and intention to *think*. I acknowledge that this is not the case for everyone. I do not wish to spend my life doing too much thinking and too little doing and experiencing. However, it seems to me that sufficient context, philosophical exposition, familiarity of self, and

strategy are all things which are deeply important to a sustainable and meaningful life. I very well might be wrong, but this is what seems to be the most rationally justified understanding of holistic education for my particular self.

Science as metaphysics:

In its own right, and despite being so prolific, science perhaps remains an estranged relative of faith. This is not to say that science fails its own standards; within the realm of rational inquiry, science is one of the most stable things we have the privilege of handling. Science bears great fruit, to argue otherwise would be irrational. The fruits of science have saved my life more than once. With faith in science, we find ourselves with a magnificent and profound understanding of our universe. We find unprecedented power over ourselves and our surroundings. It is a dangerous thing to be critical of science, because almost no one in today's world can do so without hypocrisy. Here is the fine print, however: we are looking for the truth, the *whole*

truth, and nothing but the truth. Science is not everything. In the same way that a rain dance will not cure stage 4 cancer, science can not cure the human experience in full.

I often superimpose the structure of science onto my own experience. It covers a great deal of my experience with a degree of cooperation that I fail to find in most other things. Despite this, there are parts of my experience which are left exposed and unanswered. Let me consider a visualization; the average color gamut of a human eye holds Red, Green, and Blue electromagnetic wavelength receptors. A combination of the three of these wavelengths provide what we perceive as color. I don't believe that I can see the whole color of the human experience with just red, or just blue, or just green. I believe that one of these receptors, one of these methods for consuming and observing the universe, is science. I believe that it is *one* of multiple modes of thinking which is necessary for a balanced perception of the human experience.

I am left to confront that science is a type of soul that holds a different nature than my own; it feeds on the

matter of words, its body is composed of ideas and symbols, and it grows with the cultivation from curious humans. Science's expiration date is the day the last organized thinker stops thinking. In one way, science will outlive me a million times; symbols will remain stained on papers, and bits will remain etched onto millions of hard drives. And these marks will remain there, until they are washed away by some force of entropy. Until then, unless a rational agent is reading this information, the dynamic nature of science sits stagnant. Perhaps science is worth nothing, without a rational agent to toy with it. We might acknowledge this now—in the passion of science at its most mature—to realize that we can not treat science as an undying deity. Science is not the be-all-end-all, unless you consider the human race to be the be-all-end-all.

As of this moment, science offers too little in the way of understanding the complexities of experience. As humans, it would be foolish to *entirely* disregard the profundity which exists in the near infinite complexities of our psychological experience. Such things struggle to flourish in the unforgiving structure

of empiricism, because they fail to be meaningfully quantified. And yet, the quality of human experience is irrevocable. Science is noble to an extent, but it can not be my undying religion; for axioms can not be uttered with complete truth.

“There are things that a man can achieve and other things that he cannot achieve. The story of Canute’s forbidding the tide to rise was intended to show the absurdity of willing something that is beyond human power. In the past, the things that men could do were very limited. Bad men, even with the worst intentions, could do only a very finite amount of harm. Good men, with the best intentions, could do only a very limited amount of good. But with every increase in knowledge, there has been an increase in what men could achieve. In our scientific world, and presumably still more in the more scientific world of the not distant future, bad men can do more harm, and good men can do more good, than had seemed possible to our ancestors even in their wildest dreams.”

-Russell

Why I took To Philosophy

Philosophy was a very natural thing for me to quickly fall into; it felt like a natural progression for my cognitive progression. I was very deep into the “philosophical mires” before I realized it. The question is, as an extension of before, why is this the right thing to pursue? Who says that rationality and wisdom is a virtue other than my own instinct, or the voices of others? Again, my only measure of righteousness is labeled with no root. Perhaps there is something to be said here of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*. I follow my human passion as a pawn of nature, I follow my instinct as a moth is drawn to light, and to avoid this would perhaps be inauthentic, unnatural, and against the way of nature, in all her sacred forms. I am perhaps more than a biological machine of fats, proteins, and minerals, but I certainly live in one, and it is perhaps worthwhile to implement the energy I hold towards something which feels natural.

As well as this, we have now accepted the axiom of uncertainty with a *proclivity* towards philosophical rationality and reasoning. We pursue rationality not because it is more justified than other ways of cognitive life such as pseudoscience, unfettered romanticism*, or harsh dogmatic gnostic belief. We pursue rationality and the pursuit of wisdom because it offers more opportunities for expansion, experience, and awareness in the world. It is flawed, and I have no reason to justify this exploration more than this: I instinctively *feel* like I want to be the most I can be. Though my reasoning behind this falls down to the inevitable flaw in verification that all things do, I would be happy to die if I have fulfilled this arbitrary obligation. What more can I ask for, unless I succumb to nihilism. Nihilism is shallow, and life can be really fun. I'm a sucker for fun.

To Break Down

Now that we have established the importance of rationalism, context, and the method for meaningful dialogue (a priori), we need to set some axioms for what I am aiming towards. A strange thing about this

in the context of normal dialogue is that much of what I am saying should go *without* saying. You might think it strange if someone were to explain *why* they like laughing.

“I like laughing because when I laugh, I am in a good mood, I feel good, and pleasure is something that I like to pursue because I am human and I have biological mechanisms that lead me to pursue pleasure for various reasons.”

If you are a human talking to a human, you don't usually have to say this. The other person usually intuitively understands this because it is an included feature of human experience. What philosophy allows us to do is to explore the implications of these seemingly commonplace features and utilize them in our future behavior. My goal is to pursue the best future behavior possible. This pursuit is how I have chosen to utilize my current time and energy.

Philosophy is a language and a tool which picks apart the things which we are otherwise unlikely to

take apart. Reasoning and thought has given us the will to explore these things. Having the will to do what we wouldn't otherwise do is a feature of humanity, and I want to be the best human I can be because that is the best case scenario of my existence.

In that sense, this is a philosophical discourse. Some of these things speak for themselves, some don't.

Why is it important to pursue these types of questions?

We need to explore the vast, strange, big things that should go without saying, because it is the meat and potatoes of our existence. These are things like pleasure, pain, ignorance, awareness, focus, morals, perception, bias and dialogue. An awareness of these things allow us to pursue an ideal target. What is the ideal target?

I want to be a virtuous* human (Whatever that means)

What am I pursuing with this exploration and gap year? I'd like to be as most of a human* as possible. (Important to distinguish that I do not wish to be *inhuman*, because that is foolish. I must accept my humanity in its restrictions and glories). I would like to expand my ability to control my own perception, body, activity, and soul to the furthest extent I am able to with my current facilities.

I find that there is an overwhelming prioritization of the surface elements of life over the fundamental facets of life. The goal is to live a life of *Eudaimonia* (we will explore this in a second), rather than shallow activity. I hope to engage in meaningful activity in my life over shallow, surface activity. At this very moment, I am not going to define shallow activity over meaningful activity, though I will later. It seems to me that an early understanding of the brain (or self) is one of the most effective routes towards a life of wisdom. I argue that (without luck) the

fundamental facets of life must be examined in detail before one can begin meaningful activity.

Careful and intentional wins the race. I'd like to briefly visualize the impact of strategy with an overcomplicated allegory.

Let's consider two boat captains: Both captains have ships full of passengers who are eager to arrive at their destination, and both captains are unfamiliar with the ins and outs of their boats. The first captain eagerly decides to floor the motor, causing the boat to move quickly and decidedly one direction. The passengers approve, because it seems as if they are taking the most efficient route to their destination. The second captain, instead, chooses first to find and study a map, a user manual, and the motor of the boat. This captain now understands the destination, the nature of the motor (strengths and weaknesses), and how to properly steer the boat. Admittedly, the passengers on this ship are more frustrated because it seems that they are going to arrive at their destination *after* the

former ship. Regardless, the second captain slowly begins moving forward. The first captain realizes 10 minutes into the journey that he has run the engine too hard, and he has burnt up all the fuel. Now, this ship is stuck in the middle of a body of water, too far out to refuel. The passengers watch as the second boat drifts steadily by them. Not only has the second captain maximized his time, he has also prioritized intention over action. In the long run, this results in more effective and meaningful action.

This is what I am attempting to do with this gap year. I am studying how to steer myself, I am studying the action and languages with which I might navigate this world, and I am strategizing how to most effectively move forward. I believe that this intentional utilization of time will result in a sustainable approach to the rest of my life with a higher likelihood of success and fulfillment. Very few people in our society get such an opportunity to participate in this form of education. Youth is an incredibly fertile time for

broad human cultivation, and there is an overwhelming prioritization of educational methods which are failing. I am a product of one of these failed educational journeys. I am unable to accept this. I have taken it upon myself to explore a meaningful, diverse, detailed, holistic retreat into effective learning. I hope to provide an insight into the guts of this procedure.

Young people aren't great at a lot of things, but they are good at feeling lost. I do not want to continue to be lost. This is my strategy in the maze of human life, I am choosing to intentionally forge a strong understanding of the *self*, because all that happens in the world is experienced *through* the self. This is my most direct method of having control over the direction of the path I take through life and how I experience it. For myself, I feel that this is the ultimate necessity for a valuable education and existence writ large. Call it whatever you want, I am pursuing a destination which is the opposite of confusion.

As far as I know, I have one life to live. As a young and completely confused person, it seems reasonable to me that I should find a distinct strategy towards bettering my situation. I have chosen an educational strategy which is different from most of my peers, and therefore I feel some pressure. Unorthodoxy is not something humans feel comfortable participating in, so I hope to give some verification for my decision. It is in this text that I explore and justify this approach to life (even if it might not be necessary). I also show some of the internal workings of my examination of the human life. Again, I hope to examine human life so I can proceed forward with a better understanding of how to *act* in a human life. This is my strategy, I hope that it results in the fulfillment of my potential as a person.

Eudaimonia

“For both Plato and Aristotle, as for most ancient ethicists, the central problem of ethics was the

achievement of happiness. By “happiness” (the usual English translation of the Greek term eudaimonia), they did not mean a pleasant state of mind but rather a good human life, or a life of human flourishing. The means by which happiness was acquired was through virtue. Thus ancient ethicists typically addressed themselves to three related questions: What does a good or flourishing human life consist of? What virtues are necessary to achieve it? and How does one acquire those virtues?
—[Brittanica \(Socratics\)](#)

Eudaimonia, human *flourishing*. To flourish is to grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment. Eudaimonia does not *necessarily* equal a pleasant state of mind. It means a life of flourishing and of fulfilling potential. This is what I mean by being the *most* I can be; I want to maximize the physical and psychological and experiential potential of my life. It seems to me that a reasonable place to start is the study of eudaimonia—of philosophy. It turns out, people have been at this for a while. This is helpful, because I have thousands of people who have done the heavy lifting for me.

We have established an axiom of my being which is the pursuit of the furthest point possible, the 100%, the outermost border of human experience. This is the large, pragmatic machine which works under the hood. It is a mechanism to pursue the things that I need to have in order to understand, control myself, and have truth in my surroundings. This is, of course, why I have been led to philosophy. I think philosophy and youth go hand in hand. We explore the fact that I may very well empirically have no basis for what I should pursue, nor what I think is ideal because of my age and naivete.

With this in mind, and with every ounce of the rational workings of my underdeveloped brain, I have reached a belief that wisdom is a rational and good place to aim. If I continue to be confused, lack experience, and lack judgment, I will not have a good life. I have decided, perhaps naively, that I would like a good life. I am still deciding what that looks like, but what is more important is that I put myself in a position in which I am able to determine it. To me, an in-depth investigation into the nature of the world is a good place to start if my goal is to 'succeed' in it.

However, I am making a simple and unchanging decision that I believe a pursuit of wisdom is a good place to aim.

Sanctity of Reason

Once we determine reasoning to be a viable method of exploration, we have grip on the matter. We have the question of idealism versus materialism, meaning vs atoms in the void, one world or two worlds. We are looking at this through not an anthropological, spiritual, or practical lens *at this very moment* but first using logic to coarsely focus our efforts. What we determine through the means of rationality is understood to be the correct direction for this discourse, as well as the foundation for the progressively more detailed practical and experiential elements of our existence.

We understand that we as a person can make a decision that my consciousness is a result of physical occurrence, or something beyond physics. Based on the conclusion of this question, we have different implications on the ways we ought to live our lives.

As we systematically sift through axioms, we can philosophically validate the concept that my experience, my intuition, my facilities, are the only facilities I may trust (if any). This is because if I am to refer to an external opinion as true, this is through the acceptance that my means for judging truth are sound. Thus, we must dive inwards, deconstruct the self into its most detailed elements, so that we may build our own ideal conception of everything. My wish is to be the most I can be in the time I exist on Earth, therefore I must methodologically construct and research in *utmost detail* what I understand to be the ground I stand on.

A summary of the last few points: I follow* rationality and logical discourse. This proves that I must trust only myself, therefore must study and develop myself before any other activity. My conception of the world is limited to the size of the margin I am able to produce, a lemon sized consciousness or understanding equals a lemon sized etc.

I aim for understanding. I aim to achieve it by justifying and defining every variable in this statement, picking it apart as far as they go until they lead to a clear itinerary for practical action, virtue, habit, and worldly implications. Again, I am limited to the action only within that which I understand. Thus, if our goal is ideal action, we pursue the broadest possible conception of understanding.

One of the important ideas here is the fact that aiming at such a vague target as fundamental stances on existence may at first glance seem arbitrary, naive, meaningless, and inapplicable to a pragmatically and profoundly successful human life; I argue that it is the one of the only things which leads to one.

Reason leads us to places otherwise unimaginable—from a grain of sand and the scientific method, I can synthesize a pretty intensive understanding of the universe.

To doubt this methodology is either to state that I am lying, or that reason is fundamentally flawed (as long as I said all of this stuff right... I doubt I did).

Kierkegaard, the uncertainty rule

I am currently the oldest I have ever been, therefore 18 years is the only amount of experience I may draw from with *some* element of experiential familiarity. I can not make a true statement on any life other than my own, nor even many aspects of my own. What I can do is use predetermined, empirically robust, generally trustworthy systems to determine which direction I *ought* to head in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

presupposition of reasoning systems

One of the few gambles of genuine faith I often stand by is reason. I do this because it has consistently not failed to take me to interesting places. I stand by reason because it seems* to be reasonable. It turns out, however, after a closer look, that this too is *subject to doubt*. Nothing should go

unobserved if we are looking for intellectual confidence.

It is reasonable to be reasonable, because of circular reasoning.

If I assume reason, I can show reason is wonderful and absolutely necessary, but I can not do it without presupposing what I am trying to prove. Reason seems to be unable to justify itself.

–Michael Sugrue, on the madness of Keirkegaard

I have chosen the route of logic because it empirically is likely to lead me to a correct outcome. But who ever proved to me definitely and certainly that empirical justification or logical reasoning is the proxy by which truth is measured? This is the never ending cascade of skepticism, a seemingly eternal spiraling motion of doubt, which threatens to turn into two things; wisdom or insanity. It is perhaps best to end this circular reasoning here because the sensation is similar to that of biting my own teeth.

Let's talk about intuition, a fishy term to most logicians and philosophers; For these purposes, I am defining this form of intuition as a *direct* apprehension or sensation (e.g. I *know* whether I have a headache or not, I do not have to use a mathematical proof to justify this to you). An intuitive sensation that I fundamentally will or crave is that I *want certainty, knowledge, and truth*. Philosophy is the practice that has led me closest to what I *feel* is certainty. In logical terms, this exercise has quantitatively grown my intellectual capacity and experience.

This understanding of what 'certainty' is (reasoning), is effectively on the basis of *faith*. It is here that Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith' presents itself. Either or, choose faith or reason, because you can't have your eggs in both baskets. If you choose not to decide, you have already made the leap.

It seems to me, on the basis of this reasoning (which I have uncertainly assumed the mode of) that certainty is a myth for the current human race*. With these things in mind, we open the doors to a wider

perspective. Those who are not limited to their chosen dogmatism, can—in theory—graze the corresponding goods with each mode of thought. It is in this action that a diverse and versatile synthesis might emerge. This is, in some respects what I hope to do with my life*.

He is often believed to have stated, “I know that I know nothing.”

I was always annoyed at such a blatant paradox, particularly on such an important subject. I only just recently discovered, to my relief, that he was only ever documented asserting he “*believed* that he knew nothing.”

And so we must make peace with this ideological uncertainty, a philosophy of how to best handle confusion. An attitude, perhaps similar to Oscar Wilde’s quote, “everything in moderation including moderation”. If everything is held to doubt, and we are looking for certainty, we can not find it anywhere. Perhaps this fundamental absence has something to do with this universal fabric which we don’t yet fully understand. Perhaps confusion is a certainty in

itself—one of the few things we can almost* definitively apprehend. Here is the paradox—I am not certain if we should not be certain, or I am confused whether I should be confused. Because I am confused whether I should or should not be confused, even if I should not be confused, I still am. Perhaps this, because of my lack of fluency in logic and philosophical language, is deeply naive and mathematically false. This, of course, also has the chance to be true.

Maybe this is the furthest understanding I may reach in the world of thinking as a human,

The poignancy of this ritual is the fact that the name of the game requires that I never reach an element of certainty. Perhaps in no field other than ignorance is true satisfaction for the human.

The idea which ultimately defines my incessant exploration is that I *do not* know if I know *nothing*.

This whole thing very well may be a fruitless attempt to shoot a non-existent target, and yet it is so *damn profound and interesting to do*. I feel inclined to acknowledge this motion of the universe, this life-force, this *Elan Vital*. In the Tibetan Buddhist

tradition, we see a practice which shares this attitude; Sand mandalas, often of enormous complexity and size, are constructed and then *destroyed* as a ritual. It is ceremonious, artistic in its own right, to *partake in an action*, even if it ultimately creates nothing. In this way, we enhance the attitude that action in itself is an end to a means, destruction is creation, existence is irreversible to the ritual of the cosmos. We are grains in a cosmological mandala, destined to be swept away to the entropy we were constructed from. Yet, profoundly, we were *here*, and the ritual of our activity are marked into this *thing* in some divinely irreversible way*. But anyway, Que sçay-je?

The part of me which is Wittgenstein and hopeful of certainty

Though it does not lend itself at all well to a human brain, I admire the intention of Wittgenstein's intellectual project

(particularly when I refer to this, I mean his Tractatus which I am not cunning enough to read and understand, though I understand its story and intention. I am familiar with the mental landscape of the man much more than the work he produced). In other words, this is an intellectual project which would better be created by a computer. I respect Wittgenstein because I respect skepticism, and he is one of the closest things to a human embodiment of it. Here is one of my favorite quotes by Wittgenstein and one that I believe is expository of this personality I am trying to examine:

“I would have written a good book if I could, but it was just outside my capacity. This will have to do. At its best, it's an album—a series of therapies to uncloud my understanding of the world. These are often clouded up by the way we use language, and the incapacity of my human mind to organize ideas in an ideal manner.”

This is a textbook example of this ‘intertextuality’ which I have mentioned before— of a thought which I have thought, but have never been able to properly articulate. Wittgenstein, in his precise glory, has done it for me. Wittgenstein said that “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence through language”. Wittgenstein “didn't like to put anything in print because it seemed so final; it seems that philosophy is more a process than a series of absolute certainties”.

This is, of course, the battle. We have few tools at our disposal, language is one of them. The problem philosophers often come across is that many of the things which we want to discuss (Emotion, God, Romanticism, infinitudes, etc.) are blatantly outside of the conceptual boundary in which language functions.

Wittgenstein is obsessively thorough, clean, and methodological; he leaves no mental crumbs behind. He is a true scientific positivist thinker, willing to say precisely nothing which is objectively unjustified. It is this motivation that we occasionally have in

common, but the work where we differ. Wittgenstein seemed to have the ideal brain for such unforgiving skeptical discourse.

Romanticism

“To those who have lived entirely amid terrestrial events and who have given little thought to what is distant in space and time, there is at first something bewildering and oppressive, and perhaps even paralysing, in the realization of the minuteness of man and all his concerns in comparison with astronomical abysses. But this effect is not rational and should not be lasting. There is no reason to worship mere size. We do not necessarily respect a fat man more than a thin man. Sir Isaac Newton was very much smaller than a hippopotamus, but we do not on that account value him less than the larger beast. The size of a man’s mind—if such a phrase is permissible—is not to be measured by the size of a man’s body. It is to be measured, insofar as it can be measured, by the size and

complexity of the universe that he grasps in thought and imagination. The mind of the astronomer can grow, and should grow, step by step with the universe of which he is aware. And when I say that his mind should grow, I mean his total mind, not only its intellectual aspect. Will and feeling should keep pace with thought if man is to grow as his knowledge grows. If this cannot be achieved—if, while knowledge becomes cosmic, will and feeling remain parochial—there will be a lack of harmony producing a kind of madness of which the effects must be disastrous.

We have considered knowledge, but I wish now to consider wisdom, which is a harmony of knowledge, will and feeling, and by no means necessarily grows with the growth of knowledge

....

These considerations bring us to the sphere of feeling. It is feeling that determines the ends we shall pursue. It is feeling that decides what use we shall make of the enormous increases in human power. Feeling, like the rest of our

mental capacities, has been gradually developed in the struggle for existence.”

–The Expanding Mental Universe, Bertrand Russell, Pg. 393

Writing about romanticism has been difficult for me for a number of reasons. In general, it isn't uncommon for me to assume a position of romantic ideology, attitude, and approach towards things. Because of this, I feel a strong desire to deconstruct, analyze, and meaningfully express it. I believe that the world of unfettered, passionate, rich, artistic thought deserves our attention in some capacity. In line with this recurring theme of duality, devil's-advocacy, and skepticism, I am considering the unavoidable “villain”* of scientific, prudent, hardwired rationality. It is in the consideration of both elements equally that I wish to cultivate a *marriage* between these two schools of thought. Writing about romanticism has proven to be difficult because of creative indecision. How does one accurately

represent the essence of romantic thought? Surely it would be foolish to bind such fiery ideas to the restrictive cords of language!

And so—in a disgustingly appropriate fashion to such a topic—I write these words while smoking a tobacco pipe without permission, surrounded by the sound of sudden and torrential blankets of rain, looking out from under the pole-barn apron in a vintage armchair.

What do I mean when I say romanticism? Arguably, this field of idea resides in a region not far from what philosophy calls *Aesthetics*; a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty, and artistic taste. Romanticism (among other things) is an appropriately vague adjective for the corresponding *stuff* of a world chiefly concerned with natural, beautiful, and artistic experience, (though it is not strictly limited to these things). The romantic world does not always choose to follow the well-trodden paths of rationality, restriction, or prudence in experience. Romantics often resort to

hyperbole, because they are often concerned with things beyond the circumference of words.

Often, romantics are concerned with things beyond language. The romantic world is a haven for those who see no 'rationality' in accepting the infinite absurdity of the cosmos. Prudent people are prudent until they start to seriously analyze their existence. Once you look close enough, you might run the risk of realizing the Protean soup of the human experience, and the grotesquely arbitrary lines we accept as the walls of reality. It seems to me that the most informed people in the world tend to be most aware of how uninformed they are.*

When someone examines a piece of art and feels a profound, unlabeled, complex, delicious, yearning, they are swimming in the pool of romanticism. The experience of romanticism is determined by the experience of reception; of conscious taste. Those who gift their attention to the infinite complexities of taste often appreciate tasting more. Those who appreciate tasting appreciate their experience more.

...

David Lynch has *mechanisms* from which he is able to derive a great sense of bliss and health in his old age. The importance of it being a *mechanism* for successful peace should not be understated—a vague sentiment of appreciation towards life is far less robust. Human nature follows the law of least effort, therefore if you don't have an *algorithm* that leads you towards predisposed attitudes, you are more likely to follow a path of complaint rather than appreciation. I am advocating a predisposed set of algorithms. Predisposed algorithms which have proven themselves to work are more likely to lead to a point of bliss than pain.

...

In some ways, I chose the mode of romanticism as a mechanism for *learning*.

It may be argued that I chose this route because I needed to learn about the world in one way or

another, and this way just *felt so good*. Romantic thinking led to passionate learning, and therefore I found much more pleasure in the process of exploration than I would on a learning path of alternative methods. I've been vague about what these paths look like on a pragmatic level, so let's outline some basic thoughts on development.

Because I am in my youth, my concern tends to revolve around the development of young humans from the moment they enter the world to the moment that they are 25.

When I refer to development in this context, it is generally concerning the change in how a person exists, experiences, possesses, or does. I will be looking at the various elements of human development through the lens of three regions of activity: Biological, Cognitive, and Socioemotional. These three regions of study allow us to see specific representations of the change in an individual as they grow.

Most of what developing *is*, is just learning. When a human is delivered into the world, their brain and body has a lot of biological mechanisms which are *designed* to take in the world, make sense of the world, and change themselves so they better survive in the world.

This addiction to the drug of passion must largely be attributed to my youngness—a passion for passion. There is a correct form of this, and it is difficult to achieve, particularly in young people whose decision-making-brain is half baked.

To the romantic adolescent*, every *occurrence* has an unimaginable and valid awesomeness to it. As a society we might sympathize easier with the middle aged woman who has taken psychedelic drugs and speaks of such new worlds of understanding and beauty that she has never known*, yet we shrug off the utter fascination and profundity of childhood fascination as being childish**. To the young, and to the romantic, there is value in everything— there is utter and complete *everythingness* in what some

people may think of as *nothing*. There is such a poignancy in this that I am often left unable to continue rational discourse when I speak on this, because I myself am overcome with the utter beauty of beauty itself, and on and on...

The reason I intentionally articulate this is out of hopes to bring a sanctity to it that I feel is not present in one way or another in much of today's 'prudent society'. The acknowledgment of beauty most certainly plays its role in our 'prudent society'--I am most certainly not claiming that beauty *dies* with time on Earth (There is much potential, in fact, for the opposite to occur). However, it may be argued that the general understanding or *role* of unrestrained, exciting, beauty exists as a facet of *scarcity*. In other words, we can consider the nature of value in the same manner. Value mostly comes from rarity; the same is often true of beauty. In this respect, beauty is understood to be derivative of rarity. It is in the one *particularly* uncommon majestic sunset, or in the *particularly* rare altruistic act of a stranger which we are reasonably expected to tear up and admire. The same response is generally thought to be less

reasonable of someone looking at a banana, blank wall, or intentionally placed piece of tape (if you are unaware of the specific reference i'm making with these examples, I suggest Googling: banana, tape, and wall).

Young people innately have a much smaller reservoir of experience, and therefore, the experience of reality is distorted in a deeply significant way. I am here to argue that this distortion is something we need to intentionally cultivate as a means to create a new generation which values the necessary elements of intellect and well-roundedness—of sensitive, and broadly *contextualized* individuals who are confident in the profundity of their realities as well as those of others.

Dasein

“the individual's starting point has been called “the existential angst”, a sense of dread, disorientation, confusion, or anxiety in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world.”

-Wikipedia on existentialists

The compulsive thinker lives in a state of apparent separateness, in an insanely complex world of continuous problems and conflict, a world that reflects the ever-increasing fragmentation of the mind

-Eckhart Tolle

When young people get all riled up about the absurdities of existence, listening ears tend to turn off fairly quickly. This makes sense, because most people are mainly concerned with their *own* activity, blurry motives, and identity. Unless *you* are the one experiencing the existential inquiry, it seems a bit cheesy, trivial or impractical to consider. I acknowledge that I am a strong case of the young person who is riled up on the absurdity of existence, and this has largely determined how I interact with people. If this has caused anyone to cringe, feel second-hand embarrassment, or to be annoyed at me, here lies my formal apology. I am sorry.

However—now is the time to really confront it in full face. Late night text threads, long verbal discussions, or shallow song lyrics fail to give justice to the idea that, “Oh yeah, we don’t exactly know what the hell is going on. I am in a body, and I can observe myself and think, I am unsure of what is real and how it got here and what it means. I appeared, and someday I will disappear in the way that I am now. There is an organ between my ears which I have been told is responsible for all of this perception I’m having, except I know quite little about it. All of this is something I would like to better understand, and not understanding it makes me feel quite uneasy.”

Again, I acknowledge the fact that I am young. Existential angst in the *severity* of this moment will likely fade as I age. However, it is currently in full force; searing, euphoric, and dreadful. There is a reasonable tendency to simplify the experience of existential angst in young people. It makes sense; when you get older, the things from the past are smaller and the sensation is eroded by limited memory. Any time you reflect on a time of lower

knowledge, a sense of chronological superiority sets in—the me of now is more *me* than I was or will be.

I will not attempt to describe the sensations of existential awe, confusion, and rapture, because I will fail. Perhaps all I might say on the experience of young, existential angst is that it is not a quantity of a feeling, but it is *the feeling* in entirety. It feels as if there is no limit to how intense this sensation can go, and yet each experience is infinitely more profound than the last.

Indeed, those who experience this sensation are often young people without the means to make anything out of the complete barrage of cosmological terrors and awes that have hit them without warning; but this does not render the experience any less powerful or experiential. A middle schooler, I expect, experiences the same “amount” of pain from stubbing their toe as a middle aged person. I think, even if the experience, appreciation, confusion, and passion looks a bit childish and romantic, it is good and necessary to

acknowledge it to some extent.

I feel this way because It seems to me that existential angst can be* one of the most profound natural processes in the human experience. Perhaps a reason why the experience is so savage is actually *because* of age; young people have less experience under their belt, and therefore lack the necessary means to separate the “abstract” from the “concrete”. Thus, the child is left with true, unrestrained emotional and contemplative sensation without the automatic restraints of advanced language, habit, or bias. Things can be much more angst-inducing if they don’t have a name.

Mood

In these moments of existential profundity, awareness, rapture, and catharsis, it is easy to wonder why everyone isn’t talking about this stuff all the time. In other words, personal profundity causes a distortion of perception. In a moment where you are euphoric, the concept of dread holds no weight; you are in a *state* receptive only to certain forms of mood, cognition, and perception. In a moment of

dread, the concept of euphoria is as good as fake, because you are in a state receptive only to negative sensation.

I have been fascinated by this blurry mechanism for as long as I can remember, and what it means for our understanding of consciousness. It seems to me that we do not sufficiently factor in the gravity of *mood* in the conception of a human life. Often, people speak about themselves or others as if they are *defined, distinct, constant* entities. I believe that this conception is far from reality, and is caused by an experiential illusion.

Mood defines the *character* of how you exist in a given moment. We can think of this word differently, perhaps replace it with 'virtue'; as in the quality or essential characteristic of a thing. When you are very hungry, your experience is most consciously defined by the virtue of hunger. When you are hungry, your activity is influenced both inwardly and outwardly. The same goes for other states of virtue; anxious, motivated, calm, distracted, busy, lazy, and so on.

One of the biggest distinctions I want to propose is that we *never leave a state of virtue*. We are always in a mood. You might argue that there are times where we are less conscious, and don't feel as if you are in a mood. What about sleep? What about absentmindedly scrolling, or watching tv? What about getting carried away in discussion? All of these activities *are still defined by a virtue of state*. Sleep is activity with the virtue of sleep; in other words, if I am asleep, I am in a state as good as "the mood of sleep". When I am absentminded, I am occupying a distracted state, and so on. With this framework, we are able to reconceptualize the conscious activity of a human from one that is a 'constant' entity, to one that is a fluid entity; action is entirely shaped by the profile of mood. In this framework, I do not have a 'personality that determines my actions', my personality is defined *by* my actions.

Our mood defines our actions and our experience far more than I think we realize. We seem to happily accept whichever sensation is most readily

accessible, under our noses, as unquestionable reality. This creates a number of problems; of the most significant, I think, is the rejection or ignorance of perspectivism.

I could have two situations: in one, I slept well and felt pleasantly energized and euphoric to make the most of my day—I am in a pleasant mood. In the other, I slept badly, and woke up to dreadful thoughts, sensations, and feelings towards the world—I am in an unpleasant mood.

These people will undoubtedly act differently throughout their day. Either accepts the wonderful or dreadful sensation of reality to *be their understanding of what the world actually is*.

At many points in my life, I have been either of these people.

What this illusion fails to consider, however, is that other people are living in a different reality. You, yourself, will soon live in a different reality. Your own reality, your understanding of *how the universe is*, is bent to the will of your mood. Everyone is in their

own profile of mood, and thus, everyone is experiencing different forms of reality.

Regardless, this is something that we *must* acknowledge if we wish to succeed at fulfilling our obligations. The mindset an individual learns to handle abstract experiences when they are *young* largely determines their handle on the matter as they age. It seems to me that *existence* and *being* seem to be pretty important facets of the human experience, even if we don't consciously think about them. It is my goal to broaden my understanding and mindset of these issues so that I may reduce my existential angst. With the study of existence and being as actual subjects rather than vague sensations, I am more likely to become the person I would like to be.

Also, existential angst is excruciating, powerful, relentless, angry, inflammatory, vast, and it eats depression for breakfast. It sucks, and I would like to put a foot down in the only way I can.

The goal is to take my experience as a human, and to put a name to it. When we have a name to it, we can break it apart, categorize, prioritize, understand, and then utilize. The way to *first* go about this is perhaps to experience, learn/absorb, and consider. This strategy allows you to refer your own experiences to that of others, to learn better theories than your own, and to think about the whole thing in an organized way. After much of this discourse, I have stumbled upon what I find to be a remarkably *intuitive* way to look at things. I should rephrase: After months of synthesis, I found the work of a philosopher which was *frighteningly* similar to my own. It turns out that (encouragingly) I am not the only person who feels the incessant need to methodologically analyze the fundamental human experience. Again, it is a bittersweet ordeal to discover work by someone else on a subject you feel *you* have developed on your own dime. This is particularly true when it is executed far better than what I could manage.

Dasein

I discovered this with Heidegger's conception of *Dasein*; a term which doesn't translate well out of English. Sugrue describes Dasein as "human being in the world; it is finite, it is contingent, it is uncertain. It is a collection of psychic states like worry, guilt, anxiety... It is not like anything else in the world; it is the way in which, the vehicle in which, the matrix in which *being* is disclosed to us...in other words, you can only find out what being is from the perspective or in the way that a human being finds out about what being is, and that's by *being a human being*."

A translation of Heidegger states: "This entity which each of us is himself...we shall denote by the term 'Dasein,'""; For Heidegger, this is distinctly separate from our everyday consciousness, this is not an entity of our own conception, it is a term which describes a contingent element of being in the world, "of the priority of the world to the self, and of the evolving nature of the self itself" *(J. Childers/G. Hentzi eds., The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism (1995) p. 70)
*(I should note that I have failed to meaningfully consume enough of the esoteric and voluminous

texts of Heidegger *explicitly*, but I have studied his work through the means of more accessible routes such as lectures, analyses, philosophy papers, etc. I have found that the most lean and accessible summary of the important ideas is given by Dr. Michael Sugrue in a [Princeton Lecture](#), this is the one which we will loosely follow)

Again, I emphasize our overarching goal: to fulfill my obligation of being the most I can be as a human being. To achieve this goal, we must act *authentically*. How do we do this?

Sugrue continues: “What we're going to do is investigate Dasein—investigate what it is to be a human being. We're going to do that by *being* a human being and we're going to do that in an authentic way. What that means is that we have to remove our illusions and remove our distraction by the events the little trivial events in the world focus yourself and turn inward, and what you will find is your true self and your true being”

Fantastic. We can already see what I mean about how much this aligns with my tactics; the idea of the

gap year was to do just this! To partake in the oh-so-rare cultural anomaly of retreating from society for a bit—to cut off the harmful trivialities and distortions of young human life so I can exist naturally, in a controlled setting, and cultivate an *authentic, genuine* identity and understanding of the world.

Isolation sounds scary

Now I can see how this might sound scary pretty quickly, for good reason. I am not claiming that social interaction, simple joys, careers, and acceptable human activity is *all* trivial and distorted. It is not. Believing this has the potential to lead to some pretty hairy corners of the human psyche. What I am saying is that separating yourself from the flow of life to take a moment for calibration and observation can be* *extraordinarily* profound—particularly at such a fertile time of young adulthood.

The act of retreating into oneself to expand must be paired with some particular passions and characteristics: there must be habit, there must be some balance, there must be health, there must be

complete acknowledgement of the self, and there must be perspective. The normal human person is not suited for complete hermetism, so you must treat the ritual carefully and intentionally. I have done so, but now is not the time to explain how.* (*see habit chapter)

So we now have a distinct starting point to leap from; an honest approach towards figuring out this blurry subject of our place in existence—Dasein. Instead of prioritizing an understanding of the universe as it *actually is*, we have decided to focus on the only thing we *can* start with: exactly how it *isn't*. In other words, the universe is its own thing—our goal is to pinpoint the human characteristics, flaws, and distortions of how we perceive it and live in it. What does Dasein consist of?

(footnote: This idea might better be referenced towards Hegel, or absolute idealism.

Regardless, this form of Dasein served as a useful explanatory tool for the practical ideas I was trying to get at. I may have run with it further than it deserved.)

As I see it, Dasein essentially consists of a three-fold structure:

- Facticity, Disorientation, Calibration:
 - “*To be thrown into the world*. We didn't ask for this right? No one consulted us before we were born or before we became conscious asking us if we would like a kind of spatio-temporal world full of people and things and objects and questions and issues. We're stuck with it. This is not a disease or a problem it just *is*...the fact that we are cast into a world *not of our own making* and that we busy ourselves with little irrelevant things—that's a given” –Sugrue
- Motivation, Manipulation, Instinct, Desire
 - We are trying to make something of our existence; we manipulate the stuff of the world to receive some benefit, we are inclined towards activity. We eat food, we have sex, we pursue pleasure, we

practically interact with the world in some way. We are “Appropriating the world for *our own purposes*”

- Lack, Inability, Uncertainty, Deprivation
 - We are unable to entirely *succeed* at these purposes; for we are always *aiming* for something uncertain. We can not confidently cross the correct finish line if we don't know what it is. We apprehend theories of virtue, correctness, knowledge, but we have yet to reach the objective answer. There is something fundamentally inherent to the human condition which makes our activity one of either searching or ignoring. At any given time*, there will be humans that disagree on what is true, thus, humanity is (at past and present) destined to an unanswered question or understanding of the universe.

“This is what gives Heidegger something to *do*. He wants to start with his pre-reflective, kind of

unconscious human state, and drive us towards *consciousness of ourselves*. He doesn't guarantee this is going to be pretty, he doesn't guarantee this is going to be easy, and he doesn't guarantee this is going to be readily intelligible. But on the other hand, whatever it is you are engaged in that isn't [a *better* state] is relatively unimportant”

—Sugrue

Perhaps it is a matter of *what to do, and what to aim for*. I don't think it's plausible that I will ever reach the correct answer, but it seems beneficial to pursue. Then again, we don't know anything; let's aim for the one that is most *authentic* and true to our human reality.

We are aiming to better ourselves with the notion that there *is* a more conscious human state than the one we currently occupy. When you are in a state of unconsciousness, we find ourselves striving towards consciousness. Perhaps this is a continuation of Nietzsche's will to power; the force of nature to defy entropy. In our very biology, we combat the tendency

of most physical matter to collapse into chaos. Our minds are a continuation of this biology, and now even the world of consciousness has begun to order itself.

This is the model of our human striving, our ultimate, somewhat Hegalian intention. Similar to Geist, we are an endlessly evolving *Soul*, which scoots closer to transcendence, enlightenment, and understanding over time.

It is this forward motion of *authentic* passion towards the more-conscious soul that contributes to my willingness to tolerate the disorientation of human existence. *Das Ewig-Weibliche; The eternal Feminine Leads us Aloft.*

And yet, paradoxically, this order doesn't seem to exist when you look at the human race. The more time I spend around people, the more I learn about humanity, the more I interact, the more social media matures in reverse, the more that I see chaos growing. With 8 billion people and growing, we are at

an all time high in terms of the quantity of authentic *and* inauthentic action in the world. In other words, there is a lot going on right now with humanity; to try and understand it all is impossible. In other words, we are presented with chaos; how do we best make order of it?

Trying to relate human experiences to one another can be beautiful and wonderful and profound; e.g. Art. And yet, we often do it under the impression that we can express objective truths from one person to another. As a child of perspectivism, I don't see how this is possible. Art provokes not an understanding of their experience, but a projection and simulation of your own.

It seems that trying to make objective sense from infinite human chaos would be fruitless..

The Human Experience is Hazy and solipsistic

Human life (more accurately, my life. I can speak for no one but myself) *is very hazy.*

I find that time passes at various speeds, reality is distorted to represent my moods, and space is determined by quickly changing perspective. I have no clue what is going on. Everything seems* to be chaos*. The more that I ask questions, the more that I realize the immense complexity of everything. I fall into deep pits of anxiety when thinking about these things, as many people do.

Here, it seems necessary and practical to implement ignorance*.

Perspectivalism, Perspective

“Scientific realism is the belief that science accurately depicts the way the world is. Nietzsche disagrees; he says science is just another perspective. It's certainly the perspective he believes—hence Gay Science— but not because it corresponds to the

world. Because it's an extremely useful thing to believe, it actually helps us control nature.“

-Darren Stalloff

Perspectivism (German: Perspektivismus; also called perspectivalism) is the epistemological principle that perception of and knowledge of something are always bound to the interpretive perspectives of those observing it.

...

With literally infinite views and experiences for each person, all truths are subject to bias and infinite interpretations. Each perspective is impacted by spontaneous events, meaning that no two perspectives are alike. With this and human fallacy in mind, there are no absolutes. Human truth becomes subjective and never objective. Objects appear different based on the position of the observer.

–Wikipedia

(We can see how this idea of pseudo-relativism or interpretive humanism aligns quite comfortably with our thoughts towards Hiedegger's *Dasein*.)

Perspectivism is one of the most significant philosophical and social themes I have explored in this time. It seems to me that, in a world of social interaction and comparison, one *really ought to* have some sense of the deep-rooted nature of perspective. I believe it is far too easy and dangerous to perceive others as if they have lived the same life as you, and therefore have some incorrect or negative quality to them because they differ from your understanding of the world. It is perhaps not that others are living in an altered world, but a distinctly *separate* one. With this understanding, we much more effectively empathize, communicate, and interact with all people. This is, of course, difficult to do. Human behavior follows the law of least effort; it is much easier to call someone evil than consider the complex combination of variables which have perhaps justifiably led them to their perspective. It is also against human nature to comfortably call two opposing things true. The world

becomes a lot easier to categorize when you process it through a binary system. The world becomes a lot more complicated, but accurate when you process it through an infinite spectrum. Perhaps things are even more accurate when you don't impose them upon *any* scheme of language.

With things such as psychology, poetry, philosophy, and some forms of science, we are skirting close to the fringe of things which can be meaningfully described. Again, we acknowledge perspectivalism; we do not assume X to be true, but we use it to get places. We don't know what is true, but we do know methods to go places. It is difficult but important to distinguish thing from idea, idea from reality, word from will, and so on. Again we acknowledge the world of Kant's existentialism; we do not directly examine things in themselves, but *representations* subject to perspective.

Things can be true, but only within the box they are in. Within the language of science, I can empirically prove that X is indeed X. Despite this, it *means* nothing to whoever doesn't believe you. In the

language of faith, empiricism holds no grounds for justifying truth. Therefore, to the opponent, X is Y. You have a true perspective of scientific language, and they have a different but perhaps equally true perspective of faithful language.

“And so science and common sense are just masks that we throw on reality so that we can cope with it—so that we can manipulate it. Now Nietzsche accepts the correspondence theory of truth as the only tenable theory of truth and it is for that reason he says there is no truth right because there is no fixed final parsh reality for it to correspond to. So don't be upset when we find out that everything is a lie that there is no truth. It doesn't mean that there's nothing to believe in, it simply means that not there is nothing to correspond to our beliefs—that our beliefs simply interact with the world causally rather than correspondentially. They give us a handle on the world and as I've suggested, therefore grounds for belief have nothing to do with truth but rather are all about power over nature.”

-Stalloff

I like to imagine the individual human psyche as an infinitely complex collage of these different languages of thought; therefore personal perspective becomes a highly faceted filter which processes any given stimulus in a unique way to each person. When we contrast the processed stimulus from one person to another, they will almost always be different in some degree, because each person has lived a fundamentally separate life. This is true for both very similar people and very different people. This disjunct exists in many places, but is often ignored at the detriment of everyone involved. Political language is often morbidly ignorant of this unavoidable dissonance, and this allows the eternal argument to sustain.

It seems to me that this interpretation of human experience is one of the most plausible (though of course not a certain one; interestingly, the idea of perspectivism almost argues against itself*, though

in the case of Nietzsche, not contradictorily. Again, I refer you to the utility of Darren Staloff's quote at the beginning of this section). I struggle to conceive of a position which is more difficult to disprove than this one; in other words, this idea is extremely compelling. It also offers a great deal of utility in daily life. It is interesting how the most objective answers* in philosophy tend to be the ones that rely on subjectivity.

...

I understand that my relationship between my self and my brain may be considered unorthodox* (at least within the small demographic I have experienced at this point in my life).

It is because of this that, (if I wish to express some of these ideas in a way that they are to be identified with and understood), I must start from the very root of human cognitive life in general. From there, I can

utilize this scheme as a means for navigation and definition of my place in human cognitive life.

Each and every person lives in a vastly different world and their experiences are each unique. If we are aiming for a clear, universal understanding of *any idea*, we must acknowledge this type of bias in detail. Humans are bad at acknowledging this, and it is the root for many problems. It seems to me that the meat and potatoes of politics is a field of people who simply haven't figured out how to correctly acknowledge this deficit. There is no such thing as a large-scale governed system which has a 100% success rate; there will always be people whose values and needs are not completely represented. There are very few times in history where a *lot* of people didn't get the short end of the stick. In no way, however, does this make the *pain* felt by the victims any less. It really, really, sucks for those who get the short end of the stick. I feel that understanding this makes us more likely to fix problems in a more effective and morally authentic way.

When we argue that rules, actions, or people should be a certain way, we are saying that we wish they aligned with our own values. This makes sense; if I don't think something is right, I wish it wouldn't happen. The reason I rephrase this is because we often fail to consider the *origin* of our own values.

If I have a traumatic experience with spiders as a child, I may grow up to believe that spiders are evil and should be squashed at all costs. This makes sense, it is cause and effect. On the other hand, someone may have a pet tarantula as a child, and they grow up to advocate for arachnid preservation. This makes sense, it is cause and effect.

Either of these individuals have gained their perspective from rational origins, yet they disagree with each other. The fact that these individuals disagree, means that they are at risk of vilifying each other. One is a murderer, and the other cultivates evil. In other words, we have two individuals whose experiences and values are justified, yet they create dissonance because they fail to acknowledge that they have had different experiences. This is a large

source of tragedy where there could be victory, and I think understanding it holds great power.

When the spider-squasher overcomes their sense of dread towards spiders and acknowledges that the arachnid-advocate is preserving valuable organic life, they are practicing a form of empathy. They are stepping outside of themselves so they can see the perspective of another. When they do this, they are gaining a more accurate perspective of their role in the universe. To step outside of your own bias means that you are able to see a more truthful picture.

Empathy is something humans are really quite good at if we compare them to, say, trees. Empathy is one of the things that makes humans so *human*.

Language, music, genetic preservation, civilization, law, innovation, and generosity all exist partially because of empathy. If these are features of our human world which we value, there may be something to be said about focusing on broadening our capacity for empathy.

I mentioned that humans are good at empathy. They are in comparison to starfish, but they are not nearly as good at empathy as they *could* be*. In examining everyday relationships, we can see how atrophied this skill really is:

An aristocrat will likely struggle to identify with any part of a homeless person's life, and the homeless person struggles to identify with any part of an aristocrat's life.

A person in the same family may have never touched drugs, and another may be helplessly addicted to heroin. The sober individual can not fathom the sickness of addiction, and feels saddened or confused by the life of the addict. The sober person does not understand the forces acting on the addict, and in their confusion, may resort to disgust. The gap in understanding causes a net increase of unsavory emotion. If the sober person were to lean towards empathy instead of disgust, there is perhaps a greater chance for overall benefit.

With this approach of infinite empathy (or unadulterated perspectivism), we rationally justify the notion that the addicted individual is *no less of a person* than the sober individual. The sober person lives a different life than the addict, in the same way a scientist lives differently from a shaman, in the same way that a metalworker lives differently from a philosopher in the same way that a redhead lives differently from a blonde.

To critique others for believing in or valuing something is hypocritical. To find disgust in the *variety* of humanity is to find disgust in the origin of humanity itself. We came from mutation, we evolved from diversity, we are creatures who have literally been sculpted from millenia of intraspecial variation.

There is a scarily prevalent tendency to think that humanity is one cohesive group of similar entities, and that each entity is aiming towards the same values and living in the same world as yourself. Variation exists in preference towards the color blue over pink, and variation exists in the preference towards following the law and breaking it. I believe

the assertion that all humans should be expected to follow *your* guidelines is born from deep, human, ignorance and narcissism. I do not say that this is a bad thing, because it makes sense why it happens. What I am saying is that I think it is a powerful tool, and keeping it in my repertoire means I am more prepared to best fulfill my obligations.

If we are aiming for objectively* *ideal* discourse* in our lives, this bias must be accounted for.

The ethics of action, love yo neighbor

One of the most frustrating and inevitable moral rifts young people like myself stumble upon is that *our decisions influence other people*. We have examined the inherent solipsism that exists in young people (particularly romantic ones like Goethe's *Werther*), let's look at that in this context.

I am choosing to bring up an extreme example because it is an important one to look at, as well as

the poster child for this ethical phenomenon; I am talking about self-homocide, suicide, self-harm etc. In an increasingly populated and distressed world, this is important to discuss. Keep in mind, I am speaking from a philosophically concerned standpoint; I am not arguing for or against anything we are speaking about, but organizing my observations.

When someone commits suicide, they greatly influence others*. Granted, the amount* of influence will vary from context to context. Yet, no human life is entirely unattached from the fabric of human society*. For many, suicide is the answer to the question of how to disappear into the universe—to take pain and make it into nothingness (each person obviously deals with their own intentions and variables). When the period is put on the end of the sentence, their secular consciousness ceases*. When you die, you are no longer on the surface of the pond of life—you sink to the murky bottom, where things are less certain to the organisms on the surface. When you sink, you leave a ripple. One does not leave the surface of the water without

making a disturbance, and thus, one has not simply become an absence, but in fact, a *disturbance*. It is never a matter of disappearing*. It is a relief for you, and hardship for others. There is no free lunch; the law of conservation of energy states something along the lines of “if you are miserable and kill yourself, that pain disperses itself evenly among your surroundings”.

It is with this example that we realize the nature of much of the ethical life; there is no free lunch. Chances are, you are a stitch in a social fabric. Your knit may vary in density and color, but you are fundamentally attached to a surrounding complex of other individuals, who (as a temporary axiom) can be considered equal to you. Any movement by this stitch causes tension on one area of the surrounding fabric. In other words, we are dealing with classical Kantian ethics (some of them); you ought not, without hypocrisy, act in a way that you wouldn't like someone else doing to you. It is in action that prioritizes the self and disregards others where you are saying, “Everyone should act good*, but I am making an exception for myself”. This is a flawed

equation, and thus it should be rejected if one stands by reason*.

It is helpful on an intuitive, pantheistic, meditative level to elaborate the golden rule; I have heard it so much at this point in my life that its meaning has lost its sheen. "Treat others as you wish to be treated." Why should I? This algorithm is an effective one (if everyone participates), because it is a positive feedback loop (*of positivity!*). I like when people treat me nicely, so I will treat others nicely so they will treat me nicely and so on and so on. Realistically, this fails to play out with every member of society. And yet, there is a corresponding *attitude* that comes with this notion; others' pain is *my* pain, others' joy is *my* joy. It is here that an empathetic sacrifice must be made; "I choose to embody the pain and joy of others for the overall betterment of society". If not, one finds it easy to fall into a code of brutal, natural power; "If I want it, I take it". I do not need to explain why this second attitude doesn't work. It is, possibly, a matter of utilitarianism in today's world; what must I do to accomplish my goals? If you have the attitude

of a silverback gorilla, you are not likely to get far in this current world.

This is, as with all things, a balance. Like I said, we don't live in a society filled with devout people living by the golden rule. If one lives entirely by the golden rule, the scales will tip, and *your* pain will fuel the pleasure of others with no compensation. We can start to see that simple, initial ethical questions quickly become a ratty nest of terrifying philosophical questions.

Most people have explored these ideas to some extent; they are fundamental ethical ideas, which are undeniably supporting pillars for much of human society*. The question is not whether I understand these principles, it is about the *application of these ideas directly towards my future, long-term actions*. In other words, what actions will lead to the most benefit—how do I calculate the effective sum of my moral actions? Certainly this is more than a game of only ethics! Is it more ethical to study to become a doctor if it means shunning your friends for 8 years? If not, can buying them a house earn it back? Can

concrete money earn abstract fulfillment? Etc. With this concept of a moral butterfly effect, anxiety tends to rear its horrible head. It is easy, at first glance, to examine a small moral equation. When you start looking at long-term decision-making however, uncertainty and unknowable gunk increases *exponentially*.

Similar to a mathematical equation, it is necessary to *factor* and *simplify* our variables so we are left with human-sized ideas. At risk of literally greatly oversimplifying *my entire future*, here is a sketch of this simplified equation.

On one side, we have desires, goals, and fulfillment. On the other, we have responsibility, relationships, and obligations.

Our goal is to make the value of either side *equal*; this would be considered a long-term ethical success* to the equation.

With more solid reasoning supporting this hypothesis of balance between *inward and outward energy*, I feel more confident and comfortable acting towards benefiting others. It is typical human nature to prioritize the comfort of one's self*. In practicing this equation, failure is likely in the long run. With authentic balance between the two parties, success becomes more likely and reasonable. With *this* in mind, I am more comfortable overriding my human nature of self-preservation to help others. Depending on how you look at it, I am *exploiting* this fundamental human desire for pleasure; in the end, perhaps I am doing this because I find pleasure in success and ethical behavior.

...

A Taste of Morality, using your resources

My circumstances have allowed me to have this opportunity that *very* few other people get to have. Gap years of this nature are logistically implausible and unlikely in almost every contemporary

circumstance. Socioeconomically, I am at a position which allows me to virtually disappear* for a year. As a student, I am unequally advantaged because I put in less effort than others and earn better grades. As a person, I am a white, cis male. My family is beautiful, caring, loving, and they never fight. Other than a few common mental disorders, I have a very healthy brain and body. I have not only a home to live in, but a studio space *of my own* to work in. I have a car.

These things, particularly when combined, show that I am *astoundingly* privileged. I am in a very high percentile of life comfort, by birth.

For me not to acknowledge these things is a problem. To negatively influence those who are in a less fortunate position as a result of my own is a problem. (Though I am not going to make the philosophical argument of why this is true at this very moment,) I have a moral obligation to better the lives of others who are in less fortunate circumstances than my own. I feel guilt that others feel pain and hardship that I avoid due to chance. There is nothing

that I have done to earn these blessings, thus I feel a justified obligation and desire to better the lives of others who have been dealt a worse hand of cards.

Now I can look at this situation and go one of two ways. I will either choose to stew in my sadness, guilt, and luck, or utilize and/or exploit my circumstances, facilities, and resources to shrink this margin of inequality.

I believe that the latter is a more reasonable and justified use of my options. Again, we see a theme not of experiential *denial and repression*, but efficient circumstantial utilization.

If you are in a car which has just driven into a lake, it is better to stay calm than it is to do the natural human thing: breathing fast. The same is true for my life—the clock is ticking. I can either do the human thing of getting stuck in emotion, or I can use my resources to the advantage of the situation.

Spirituality/Religion/Theology/Metaphysical Transcendence

Spirituality and religion is arguably the most conspicuous representation of philosophical discipline in the realm of contemporary society. This is not the place for me to flesh out my theological perspective, despite the seeming relevancy*. Here, I hope to speak about spirituality briefly and impersonally. I wish not to linger with words on this subject nearly as much as the other problems of my current inquiries, but this does not mean that this is an absent element in my current explorative efforts. In fact, I find that I am, more than ever, free to authentically pursue an understanding and relationship with the history, logistics, ideas, and sentiments of this eminent feature of the human experience. Spirituality was not absent through the gap year; if anything, it was the most present it has ever been in my life. I hope that this doesn't come across like I am not giving justice to the profundity of spirituality.

Spirituality is a metaphysical* ritual, religion is a ritual of moral inquiry, and (in theory) a pursuit of wisdom. Nowadays—from what I have witnessed in my short life—it seems spirituality is only discussed very meekly or very loudly. Part of me wishes not to speak on this because it is *not* something which lends itself to unbiased discussion; when you are dealing with eternity, faith, and the deep implications of spiritual dogma, people are often less likely to take the risk of being skeptical or considering alternative truths. And this is perhaps, to some extent, an irrevocable feature of many people's conception of the metaphysical life; to many, good faith is confidently based exclusively on spiritual apprehension rather than evidence. So it makes a great deal of sense that science and religion often butt heads; how may either be true at the same time? In theory, some of us must be right*, and some of us must be wrong*. Either science is a reasonable method for justified knowledge—or rather, we earn our right in divinity through conviction, testimony, and wholehearted allegiance to gnosticism.

Of course, this is a false dichotomy, and therefore unrepresentative of the diverse continuum of metaphysical opinion. Perhaps this might serve as a loose spectrum which represents the ultimate values of any given plot of an individual; skepticism vs conviction. Perhaps the entire spectrum is incorrect. I do not wish to participate in the controversy that exists in the seemingly futile and ineffective argument between the skeptical and the faithful; for they each bicker with their own language, and are understood only by their tribe. The scientist often argues with the *language* of empirical reason, and the pious person argues with the *language* of sacred devotion. These puzzle pieces will, in this form*, always fail to connect; and if they are looking for agreement, it will perhaps (if anywhere) be found in some hesitant acknowledgement on either side of pantheism as a plausible midground.

I am not here to argue or quantify the reason, values, or dangers behind any of these modes. I am also not here to express my own take on the matter, for this is something which, at the moment, I believe serves a more meaningful role for myself through

contemplative *solitude*. I am saddened when the profundity and power of spirituality is overcome by the inflammation of bureaucratic, dogmatic quarrels. I do not wish to minimize the influence of this tradition. Regardless of your participation, I believe that spirituality is an unavoidable feature of anthropology which would be foolish to leave unacknowledged, and it can have (as with most things) both negatives and positives.

If I have anything to say on the matter at this moment it is perhaps these ambiguous statements: One, spirituality should exist where it better* those involved. Two, the act of *restricting* a human being (of any age, but perhaps particularly of the young) from the right of *justified inquiry* has proven itself to be a potentially dangerous feature of almost any human system.

Ontology

“Even the philosophical man has the presentiment that this reality in which we live

and have our being is an illusion, that under it lies hidden a second quite different reality”

...

Now, just as the philosopher behaves in relation to the reality of existence, so the artistically excitable man behaves in relation to the reality of dreams. He looks at them precisely and with pleasure, for from these pictures he fashions his interpretation of life; from these events he rehearses his life. “

-Nietzsche, the Birth of Tragedy

“The roses had the look of flowers that are looked at”

–TS Elliot

I've observed that almost every philosopher, usually at the beginning of their intellectual project, dives into the fascinating problem of human existence, of being a human mind in the world. Though many thinkers devise different approaches to this problem, it seems to be a natural and inevitable obstacle for a philosophically oriented individual to encounter. After all, it seems to be one of the most fundamental


elements of this most fundamental science. Without being, there *is* no entity to practice philosophy.

Philosophy is the observation of the things which allow the world to be, and ontology is perhaps the observation of the things which allow philosophy to happen. It seems to me that knowing the strengths and limits of one's self, particularly through such a root language of ontology, is a deeply necessary and practical endeavor. It is often a useful and necessary thing to be aware of yourself; it is better to know you have cancer than to be oblivious. With knowledge of this issue, you are likely to take the first step towards resolving it. With knowledge of the way in which I exist in the world both as a run-of-the-mill human being and as a unique, specific individual, I am more likely to authentically confront necessary elements of my existence.

I am not (yet) attempting to formulate my own unique theory, but I am studying that of others. One of the most prevalent figures in this question of ontology is Immanuel Kant. I find that my loose, instinctual understanding of the human mind in the world often matches his; as I understand it, Kant's understands

that humans are not a “Tabula Rasa”, an empty box which collects the outside world, but rather an ‘observer behind a window’.

We have to experience things through the necessary forms of space, time, causality, and the hardwired, marginal perception of the human form. Thus, we do not *know* what things are of themselves, but we experience the various illusions or projections of our senses on the subject. With this in mind, I find myself returning to the emphasis of studying my cognitive biases; for if the outside world, to my knowledge, is experienced through the window of my psyche, I ought to be aware of the limitations and distortions of the window. If the window is made of red glass, the external world is not red, the window is red. When I understand that the external world is being falsely or inauthentically represented, I gain a more accurate understanding of the true nature of the external world.

 Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Idea The Kantian explanation of the human experience in the world, essentially if you are in a room with one

window, your only conception of the outside world is in the shape of a window, in other words,

Think of the human mind as being a room like this room and say that the room has one window and only one window and all your and you never the doors are locked you're never going to get outside this room that's the human mind itself now when you look at the external world when you observe and experience external reality it looks to you like external reality is shaped exactly like the window of course it is well because that's your only access to it literally speaking the shape of the window as far as you're concerned is the shape of what's outside the window in other words the light that comes in is precisely shaped by the opening that lets it in in other words there's a form that the mind imposes on external experience and this activity of imposing these forms is a far better more accurate truer representation of the human cognition

Free Will?

Ah, at last we have reached the famous, divisive question. Do I make my own decisions? How does 'fate' work? Does it matter? As always, I feel there is importance in acknowledging that this has some powerful (and quite practical) implications. This is intended to be a gentle and cautious discourse, and I hope that it is comforting to you as a reader to understand that I am in no way justified in making any statements that should directly influence your stance on the matter other than awareness of my perspective.

The question of free will is particularly exciting to me, because it is *actively* being worked on by physicists, psychologists, philosophers, neuroendocrinologists, cognitive scientists, and more. There is *so much* to consider with this question; it gives the impression to me that it's one of the more tangible and practical seams between the physical and metaphysical world.

At this moment, I suppose I hold an agnostic attitude towards the issue; it is not conceptually clear whether I have 'free will' in the commonplace usage* of the term*. Many admirable and thorough thinkers are *divided* on this subject, and I don't currently feel worthy to give a statement on whether it is one way or another.

I do, however, sustain somewhat of a functional interface between this idea and my action; my goal is to reference this idea towards what I understand to be an ideal life, therefore I must consider the practical application of conception over theoretical. (Some of the loudest voices in this argument come from Newtonian Determinism and Heigens Uncertainty or probability*)

Let me elaborate in a Pascalian way: If I do have free will, I will choose to do things and end up somewhere. If I don't have free will, I will do things and end up somewhere. Regardless of what is true, I am inclined (as a biological creature) to do things which lead me in the direction of what I understand

to be ideal. This is distinctly different from seeking pleasure; remember my ideal conception of life is to succeed in fulfillment, not *necessarily* pleasure (though it *may* exist in fulfillment).


This sentiment towards this discussion feels like the most effective *use* of this conception as it allows me to be protean in my activity: if I need comfort to be most effective in my action, I may take a deterministic stance. If I need motivation to be most effective in my action, I choose probabilistic. Essentially, I have chosen to exploit the uncertainty in this question as a means to best propel me towards the most effective activity—to be guilty or concerned with action is not always the best state of mind, the same goes for comfort.

This conceptual switch serves as one of my favorite rationally justified methods towards coping with the (often difficult) activity of living. Some coping mechanisms are not rationally or morally justified, this one uses the fundamental uncertainty in everything as a *source of comfort or motivation*. It's

one of my favorites, though I must be cautious in my use.

A lack of belief in free will offers a number of radical, real world implications.

The perspective an individual holds towards the question of free will can influence human action in radical and potentially unfortunate ways. A thought experiment here was devised by Daniel Dennett on the implications of getting people to believe that they have no free will:

 The great free will debate | Bill Nye, Michio Kak...
(I'm paraphrasing)

Suppose we have a man with a neurological condition. He is treated by a neurosurgeon, who—following the procedure—tells him that the disorder was fixed by implanting a computer chip into the brain. The neurosurgeon tells him that this chip takes care of the neurological condition, with the side-effect being a team of workers at the clinic are now controlling his every action and thought. To him, nothing will be

different, the decisions he makes seem to be his own, but are in fact being made by someone else.

With this in mind, the patient indulges in a number of his worst features, he is arrested and put on trial for his 'crimes'. The neurosurgeon is brought in, and tells everyone in the courtroom that the brain chip does not control his actions, and the whole thing was meant to be a joke.

With this, we see that the belief or understanding that the decisions a human makes are already predetermined leads to a number of potentially catastrophic, real-world activities. I feel that, regardless of whether I believe in free will or not, this series of implications ought to be held in mind. This is particularly true if I am aiming to succeed in my goal of being the most I can be as a person— in this world, at this time, in my position.

Humility?

No one really cares about me. Let me elaborate this, so I don't leave you with the notion that I am overly-cynical or (God-forbid) unapproving of this fact. First of all, I am aware that people, in fact, *do* care for me. My family, my friends, my pet(...?)*. I do not want to discount this, nor argue that anyone should increase or decrease their amount of love towards me. I am endlessly thankful for this in the same way that I am thankful for the other privileges in my life; clean water, clean air, sufficient shelter, etc. It is an utter blessing and I absolutely, wholeheartedly recognize this.

At the time of writing this, I am one of approximately 7,955,500,000 human beings who inhabit planet Earth. I know* somewhere around 600 people*, though I have met a few more. That means I have encountered somewhere around 0.000000075% of Earth's humans in an acknowledgeable way. These numbers are virtually meaningless to the human brain as an actual scale-reference point, but it does serve to explicate one of the few, easy-to-forget facts of human life; we are one of an unimaginably vast quantity of our species. There are vast quantities of

people who are virtually indistinguishable from you, who have lived extremely similar lives to you, and an *unfathomable* quantity of people who will never begin to acknowledge that you exist at all. Even if you are a celebrity of unprecedented status*, your name is likely to reach the ears of 50% of the population of Earth, *if you are lucky*.

It is easy to think that your life is groundbreaking in the scripture of the Anthropocene. I often experience thoughts or experiences of such profundity and newness that I feel as if I have uncovered an ancient truth of the universe; untrodden intellectual or experiential ground. If you factor in the billions of young individuals similar to myself, who exhibit similar psychological characteristics, occupy similar environments, and will similar wills, I am not *remotely* special.

Of course, to the optimists out there who are unwilling to tolerate such facilitation of harsh numbers, this obviously depends on your definition of special. I wish not to *focus* on alternate definitions of 'valuable', 'special', or 'meaningful', but

appropriately acknowledge them. Again, it is crucial to understand that I am a product of the tradition called *perspectivism*; I wish not to disclose any statement as objective truth, but as a feature of a certain perspective that can harmoniously exist with other, often contradicting, perspectives. I believe this is a more accurate representation of truth in a human context. Thus, what I continue to explicate is only one of these perspectives; one which directly contradicts other perspectives I also believe to be true. In this action, I am able to cultivate ideas which wouldn't have presented themselves in an alternative line of thought.

I will no longer play a number game, but I will ask you to keep the sheer cosmological infinitude of these numbers in the forefront of your mind as we continue. The number of individuals who regularly acknowledge me, much less care for me, is a bafflingly *negligible* quantity (within the perspective of statistics, physics, numerical reasoning, etc.). I find that visualizations which allow for an intuitive sense of this scale, of things like sand grains on a beach, allow me to expand my default frame of

reference towards a more spacious attitude. As someone with a volatile proclivity towards dread and depression, there are times to consider such ideas, and times where you should avoid them. Right now, this is a time to consider such an idea. I am in need of a *humbling*. Passionate thought, in large quantities, has the effect of stretching human concerns towards a *limited* portion of human experience. This distortion bias is something I'd like to have the ability to avoid when it comes time for alternate modes of thought, existence, or action. This is, of course, not intended to disregard the significance of passionate thought, nor any mode of existence composed from distortion or limitation. It is out of appreciation and devotion to the *diverse* competency of various modes of thought. One might reasonably argue that even *this* mode of thinking is subject to it's own form of distortion or bias. I think they would be right.

Nothing in excess. Everything in moderation, including moderation. This appetite for humility is not provoked by metaphysical virtue, but out of practical necessity towards my defined goals.

Clear-headedness and maximal perspective are essential traits I must acquire if I hope to succeed. Numbers, comparisons, and easy-to-forget truths are what effectively calibrate me in the direction of humility. And so, I will list some aphorisms for future reference, of which I have contemplated in moments of pseudo-clear-headedness and lust for the expiration of ego. (There is variation in abstractness—many of these serve as personal hermeneutical devices which evoke detailed and complex sensations or mental landscapes in me)

- There is a point in interstellar space which is so far that light, going 1000 times the speed of light, will never reach you in 1000 of your lifetimes.
- You are a haphazard mixture of pounds of carbon, hydrogen, water, and biochemical happenings which you have little control over.
- You have been invited to a very strange party where you get to have a consciousness but it's made out of meat. (John Green)
- You are at a significantly lower state of consciousness and awareness than what you could be or will be in the future.

- There are people who you don't think highly of, who are significantly better at life than you are or ever will be
- You will never be perfect, and you might not even fit the average definition of good.
- You are "A creature called lust" -Björk
- Your consciousness is almost completely composed of mood
- The human lifespan is extremely short
- Apocalypse means nothing when you are unconscious
- You have spent most of your life doing the wrong thing
- Your perspective, in its full glory, is itself a product of perspectivism, and equally likely as everything to be nonsense.
- You are a blithering hypocrite, who has the obscene audacity to sleep at night
- You will never begin to experience the first inkling of the cosmos
- You are unquestionably, embarrassingly, meaninglessly, and meaningfully contradictory and helplessly absurd.

- You have missed out on life changing opportunities without knowing it
- You have hurt others without knowing it
- People have and will live lives that you wish you could live, but will not.
- In the time it has taken you to read this list, about 120 individual humans died. (That's 178,000 daily, but too large of a number for you to apprehend)
- Sophists are no match for worms

This list does not make me cynical nor depressed. With such thoughts in mind, I am shot through with a potent concoction of motivation, passion, nobility, honor, comfort, freedom, and perhaps a greater sense of autonomy. It is human nature to return to a solipsistic reality. It is vital to combat this nature.

Goal execution, Self Determination Theory

What precisely do I want at this moment in my life?
How subject is that desire to change? How does one pursue a goal of which the expiration date is

uncertain? If patterns continue how they have, my future self will look back on my current mental profile and be vexed at my verbose immaturity, my lack of experience, and my inability to see the near future when it seems to be positioned right beneath my nose.

I realize there will be inevitable discomfort in reminding myself of these very attempts at feigning self-awareness or wisdom by acknowledging my current immaturity. It is not completely edifying to trick myself into thinking I am aware of my stupidity, and because of this, I am somehow less stupid. It is, I think, helpful to examine these things, but it is an impossible ego-loop to remove oneself from. When I think that I know everything, I am being foolish. When I acknowledge that I don't know anything, I am attempting to make myself seem more knowledgeable of the universe, when I really have just done so to uplift my ego from the likely truth that I don't even know near the amount I don't know. In this circumstance, when I have acknowledged my awareness of my lack of awareness, I am doing the same thing for my ego, and so on and so on... This

is one of those trains of thought which is unavoidable, but often necessary to place entirely to the side; if for nothing else, for one's sanity.

“So yes, a healthy journey towards minimizing the ego should be entertained at the very least and if the traveler feels well-equipped. But at the same time, recognize that we experience the world in an incredibly limited sense. The stormy waters of the temporal, of the metaphysical and ethical, are deep and treacherous. Without a worthy vessel we'll drown quite quickly. So make sure you maintain your vessel.”

-Sysiphus55

So my goals are likely to change, but what of my values? Values *feel* as though they should be deeper rooted than goals, but I can't help but feel that they are also subject to radical distortion over time. How do I make goals, or follow a path, which I am uncertain of its solidity? What approach offers the greatest probability? It is here, in this moment of

complete uncertainty, and youthful-ego-eagerness, that I feel inclined to lean towards a constant, reliable, and impartial mode of thought; science.

We are dealing with the development of values and corresponding goals over time. In the scientific study of human motivational and developmental theory, we get important evidence describing the natural progression of humans through value and goal systems. In [self determination theory](#), for example, it is suggested that three main needs should be met for long-term psychological well being and (God forbid), fulfillment/happiness. Those three needs are relatedness, competency, and autonomy. “We need some sense of belonging, care, intimacy, and affiliation with other people”. It is this variable which I have effectively sacrificed for the stretch of the gap year, so I could wholeheartedly designate my energies towards competency and autonomy, wherein I have worked (and am working) on developing “some confidence in [my] own abilities to master and carry through activities in [my] environment” and learning to “agree with [my] own behavior...and acting with volition,”

Let's assume this, temporarily, to be our structure of human need (though it obviously does not represent the whole picture), Unfortunately, it is normal for humans to be deficient in some or all of these nutrients. All of these things require a great deal of effort and luck to juggle. Because of the nature of the human world, the scarcity of luck and meaningful effort, and the plain old helplessness of human activity, it seems to me that it is completely vital to implement a robust *methodology* or *strategy* towards best achieving these vital human values.

Execution, Completion, Habit, Getting things done, Tom Sachs

How does one get something done at all—regardless of motivation? Human behavior tends to follow the law of least effort. How do we ensure that necessary actions get done? It is my goal to use the knowledge I have acquired in the study of the human brain to benefit our behavior.

Memento

In the movie *Memento*, the main protagonist has a form of severe amnesia which prevents him from existing linearly. Because his memory effectively resets at frequent, regular intervals, he developed a habit of creating tangible markers and contextual reminders for himself in the form of tattoos or notes. In this way, even without awareness, memory, or familiarity, he was able to complete his goals in a linear fashion.

I would like to draw a similarity between this narrative with that of human psychology towards goal setting.

Previously, we examined goals from a scientific and personal perspective. We have goals that we understand to be correct, the question is now one of execution.

We have discussed some things about Dasein, neuropsychology, and the world of distraction to which humans are biased. With these things in mind,

we have a better understanding of the details we should navigate to effectively complete our goals.

Humans are not made for our philosophical idea of success, they are designed for biological success. Human success, in terms of what many contemporary humans consider to be successful, is uncommon—we are not designed to enjoy the work that goes into human success, we are designed in the language of biology. We are *very good* at biological success. Arguably, we have achieved an unprecedented biological success (though, out of human nature, we have ironically proceeded to cause our own biological downfalls). We have 8 billion people on Earth. To put this in an laughably rudimentary ecological perspective, there are (approximately) 49.5 million ducks, 48 million deer, and 440,000 elephants on Earth right now. Regardless of how precise these measurements are, we can see that the population of such creatures is in a completely different numerical ballpark to that of our own. Humans are invasive in an unprecedented biological manner, perhaps second only to bacteria. We have increased our *own average lifespan* by

200% in the last 1000 [years](#). We are *legitimately* considering how we can live on a *separate* planet. These are not things we can say about mole rats, eagles, or even cuttlefish.

And yet, if you give the average human an option between eating a bowl of ice cream or working out, they will likely prefer the former. Working out with a good diet provides long term benefit, and ice-cream provides short term pleasure. Because of these primordial mechanisms which are still, more or less, at the steering wheel of human behavior, we are biased away from achieving *our idea* of success. The human is a powerful machine with extremely old software.

With all of these variables against us, with our meat-machine inherently concerned with things we *no longer need to be concerned about*, how do we change our behavior?

First, I would argue, is to become aware of it. You are not likely to make effective change until you realize there is a problem.

Second, I suppose, would be to examine the behavior you exhibit which is a result of this contextually faulty software. In other words, what things am I doing to please the animal in me, rather than the more wise, conscious soul in me? This is, of course, deeply tangled with the physics of habit. Habit is a mechanism which holds great power in the biological world. We can use it to our benefit, but it is *indeed* a finicky and unthinking creature. Similar to *Memento*, we can develop intentional and visible ways to remind ourselves that a given behavior may be animalistic and potentially harmful. The moment of decision to eat a hamburger can quickly be solved by a well-placed post-it note. This behavior can be scaled up to virtually all applicable areas of psychological, negative, animalism. In this circumstance, when I say animalism, I am referring (for the lack of my current vocabulary) to negative behavior as a result of biological mechanisms. I don't think animals are bad, I think that acting like a starfish is bad if you have to pay your taxes.

Third, now that we have defensive mechanisms in place, we can implement offensive mechanisms. Offensive action is difficult at first, but as a result of habit, becomes easier over time. A better description is, perhaps, that it becomes *less demanding* over time. I think it would be good to examine an empirical foundation and context for the ‘physics of human goals’;

I won’t spend too much time articulating the way humans suck at following promises to themselves, because we are all too familiar. Maybe the easiest description of this is the ‘New Years Resolution’ phenomenon, where we define things we want to happen and then usually fail to follow through with the necessary action over time.

Careers and Success

In my culture*, we tend to glorify work rather than happiness.*

I get the impression that you earn more social brownie points when you work hard and spread yourself thin, than if you work little, and are fulfilled*.

We would rather glorify hard work than true success.*

Success obviously looks different for everyone; it is not *necessarily* the dream of most to be a perfectly happy man who lives in a cardboard box (this is not what I am arguing to *necessarily* be the ideal).

People derive fulfillment from various things like moral obligations, emotional development, creative expression, or professional exploration. I wish not to delegitimize these passions. I wish to uplift the notion that prioritizing development of the self is the one of the most surefire ways to succeed in whatever passion you must pursue.

An example (that isn't Faust by Goethe): Johnny (Age 9) wants to be a visual artist when he grows up. He holds this career standard high because he likes creative expression. Because his goal is *being a successful visual artist*, his standard of excellence is exclusively defined by social acclaim, his position in the art world, how good his art is, how many galleries he displays at, and how much money he earns. Johnny, (now age 45), has achieved all of

these standards after a mind bogglingly difficult couple decades of effort. Even with his goals completed, he *has every possibility to remain unfulfilled*. If Johnny were to prioritize the things which are likely to make him happy in every activity, he is more likely to be happy during what could be perceived as painful effort. What's more, is that his authentic happiness could have led to a more impactful career, even though less perceived *pain* is going into the system.

Thus, I state that success is measured by how fulfilled the individual is. To some this statement may be uncontroversial, and to others, quite offensive.

The idea that everyone is aiming for the same form of success is perhaps attractive because it is universal and simple. However, diverse conceptions of success are what leads to a functional civilization. There is something beautiful in the notion that a cargo-ship-specialist welder can be somewhat responsible for the success of brain surgery on the other side of the world. Sometimes I feel cynical

about (hu)man(s); but when I think about what goes into the synthesis of the chemicals of the dye which must be transported to a textile factory to be impregnated in sheep wool from a sheep farm to be woven into a sweater to be sold in a store to be worn by me and the hundreds of hands which make possible the privilege and beauty of my warmth, I stop.

If a mechanic is fulfilled by fixing something to the best of their ability; they should measure their success on whether they are fixing things to the best of their ability or not.

Many believe a successful career to be defined as helping others—a pretty solid intention if you ask me. I believe this desire is justified, but only if this conception of altruism as a successful career is determined by your internal philosophy. To pursue anything other than your internal philosophy is inauthentic. People hold different philosophies, therefore they hold different conceptions on a successful career. There is no 'standard' for a successful career other than the one which allows you to manifest your personal philosophy.

There is a difference between a chore and a hobby. The perception of a job as a chore, something to complete so that you may be happy, has the potential to be dangerous. I think a lot of people understand this; some people have less opportunity for choosing better careers, some people are too far into their career to change, and some have accepted this type of working life as the be-all-end-all.

It is my wish to act on this thing when it is most plastic; to hit it where it hurts *when* it hurts. It is more efficient and effective to develop the conception of a successful career before it has begun than when it has. It is in this vein that I believe in researching interviews, advice, and writing of experienced people as they reflect on their career. What better time is there to read the material of old people preaching: “I wish I did this when I was younger” than age 18?

It is more complicated than “choosing a job that doesn’t feel like work”. If your job is to watch tv all

day, there are still things missing from the equation of a satisfying life (at least for me).

Meditation

“The mind can be hijacked away by something called 'Mental Time Travel.' That means that our attention is not in the present moment, so when we're thinking about the past, our attention is fully in the past, same thing with the future. About 50% of our waking moments, we aren't in the present moment. Now, that may seem very disempowering, like, 'How are we ever gonna fight that fight?' But, the good news is that decades of research in my own lab and many others has now given us a solution-mindfulness training, something that's been around for millennia. We can train our brain so that we do not need to fight. What we know is that when people practice mindfulness meditation, which is attending to the

present moment, their attention is stronger. 12 minutes or more a day can cultivate something called 'Meta-Awareness.' What is Meta-Awareness? It's the ability to be aware of the contents and processes of what's going on in our mind moment by moment. We're paying attention to our attention. Now, why would that awareness be beneficial? Because every time we are aware, we have more control. We can own our attention, and we have it available to us to not only enjoy the moments of our lives and feel fulfillment, but to meet the challenges and demands that we certainly will all face.”

–Amishi Jha

Before we get started, I want to be clear that this obsession with meditation, consciousness, and mindfulness is not just a subtle appreciation or hunch; this is empirically justified. Here is the tip of the academic iceberg which shows some of the

increasingly promising and growing body of research associated with the tangible benefits of meditation:

- stress reduction

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3951026/>
- https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Albert-Arias/publication/6761589_Systemic_Review_of_the_Efficacy_of_Meditation_Techniques_as_Treatments_for_Medical_Illness/links/56781f6108aebcdda0ebc952/Systemic-Review-of-the-Efficacy-of-Meditation-Techniques-as-Treatments-for-Medical-Illness.pdf
- <http://transformationalchange.pbworks.com/f/Health%2BBenefits%2Bof%2BMeditation.pdf>
- <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1161/circoutcomes.112.967406>

- Decreased anxiety and depression

- <https://tmhome.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Study-on-depression-and-perfectionism-at-college.pdf>

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3951026/>
- <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/acm.2013.0204>
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3423469/?_escaped_fragment_=po=7.14286

I realized that I would be here for quite some time if I actually included all of these incredible studies... Take a look at this main website, it links you to a good number of resources at the bottom:

[meditation main article](#)

Meditation has been shown to directly influence or benefit blood pressure, heart rate, [decrease presence of] cortisol ('stress' hormone) and epinephrine (adrenaline), increase oxygen utilization, increase melatonin, change *skin resistance, body temperature, and relative blood flow to the brain.*

“Meditation increases regional cerebral blood flow [in significant regions of] the brain, increases efficiency in the brain's executive attentional network, and increases EEG coherence (essentially the balance of connectivity in different regions of the brain*). A study on the effect of meditation on the executive attentional network found that meditators were faster on *all tasks*.”

–National Institute of Health, Library of medicine, etc.

The effects of meditation are not placebo*, nor are they insignificant. Within my own life, I can confidently say that it plays (and should play) a profound role in the quality of my existence.

Days begun with intentional, disciplined, and focused meditation or mindfulness are *incomparable* to days begun without it. The difference between my mindful life and my distracted life is *substantial*. I can not say that this is the case for everyone, but it is

certainly true for my distinct psychological profile. This is not something I can afford to ignore; this is one of my most important tools towards directly advancing towards my goals. Let's talk about it.

Stigma*:

I use an asterisk here because I don't believe that this is the correct term for the attitude held towards this type of practice. I think that in our Western culture, the mention of something distinctly eastern like Buddhism or Wabi Sabi or Meditation doesn't invoke explicit stigma, but perhaps something better described as a xenophobic shrug-off. I don't mean to explicitly call this xenophobia, but there is—admittedly—a set of assumptions which comes along with an attitude of Eastern holistic ways of life or spirituality. Perhaps a good example is when you look up the word meditation; you see rows and rows of this type of thing in Google images:



I for one, *rarely* sit cross legged when I meditate, nor do I *ever* think about what a chakra is. I think it is unfortunate that some of the more flamboyant outliers of this ritual represent the social image of the entire practice. This is the case within most social realms of the public sphere, but I still feel better acknowledging this. There is an understandable correlation of mediation with “hippy culture” or perhaps the few flamboyant individuals you have met in your life who have spoken about it. I have nothing against these people necessarily, I am just clarifying that I don’t tend to act along the lines of most of the practices, attitudes, or ideologies associated with this social group.

I do, however, greatly value cognitive health, education, and exploration. I value the [empirically justified](#), significant therapeutic benefit of this activity. I also value the unprecedented shift in my physical, cognitive, and socioemotional life. I am more happy, healthy, and competent because of this thing. I believe that many others would feel the same

way if they practiced this activity as well, though I am not here to argue for it. I am here to write *about it*. (I also want to be clear that the results and understanding of this practice vary greatly from person to person because the practice tends to be greatly influenced by the psychological landscape of the individual).

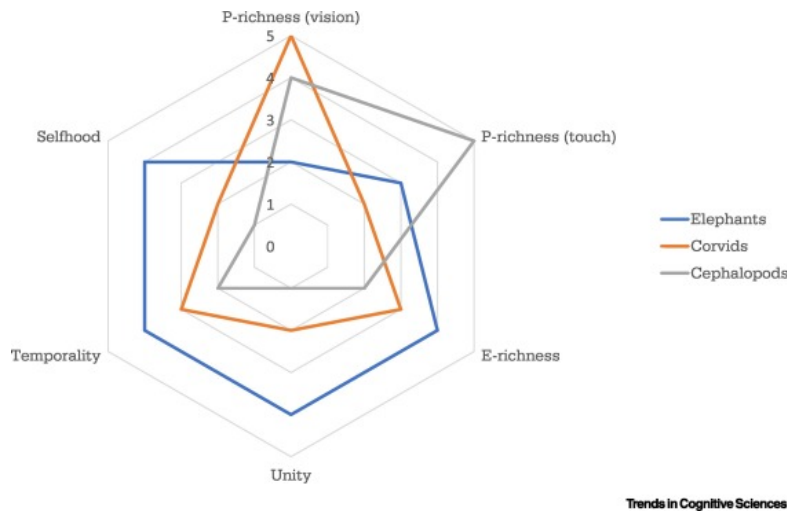
Profundity

I have realized, after participating in meditation myself, that it is an activity so infinitely profound (if properly executed, regularly) that one will never live their life the same. This is not a surface level activity, this is among the deepest experiences our conscious brain has access to.

Theories of consciousness tend to be a bit more blurry than other areas of neuroscience, but let's use a simple hermeneutical scheme for the sake of discussion. (I have recently heard that this theory is being doubted, so take this with a grain of salt).

Some neurologists understand consciousness as a gradient; neurological activity can be measured in quality and quantity, and varies according to changes in species and/or intraspecies neurological structures. This is to say, a starfish is less conscious than a dolphin is less conscious than Mahatma Gandhi, etc. This is *simply one* of the theories, one of the models with which consciousness tends to be discussed.

Another idea I want to take from an alternate model of consciousness is a multifaceted approach which considers consciousness as a varied composition of different *elements* of consciousness such as perceptual capabilities, cognitive capabilities, etc. One might consider the *sum* of these values as the single proxy by which the 'gradient of consciousness' is measured.



It seems to me that meditation of (different sorts and practice) directly expands each of these facets of consciousness, resulting in an overall increase in 'livelihood', or 'life experienced'. I have spoken about this model before; how I would prefer to be a human over a mollusk, because the human can do more, thus experience more, thus feel more, thus know more, etc. I feel similarly towards consciousness; it is the direct opposition to death. If I am not dead, I would like to be as conscious as possible. According to my goals, I wish to be the most I can be. To achieve this goal, somewhat inherently, I must expand my consciousness to the greatest extent I can.

I practice a number of different meditations, and each often overlaps with the others. There has not been one successful session which hasn't left me utterly aware and humbled with my position in this universe. This is not something I wish to explain to those who have not experienced this level of self-exploration, because I am unable. Again, a golf-ball-sized consciousness results in a golf-ball-sized understanding. With my own psyche, I acknowledge that I have a quark-sized consciousness compared to the consciousness humans have *potential* for.

There is a distinct moment in certain forms of meditation where you are hit with a powerful understanding of this ritual's intention. This moment sparks an entirely new conception of Dasein, 'human being in the world'. I will not go into sufficient detail of the logistics of all of these rituals, but I will elaborate on some of the practices and results I have experienced with each type

I believe this activity holds significant potential for the betterment of the world. It serves as therapy, exercise, prayer, sleep, and catharsis. It exists in locations deep inside the realest part of you, and also completely outside yourself—universes away. It is everything and nothing in entirety, and it is nothing short of completely profound. Do not underestimate the power of human consciousness until you have had some long discussions with it through its own language. It is an art of deep, authentic existence. When coming out of certain forms of meditation, you can't say a whole lot about it to describe it other than perhaps "Is"; and even this is saying too much.

It is important to implement the activity of meditation with sanctity and daily emphasis. Without a system to ensure that this happens, the shallow regions of your brain are more than likely to make your decisions. Human behavior follows the law of least effort. It is much easier to be distracted than focused, but much better to be focused than distracted. Make the right

choice, and position yourself so it is easy to make it every day.

Logistics

I'd like to describe some things about some forms of meditation I have explored. I would argue that around $\frac{3}{4}$ of these involve "mindfulness", but I am not a huge fan of the ambiguity of this term. If this serves as an adjective for a deeper level of consciousness, then yes it is involved with these practices. These are not instructions on how to do these meditations, but vague testimonies of the experience and role they have held for me.

- *Dhyāna.*?
- I am going to knock this one out of the way first because I don't really know what to say about it. All I know is that this is an incredibly profound sensation and experience, and you *know* where you are when you arrive. It often catches me off guard, and I realize that I am practicing it without intending to. You

understand that you will not know it all, but you *are* there, and you play an irrevocable part. Nothing is not necessarily beautiful nor ugly, because it is beyond the stuff of words. It is something purely of sensation and experience, and it is an incredibly intimate, vulnerable experience. Because it is such a shift from the normal human attitude towards life, it can be scary. Once you learn to encourage it despite the *newness* of it, it can change everything. This has taken me from a depressed state to ultimate bliss within 5 minutes. Sorry this is so vague, but this is the best I can do. It is a sacred indifference. It is the attitude held by soil.

- *Musical*
- When I listen to music with a distinct plot or trajectory, I see *strikingly* vivid visuals in my mind's eye. These usually vary, but sometimes involve locations and sensations from past sessions. A sense of understanding develops in tandem with the song, and the visuals compositionally toy with the plot. If there are lyrics, I find that

there are vague entities which perform them to me, and take me on a sort of tour around this particular region of my consciousness. *This is an active state of meditation**, and I find that my brain is often pleasantly exhausted after such rides. These experiences almost always fill a nuanced emotional deficit I have in the mornings or afternoons. Caffeine assists with linear and detailed thought, and I often find myself in this type of practice as I have had morning coffee and music. A bizarre observation I have made: Björk serves as a great musical and visual artist for these explorations if you are willing to get a bit strange. I get the feeling that her entire life was one of these meditations.

- *Transcendental Meditation*
- I find that transcendental meditation is usually a confused search for *something* for the first 10 minutes or so, and then the brain catches up, and you are hit in the body with an eternally weighty brick of bliss, still energy, and understanding. It is good to sit

very still here, with as much sensory deprivation as possible*. I cover my eyes and play quiet white noise* to block out any cars which drive by. My nervous system reaches an interesting point when you sit in one position for long enough, and I feel pleasantly energized yet stoic. I practice this meditation more than the others, and try to do it in the morning and at night. This is the easiest on the list, and perhaps the most transformative.

- *Being Physics*
- When one gets caught up in the tangle of human emotion—of stinging, complex, infinitely nuanced thoughts—it is useful to step away entirely. Some people do this with drugs, I find this to set a potentially incredibly dangerous sentiment towards your human experience, though it can be implemented safely. I choose to do this with forms of contemplation or meditation. One of the best ways to step away from these sensations entirely is to consider the physical universe, and you as part of it. This

is not to fully disregard any sense of consciousness, emotion, or metaphysics permanently; it is to relocate temporarily so you can untangle.

Consider the chemical makeup of your organs, the combination of small electric charges inducing neurotransmitters which leap synaptic clefts of trillions of neural cells surrounded by a soup of glial cells in your head. Consider the fact that the grass outside is not far off from your own makeup, and that the grass is not far off from the soil, and the soil is not far off from the dust in nebulae which dance trillions of lightyears away from here. Consider that there are billions of planets which rain glass and diamond. Consider oceans of liquid mercury or methane, and clouds of sulfur. Consider mountains of plutonium. You exist in an expanding vat of soup made from a limited number of ingredients. To be concerned with your own emotion is comparable to sobbing over the death of a bacteria. Whole galaxies die, and you are concerned about money.

Take some time in this world, and recalibrate yourself.

- *Being Nothing*

- One step further, is to completely do away with thought and sensation in entirety. This is difficult to facilitate, but with enough practice or luck, one can learn to sink into a distinct cognitive landscape which holds about one thought every 5 seconds. This gives a similar sensation to that of a full body massage or exfoliation. It is far too easy to forget the ridiculous burden of continuous thought. I find that simple yoga helps with this, because your brain dedicates its energy to the subconscious locomotion of your body. Make sure to breathe here, because it's easy to forget how to breathe right.

- *Yoga Nidra*

- This one is fine, but definitely not my favorite. I use this if I have had caffeine late at night, or if I am struggling to fall asleep. Truthfully, I find less cognitive refreshment in this form than I do in some of these others,

but it would be silly not to acknowledge it. This one is easy, comfortable, and psychologically undemanding. People encourage guided instructions with this, but I find voices distracting. This is good if you are trying to get started, because you are told what to do.

- The gap between language and experience; alan watts, why those who experience meditation struggle to word it properly for non-meditators
- The power of this medicine in my life as a neurotic soul
- The importance of breathing, following it where it takes you
- The science behind it
- The sensation behind it varies, but it fits whatever you need in that moment.
- The stigma* behind it
- Exploration of consciousness, how this act is shrinking violently with technology, how to reform your idea of activity with this act

The infinite part of our life does not see the world from one point of view: it shines impartially, like the diffused light on a cloudy sea. Distant ages and remote regions of space are as real to it as what is present and near. In thought, it rises above the life of the senses, seeking always what is general and open to all men. In desire and will, it aims simply at the good, without regarding the good as mine or yours. In feeling, it gives love to all, not only to those who further the purposes of self. Unlike the finite life, it is impartial: its impartiality leads to truth in thought, justice in action, and universal love in feeling. Unlike the nature which man shares with the brutes, it has a life without barriers, embracing in its survey the whole universe of existence and essence; nothing in it is essentially private, but its thoughts and desires are such as all may share, since none depend upon the exclusiveness of here and now and me. Thus the infinite nature is the principle of union in the world, as the finite nature is the principle of division. Between the infinite nature in one man and the infinite nature in another, there can be no essential conflict: if its embodiments are incomplete, they

supplement each other; its division among different men is accidental to its character, and the infinite in all constitutes one universal nature. There is thus a union of all the infinite natures of different men in a sense in which there is no union of all the finite natures. In proportion as the infinite grows strong in us, we live more completely
–Alan Watts (I think)

Presentness, conclusion?

The vital nutrition of ‘presentness’ is becoming increasingly absent in the practice of human life. We tend to live in the past or the future wholeheartedly rather than the present. This is one of the mental faculties which humans are unique and/or lucky in having, it is called ‘Mental-Time travel’. And yet, we now seem to spend very little time *actually, presently* existing, here and now.

Presentness feels like such a vague word that it fails to sustain meaning; let's explain it*. To be present is

to have a profound neurophysiological, experiential, emotional, perceptual, infinitely real, and often spiritual, conscious *sensation of your reality*.

I imagine that the only people who think that this last sentence isn't complete
pretentious-psychology-obsessed-youth-hippy-dippy
-meditative nonsense are the ones who have experienced this state multiple times. Over my extensive process of familiarizing myself with this state through meditation, the neuroscience of consciousness, philosophy of mind, and self examination, I still manage to forget the profound importance of experiencing it daily. There are few things which I can say certainly and directly benefit every facet of my life; meditation is definitively one of those things. Both my inward and outward activity is directly influenced by this practice. As we have spoken about before, consciousness is the bottleneck between you and the universe. When you take the time to speak the language of your consciousness, your universe becomes infinitely more navigable.

Again, this is a difficult thing to speak about because it is such a thoroughly complex, protean, yet distinct experience. If you haven't explored this state of mind, I imagine that it would be virtually meaningless to read about. The state I am speaking about, to the extent I can go with language, is perhaps best defined as 'clear headedness', 'silent, attentive awareness', 'wakeful being' and 'completely aware presence in reality'.

This state of mind can be contrasted against other neurophysiological states that I consider to be more in the realm of distraction. The mental state of 'distraction' is composed of unfinished trains of thought, correspondingly distracted action, stress, guilt, incompleteness, disorientation, weariness, anxiety, disappointment, confusion, etc. A good visual for this state of mind is an endless stream of pop-up ads that fill your mental screen. The moment you read the first bit of the first pop-up, another one appears. As this continues over time, you become increasingly aware of the passage into confused business, but you are still unable to close all of the

ads. In many human lives, we have made a habit out of this; waking up to the mother of all pop-ups—the telephone—and starting the cascade until we find ourselves asleep again.

The problem with articulating these two separate realms of cognitive experience, particularly to an audience of different people, is that each person exists in their own position on the spectrum between the two. If one exists only in a state of anxiety, their proxy for measuring the experience of peace is more anxious than that of a Tibetan monk. As a direct result of cognition, those who live in a state of endless distraction measure their own distracted state against this description of ‘profound presentness’; you can not understand something entirely until you have experienced it yourself (sometimes not even then). I, myself, only know the extent to which this mental state goes by the measure of my own memory of experience. Memory though, is a state liable to distortion—yet another reason why this is difficult to describe. Similar to that of people who have experienced psychedelic drugs, love, pain, or snow-skiing, the full experience

escapes the circumference of language. Thus, the only way to truly start to understand is to experience or explore it yourself* (I am not advocating the use of psychedelic drugs, love, or pain, but using these as rhetorical devices).

We spend the entirety of our waking lives in some form of consciousness*. With meditation, we can directly sculpt the effectivity, experience, and capability of our consciousness. I do not want to live a life where I am more anxious than happy, nor one where I am more depressed than functional. For my psychophysiological profile, meditation, exercise, nutrition, and self-awareness are vital to this goal. I must not forget that the vessel through which my experience is made possible is directly nourished by these things. Virtually nothing I want to achieve is possible without extensive fluency in this department.

I am not here to persuade you of the power of meditation—you can explore that joy on your own terms. I am here to remind myself of the utmost

importance of this ritual, and that my life is largely influenced by the energy I dedicate towards it. I must fix the bad habit of forgetting the profundity of the meditative experience—of distorting its importance. I want to clearly define this, here and now, as a completely necessary facet of my daily life.

Physical and psychological health are fundamentally necessary for the capability of achieving my goals, and through the exploration of some of these subjects, I have greatly improved my approach towards them.

You are what you Eat

“Nothing can be more certain than that the poet is a poet only in that he beholds himself surrounded by forms which live and act before him, into the innermost being of which his glance penetrates.

...

Why is it that Homer sketches much more vividly than all the other poets? Because he contemplates much more. We talk so abstractly about poetry, because we are all wont to be bad poets. At bottom the æsthetic phenomenon is simple: let a man but have the faculty of perpetually seeing a lively play and of constantly living surrounded by hosts of spirits, then he is a poet: let him but feel the impulse to transform himself and to talk from out the bodies and souls of others, then he is a dramatist.”

-Nietzsche, *Birth Of Tragedy*

You are what you eat (in other words, you become what you surround yourself with and consume, it is human physiology and psychology to repeat what they most see)

Thus;

- I must surround myself with virtuous, fulfilling, beautiful, and sustainable things if I wish to be them

- I must realize the extent to which I am biased because of my surroundings
- The nature of my character is defined by the decisions I make towards consumption
- Other people are what they eat
- You should consume things that you don't typically eat, for truer perspective
- You are defined by the quality *and quantity* of what you eat
- You must have balance if you wish to be wise
- Your moods and thoughts are a result of what you have eaten
- You have the freedom to wisely or foolishly decide what to eat
- You should not expect sustainable activity or energy out of insufficient nutrition

In [this](#) episode of parks and recreation, Andy briefly shows his amazement at the idea that food becomes energy; he punches and kicks and remarks, “see that? [punches air] That's spaghetti.. [punches air] Nachos... [kicks air] that was a cookie.”

That idea is simple, but I think we often forget its

significance. Similar to Andy, I had a revolutionary moment when I looked at my dog and realized that virtually 99% of her biomass is a biochemical reorganization of water and kibble. That entire organism, her activity, consciousness*, memory, personality, habits, body, and energy is all made out of the kibble and water we have been feeding her since birth.

It is here that I naturally found myself looking in a mirror and thinking a similar thing;

It seems to me that there is this pseudo-conscious* relationship between the body and the consciousness, where we think our bodies are some unchangeable, constant, homogeneous machine. In reality, I am composed of tissue which is continually replacing itself, I am a curation of the nutrients from the food I've eaten in the last 18 years, and my brain is an organ with varying trodden neural pathways which are physiologically carved into my brain by repetition. To my fathers and I's poetic delight, we recently learned that the only tissue which remains in a human body for the entirety of its life is the

cornea of the eye, and certain types of heart tissue. In other words, every photon I have seen, am seeing, and will ever see, will have passed through a select number of cells in my face. My brain, on the other hand, is far less constant. Significant neurogenesis can occur *every single [day](#)*. Within less than 15 days, I can make a visibly noticeable transformation in my brain's biological structure*. Moreover, I am about 10 years away from full neurological development, meaning my neuroplasticity is the highest it will ever be again.

Our brains and bodies are *amazingly* malleable. It is my wish, when I am most receptive, to become familiar with the skill of changing myself to what I need to be, and to stay that way. This is the game of habit. If I am what I eat, I ought to eat good things. My brain does not like to eat good things in the short run. I must understand this in detail, so I am more effective at combating it. This means becoming familiar with the most prevalent patterns of human behavior. I have approached this familiarization with two angles*: A study of neuropsychological behavior, an analysis of myself. There are patterns within

human behavior (particularly within physiology), but there is variation in each individual's psychological profile. For example, I have to consider my diagnosed depression and anxiety as a variable. I have to find which habits I am particularly weak to, and what my psychological blindspots are.

Neuropsychological Behavior

One of the most significant neurobehavioral systems we should examine is Dopamine. Bear with me as I give my definition of what I understand dopamine to be. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter which is largely responsible for motivation, desire, attention, (and other more boring physiological processes).

Neurotransmitters are essentially different chemicals which are expressed between one neuron to the next to determine the action of the receiving neuron; a 'communicative' biochemical response that results from stimulus.

I could make this quite complicated, but I will choose not to. When I desire something, there are two ways I might apprehend it; One: "I want

X, and because *I want it* I will try to have X”, or Two: “I want X because my brain is in a habit of desire. In the longer run, I should not have X, so I will refrain”. Essentially, we have these two mindsets which show themselves in different ways. For example, the former is often shown by ignorance, indifference, bingeing, excuses, etc. The latter is shown by guilt, diets, New-Year's resolutions, etc.

Personal Psychological Profile

This is not the place to outline my specific flaws and vices, I have years of journals which articulate them in painful detail. Look at the ‘humbling’ section if you want to see me trash myself. I suppose an example of a personal variation would be my relationship with sleep. Naturally, if I had complete control over my life, I would be nocturnal. I would wake at sunset, and sleep at sunrise. In this way, I am not bothered by the shrieking, blinding, harsh light of mid-day. I think Earth is a beautiful place to be, but particularly so when there are shadows, clouds,

and contrast*. Along with this preference, I also (at the time of writing this, age 18) *prefer* 10-12 hours of sleep. This is a lot of sleep, and it is almost always unsustainable. 10-12 hours is the only stretch of sleep that allows me to feel unquestionably energized, rested, and ready to have a day. I have documented this, it has been a struggle. This is not unheard of, it is simply variation in human physiology. Another relationship with sleep: when I am highly depressed, sleep overwhelms my life. When I am depressed, I do not sleep and then wake; I sleep and then take myself away from sleep to partake in activity which is a temporary chore in the way of sleep. This behavior is likely to change to some extent over time, as I am a teenager and this is not highly abnormal behavior. However, I ought to familiarize myself with the process of waking up when *I do not want to wake up*, as well as *combating the lure of excessive sleep*. If I am aiming for autonomy, capability, effectivity, and sustainability, this is a trait which I must develop an understanding of.

Ignorance

What I have found through looking at utilitarianism is a way to bypass potentially harmful and frightening aspects of life; an intentional utilization of *ignorance*. Ignorance is bliss, and bliss is necessary for the *preservation* of a successful (sane) human life.

Ignorance, however, is volatile. Similar to consciousness, it holds a number of dangerous implications with it. A state of complete ignorance means that nothing is of your conscious concern. This sounds simple, but can be infinitely dangerous to a human life; if *reason* has no influence, *wisdom* is out of your concern, things go south very quickly. It is for this reason that we should wield ignorance with great care and grace, through things like intentional meditation, mindfulness, creative composition, socializing, rest, and recreation.

Ignorance Is Death

Anyone who does not see the vanity of the world is very vain himself

So who does not see it apart from young people whose lives are all noise diversions and thoughts of the future, but take away their diversion and you will see them bored to extinction. They feel their nullity without recognizing it—for nothing could be more wretched than to be intolerably depressed as soon as one is reduced to introspection with no means of diversion

-Pascal

How does one make peace with ignorance and confusion?

It's easy to conceptualize the retreat from truth to ignorance as a form of death. In the book *Flowers For Algernon*, Charlie quickly evolves from a small intellect to an enormous one and then back again. The experience of the read leaves you with a vivid and profound sensation that Charlie, in his most *alive* state, has disappeared or died. He has returned to a state of less-consciousness;

comparable to death. To expand consciousness or awareness of the world is perhaps to become more alive. Consider that we remove the bark of a tree, the tree has less *life*, less *self* which exists in the world.

Of course, this is a slippery slope. I want to clarify that this is intended as a means of basis for *further elaboration*. I do not wish to say that those with less consciousness are any less valuable than those with more, because I do not attempt to quantify the cost of a life. All I am saying is that if I were to suddenly become a dandelion one day, my family would likely* treat me as though I have died. I can say confidently that when I listen to Adagio for Strings, Opus 11, I experience an unquestionably vast emotional landscape, dense with complexity and profound sensation. This is, I assume, less of the case for the average dandelion. When I lose knowledge of the world, I have become less conscious of the world. When I become less conscious, I experience *less deeply*. This provokes an *intuitive* sensation that I have become *less alive*.

In this way, we are spurred towards knowing as a cactus is towards water. With this equation, the more we know, the more we can live—the deeper we might exist—the further we feel.

Ignorance Is Life

But then, what about the opposite of ignorance? What of a life that is made of infinite, conscious stimulation? Wouldn't this be too much? As humans, we can not and *should* not be aware of everything.

As an interesting sidebar, what would that even look like? Wouldn't an entity who experiences and knows everything as it was, is, or ever will be all simultaneously be God? I know and experience such a negligible fraction of a decimal of a fraction of a decimal of an exponentially small quantity of what there is to know and experience, and sometimes that is far too much for my sanity.

Is there no value in abstraction, or unlabeled experience? Why then should we kiss our loved

ones, dance to music, stare at and create art? *If these things don't account for the 'true state of the cosmos', what significance could they ever have in comparison to the hand of infinite awareness?*

Of course, these things are irrevocably meaningful, profound features of a human life that *can not* be ignored. Perhaps this is just an overcomplicated way of describing the human experience; curated ignorance.

DeNicola aims to understand ignorance, which seems at first paradoxical. How can the unknown become known—and still be unknown? But he argues that ignorance is more than a lack or a void, and that it has dynamic and complex interactions with knowledge. Taking a broadly philosophical approach, DeNicola examines many forms of ignorance, using the metaphors of ignorance as place, boundary, limit, and horizon. He treats willful ignorance and describes the culture in which ignorance becomes an ideological stance. He

discusses the ethics of ignorance, including the right not to know, considers the supposed virtues of ignorance, and concludes that there are situations in which ignorance is morally good.

Ignorance is neither pure nor simple. It is both an accusation and a defense (“You are ignorant!” “Yes, but I didn't know!”). Its practical effects range from the inconsequential to the momentous. It is a scourge, but, DeNicola argues daringly, it may also be a refuge, a value, even an accompaniment to virtue.
—gettysburg.edu.

It seems to me that things like art, profundity, *love*, expression, emotion, and all of these human blessings require an element of *distraction* and *ignorance* to exist. In a moment consumed by love, one tends to disregard notions of rationality. With overbearing feelings of cold, hard rationality, one might spoil the experience of love.

Perhaps you are entirely consumed with a movie in a theater; what happens to your viewing experience with this thought: “I am looking at a fabric screen which is reflecting pixels of optically gathered photons which cause the illusion of visual stimulus as a means of satiating my dopaminergic desires to feel emotions,” and so on and so on...? With this thought, you lose the incredible value of being fully consumed by art—*really experiencing cinema*. In moments of profound art, for example, we must ignore certain stimuli to most effectively wring the goodness out of a thing.

These are obviously mild examples, but the same is true for significant things like death.

We all know we are 100% going to die. One day, I will no longer be living on this Earth, and some day humans will forget about me. Does this mean that I should keep this in the forefront of my attention at all times? I’m not sure if that is most likely to lead me where I want to go. We must be deeply aware of these things, but we also must have the strength to move forward—to use this for our benefit.

As humans, who have confronted the authentic mode of human life (Dasein), we must realize the role of this fundamental ingredient, Ignorance. As we know (and will continue to explore), conscious experience is closely defined by *attention*. The things which we pay attention to are the things which influence our experience. To authentically navigate our experience, and to make the most of it, we need to carefully curate what we pay attention to and what we ignore.

How do we do that?

Cognitive Biases

It turns out, our brain is a biological machine that is *meticulously* designed to play with attention and ignorance.

We have discussed Dasein—a state flavored, stained, and defined by human shenanigans; it

seems to me that it is largely composed of cognitive biases*.

A cognitive bias is a systematic pattern of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment. Individuals create their own "subjective reality" from their perception of the input. An individual's construction of reality, not the objective input, may dictate their behavior in the world. Thus, cognitive biases may sometimes lead to perceptual distortion, inaccurate judgment, illogical interpretation, or what is broadly called irrationality.

Although it may seem like such misperceptions would be aberrations, biases can help humans find commonalities and shortcuts to assist in the navigation of common situations in life.

—Wikipedia

Evolutionarily, humans have developed a number of neurological shortcuts that are often helpful*. If someone runs up to you on the street and holds a

knife above their head, you might feel scared. You probably didn't spend time deducing what the person was intending to do, you made the assumption that they were going to stab you. This assumption that 'raising knives above one's head is reason for fear' helped you avoid the attack. In this example, we start to see that much of cognition consists of blurry shortcuts—of subconscious activity which defines our action, despite its potential irrationality. I should not have to explain why biases can be bad.

As a human in the world, I will never be anything other than a human in the world. This means that I play by the rules of human cognition. Like many other humans, I wish (in one way or another) to transcend—I want to know everything, I want to be better than I ever could be, I want things which are beyond my capability. My goal is to get as close to this as I can*. To do this as best as I can, I must know my own flaws. Knowing the weak points of my brain allows me to better account for them in my actions. I will not explore a particular list of cognitive biases here because I could go on for a very long

time, and I know what I would like to know about them.

Habit

I used to think that routine, discipline, and habit was “inauthentic and artificial”. It turns out, they are some of the only ways to achieve organic authenticity.

There is nothing inauthentic about good habits, good routine, and good discipline* (if practiced correctly*). I used to hate these things. In some ways, I still do. But these are the *only ways* you can get things done without luck. So I yearn for them. We are looking for the action which is most likely to get us to achieve what we want to achieve. We will not achieve our goals without effective discipline, attention, habit, and *routine*. These are the very algorithms which make competency, fulfillment, achievement, success, and health possible. It is time that I realize the profound importance of this.

My favorite movie is 21 minutes, 7 seconds long. It is a manifesto and rulebook for work in the studio of Tom Sachs. If you haven't seen these videos, please

watch these two videos. They will help contextualize this mode of exploration, and the sanctity with which we will be holding to discipline.

[Tom Sachs: How to succeed as artist in spite of your own creativity | TED Talk](#)

[Ten Bullets: How to work to code](#)

The reason 10 bullets hit me so hard, was the fact that it was so contrary to my existing formula for action. My formula for creative and practical action repeatedly resulted in burn out, self-hatred, depressive episodes, hyper-stimulation, and unsustainability.

Hearing the words, “Creativity Is The Enemy” from one of the most creatively realized figures in contemporary high art, a figure whom I have revered for years, allowed me to realize that there is not just passion, but *strategy* in the world of creative efficacy.

I was functioning in an excessive and forced mode of output, with no restraints.

Sachs is functioning *highly* through a mode of excessive restraint. He is astonishingly effective and

lean; there is no excess in his work. Yet, with this leanness, he manages to preserve thoroughness, passion, dedication, and creative sanctity. His process made sense, and it worked. It would work for me too. This chilled and excited me to the bone—there are few moments in my life where the world has changed so palpably around me. There is a scene in *The Lego Movie* where the main character all of a sudden transcends to the understanding of a “master builder”. From his perspective, every element of the world around him shone with visible creative potential, but the relevant bits were highlighted so that he could target them and make something masterful. In the moment after watching *Ten Bullets*, my head was dead clear. I saw the things around me, and how restriction was the key for expansion. This mindset has prevailed to this day. I certainly don’t sufficiently embody these principles, but I am improving.

Tom Sachs Dialect

Built into the very fabric of this type of content, was a *dialect* for expression. This dialect was structured

like an *instruction manual*. At risk of coming off sounding somewhat eerie, cultish, and shockingly dogmatic, the ideas that are expressed through this dialect are *so lean*.

I respect effective prose—prose becomes more artistically impressive when less is used to express more. When less is expressed by more, it is a mark that the creator holds a greater understanding of the subject. You should know 10 times more about what you speak about than what you say. It often seems like I know 1/10th of what I speak.

Input before output Transcript

*“Every morning
our subconscious and waking selves meet
our dreams still dominate our thoughts
the bridge within ourselves is fragile
and waning our time to explore and express this
most
sacred space is limited*

*[Sachs grabs his cell phone:] this is input first
stimulus from the outside world
unleashes a torrent
chemicals of addiction dissolve its foundation
we become disconnected...distracted*

*tomorrow we kill our addiction
today we commit to output
before input
human behavior follows the law
of least effort*

*for an action to become
habit it must be clearly defined
easy and satisfying
our habit must become effortless
it must be pleasurable
it must be fun
We start small. We narrow
our attention to the most attainable goal*

*to make an apple pie from scratch
we must first invent the universe*

*we focus on simply picking up the pencil
and reward ourselves for that
Achievement*

*to be easy is to be free from resistance
create an area just for your habit
and your habit only
keep it well stocked locked and loaded
this is a small commitment but will
demand
extreme dedication stay with it
until it sticks*

*endure and go deeper
we do not waste this sacred moment
the work itself will become the reward”*

–Tom Sachs

With this doctrine in practice, I struggle to imagine
an unsuccessful scenario.

Again, *human nature follows the law of least effort*. Our goal is to be the most I can be. Therefore, we must keep my human nature in check; allow it to follow the laws which effectively position myself towards effectivity.

(Footnote There is a conflict between the David-Lynchian sentiment of getting everything important down, and the Tom-Sachsian wisdom of intensive pruning. It seems that both are paradoxically impregnated with each other.)

I am an unfettered source of output, 90% of the time. This has *potential* to be valuable, but a larger potential to be catastrophic if not forcefully and properly handled. In terms of creative inspiration, I am never empty; I am an infinite well of ideas. This sounds like a brag and a gift, but it has quickly proven itself to be a burden rather than a blessing. I have discounted this phrase in the past, but it should perhaps be examined;

“A jack of all trades is a master of none,”

This is actually only one known iteration of the quote, the original goes as follows:

“A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.”

I think both of these statements, despite arguing different virtues, are both correct. To some, the former version might be more beneficial. To others, the latter.

I think there is truth in the sentiment “everything matters”, and it is largely the means by which my curiosity thrives—yet, at a certain point, we must return to a *focus* if we want to get things done. In other words, effective action requires that this sentiment is honored, but sufficiently restrained. For some, this sentiment of versatility and diversity should be increased. For my current self, it has overwhelmed my other circuits and should be pruned*.

I prefer an artist who paints his painting rather than the one who plans one for his whole life. More often than not, this world rewards the one who is capable of acting *and* scheming, rather than the one who can only scheme. Creative potential holds some value, I do not want to discount this—but it is more relevant to someone like me to learn how to act instead of planning.

It is rare that I endorse any form of rigid dogma—yet, here I am passionately begging myself to follow a philosophy which is defined by its passion towards unchanging discipline. Tom Sachs often says, “The reward for good work is more work”. This seems to be one of those circumstances where turning left is the only way to turn right—where the opposite of the instinct is the successful maneuver. It seems to me that human nature is conditioned for survival, not success. Often, this means that we have to directly oppose our instincts if we wish to succeed; eat a salad instead of a burger, run a mile instead of taking a nap, read a book instead of watching television, follow a habit instead of straying, etc.

These are the necessary principles, mindsets, and discipline which are absolutely imperative for conditioning a human towards achieving their goals.

Effective action over time requires intention, strategy and rigid dedication. As a human, I am bad at two of these things. With this text, with this practice, and with this education, I am more likely to inherit the intuitive—muscle-memory—understanding of habitual dogma, disciplinary rituals, and the sanctity of routine.

Routine over everything.

Routine over everything.

Routine over everything.

The work of the human is directly defined by their routine.

The way humans change and better themselves is through routine.

The human brain speaks in only one language:

Habit. Repetition.

Routine over everything.
Routine over everything.
Routine over everything.

The human's goals change rarely, if ever. The human's energy and effectiveness varies endlessly. Routine allows the human to override this.

Routine over everything.
Routine over everything.
Routine over everything.

It is written into our physiology, that routine holds precedence over everything.
Don't kid yourself and say you don't have a routine; this in itself is one.
Your goals don't change, your energy does. Speak in the language of your energy.
Use your energy how it *can best be used*. Exploit it.
Stop using the routine that isn't working, and start using the routine that works.

Routine over everything.
Routine over everything.

Routine over everything.

Every wise person I have ever heard is arguing in their own way that success requires you to “*Find a good routine—it will work.*”

“*Find good habits—they will work.*”

One does not find the pirate’s treasure by randomly meandering.

One finds the pirate's treasure by *following a map*. Human physiology must be led *intentionally and effectively* if we expect it to succeed how we want.

Routine over everything.

...

There is no way to ‘hack’ a habit. The only way to form a habit is to do the work, and to do it regularly. Create tools that will help you in your path to form and keep a habit; implement algorithms:

For me, the start of the day is *very fragile*. When I wake up, I am an unthinking creature. If I wish to succeed in my long term motivations, I must make the correct actions in an unthinking state.

How does one get something done at all—regardless of motivation? Human behavior tends to follow the law of least effort. How do we ensure that necessary actions get done?

Memento

In the movie *Memento*, the main protagonist has a form of severe amnesia which prevents him from maintaining linear memory. Because his memory effectively ‘resets’ at frequent, regular intervals, he developed a habit of creating tangible markers and contextual reminders for himself in the form of tattoos or notes. In this way, even without awareness, memory, or familiarity, he was able to complete his goals in a linear fashion.

I would like to draw a similarity between this narrative with that of human psychology towards goal setting.

Previously, we examined goals from a scientific and personal perspective. We have goals that we understand to be correct, the question is now one of execution.

We have discussed some things about Dasein, neuropsychology, and the world of distraction to which humans are biased. With these things in mind, we have a better understanding of the details we should navigate to effectively complete our goals.

Frankly, the brain was designed to be lured by, for our evolutionary success and survival, certain kinds of information; threatening information, novel information, self-related information, and even things that are fun and enticing.

–Amishi Jha, (Miami Uni Neuroscience Prof)

Humans are not made for our philosophical idea of success, they are designed for biological success. Human success, in terms of what many contemporary humans consider to be successful, is uncommon—we are not designed to enjoy the work that goes into human success, we are designed in the language of biology. We are *very good* at biological success. Arguably, we have achieved an unprecedented biological success (though, out of human nature, we have ironically proceeded to cause our own biological downfalls). We have 8 billion people on Earth. To put this in an laughably rudimentary ecological perspective, there are (approximately) 49.5 million ducks, 48 million deer, and 440,000 elephants on Earth right now.

Regardless of how precise these measurements are, we can see that the population of such creatures is in a completely different numerical ballpark to that of our own. Humans are invasive in an unprecedented biological manner, perhaps second only to bacteria. We have increased our *own average lifespan* by 200% in the last 1000 [years](#). We are *legitimately* considering how we can live on a *separate* planet.

These are not things we can say about mole rats, eagles, or even cuttlefish.

And yet, if you give the average human an option between eating a bowl of ice cream or working out, they will likely prefer the former. Working out with a good diet provides long term benefit, and ice-cream provides short term pleasure. Because of these primordial mechanisms which are still, more or less, at the steering wheel of human behavior, we are biased away from achieving *our idea* of success. The human is a powerful machine with extremely old software.

With all of these variables against us, with our meat-machine inherently concerned with things *we no longer need to be concerned about*, how do we change our behavior?

First, I would argue, is to become aware of it. You are not likely to make effective change until you realize there is a problem.

Second, I suppose, would be to examine the behavior you exhibit which is a result of this contextually faulty software. In other words, what things am I doing to please the animal in me, rather than the more wise, conscious soul in me? This is, of course, deeply tangled with the physics of habit. Habit is a mechanism which holds great power in the biological world. We can use it to our benefit, but it is *indeed* a finicky and unthinking creature. Similar to *Memento*, we can develop intentional and visible ways to remind ourselves that a given behavior may be animalistic and potentially harmful. The moment of decision to eat a hamburger can quickly be solved by a well-placed post-it note. This behavior can be scaled up to virtually all applicable areas of psychological, negative, animalism. In this circumstance, when I say animalism, I am referring (for the lack of my current vocabulary) to negative behavior as a result of biological mechanisms. I don't think animals are bad, I think that acting like a starfish is bad if you have to pay your taxes.

Third, now that we have defensive mechanisms in place, we can implement offensive mechanisms.

Offensive action is difficult at first, but as a result of habit, becomes easier over time. A better description is, perhaps, that it becomes *less demanding* over time. I think it would be good to examine an empirical foundation and context for the ‘physics of human goals’;

I won’t spend too much time articulating the way humans suck at following promises to themselves, because we are all too familiar. Maybe the easiest description of this is the ‘New Years Resolution’ phenomenon, where we define things we want to happen and then usually fail to follow through with the necessary action over time.

Like what we said about the pirate’s treasure map; we must have a definitive plan for how to go about things. For me, this looks like regular planning—one day a week, examine the longer term engagements that you may forget. Once a month, examine an even longer term intention of things. Keep tangible records and remind yourself of your intentions. Human behavior tends to follow the law of least

effort—its inertia can be corrected with detailed, disciplined, and intentional planning.

“For an action to become a habit, it must be clearly defined, easy and satisfying. Our habit must become effortless. It must be pleasurable. It must be fun. We start small. We narrow our attention to the most attainable goal.’

—Sachs

It is not enough for something to be defined by authority—there is a reason the toddler still attempts to steal chocolate when he was told not to. If it is *fun* for the toddler to avoid the chocolate, he will not eat the chocolate. This is human behavior. Make your necessary actions pleasurable. Make the chores the reward. Make the dreadful and banal your version of exciting and wonderful.

This leads us to King Midas.

Luxury

In the repeated, slow, intentional reading of books like *Walden*, *The 4 Hour Work Week*, and epicureanism philosophy, my idea of “rich” and “wealth” has changed dramatically. In *Walden*, we encounter the idea that (depending on how you see it) materialism can be an indicator of a form of poverty. Thoreau introduces the idea that our objects have the potential to *own us*. The man with too much furniture is restricted to a stationary life, the man who wastes his energy on the paint-color of his house worries less of the strength and longevity of the rafters and floorboards. In *4 Hour Work Week*, Ferriss elaborates this perspective; what is the value of being rich? Time, freedom, luxury, having the necessary resources to provide fulfillment are all made *significantly* easier with the ownership of money, but we seem to have grown to mistake money *as actually being* these virtues. If the baseline goal is luxury, freedom, autonomy,

fulfillment, we must acknowledge the fact that we may achieve these things with no money at all*. We need to reframe our mindset. He who has made the banal luxury is perhaps the richest of all.

What is the best life? What is the greatest satisfaction one can experience as a human? What is the furthest point humans are capable of reaching? Where precisely is the limit to how far we can transcend?

It seems that the activity in the human condition largely revolves around the attempt to answer these questions. Regardless of your attitude, we must recognize that there have been multiple approaches to this inquiry. I know this because there are eminent atheists, devout theologians, ignorants, investigators, hedonists, ascetics, lovers and haters all living on Earth right now. A devout theologian pursues religion because they believe it is what they ought to do; if they didn't believe in God, they wouldn't be a devout theologian, and so on. Whether

or not the individual is aware of their conception of truth, they inevitably follow it.

What a lover sees as truth, the hater sees as untrue; and vice versa. I suppose this means three things: one is right, both are right, or neither are right.

With this logical attitude, we must keep in mind the plausible notion that this very question of “who is right” may be fallacious. Perhaps we are dealing with something much more complex than this language is giving justice to. Perhaps the opposite is true. What we do know is that we don’t know, and I suppose that is something.

I get the sensation that this is one of the weightiest questions we can ask, within Dasein—as humans. What ought we do?

If we don’t answer this question, what are we? This question has everything to do with our identity, our meaning (or lack thereof) and our entire experience. The answer to this question defines the nature of *everything*. Similar to Kierkegaard, I often get the

impression that we are not beings that are capable enough to sufficiently answer this question. Perhaps we live in a constant, fundamentally unchanging dimension of uncertainty, and that is how it is.

How do we turn the boring or unpleasant things of life into things we want to do and enjoy?

I know the exact steps I need to take to *dramatically improve the state of my life*. But I don't want to do the things, because most of them are unpleasant* to do.

I should invest, I should work out, I should eat better food, I should clean up behind me, I should remove my instagram, youtube accounts permanently, I should read more, I should work harder, I should send a couple well phrased emails to the right people, I should finish this that and the other thing.

Why on *Earth* haven't I done all of these things? Why can't I bring myself to do all of these things, particularly on a robust regime? What is the meat

and potatoes—the precise psychological mechanism—which so vexingly spawns this problem?

Boredom

It seems to me that the answer is (in one way or another), *Boredom*. Within this word, we have a number of other variables to look at: Dopamine imbalance, meta-awareness, Routine/Habit, attention, autobiographical planning, procrastination, ignorance, etc.

With a better understanding of the brain and boredom, we are better equipped to exploit it. Let's exploit the brain by talking about boredom.

Let's define boredom;

“So what is boredom? Well contrary to popular belief, it's not when you have absolutely nothing to do.

It's just when none of the options you have available to you appeal to you.

Boredom is characterized by a lack of concentration, restlessness, but also feeling lethargic.

It's a state of being underwhelmed. And there are now more ways than ever to avoid boredom..."

–Veritasium

Feeling weary because one is unoccupied or lacks interest in one's current activity.

–Merriam Webster

Boredom is the root of all evil - the despairing refusal to be oneself

...

It is very curious that boredom, which itself has such a calm and sedate nature, can have such a capacity to initiate motion.

–Kierkegaard

We can not change the rules by which our brain's physiology plays; in other words, to 'try harder' or

‘reject pleasure entirely’ is not the correct approach. Your attitude is almost never stronger* than hundreds of millions of years of biological evolution, even if it may seem that way in moments of determination or passion. Certainly this rejection is possible in many circumstances, wherein the conscious part of the mind overrides the terrified and determined rest of the body. Yet we are talking about *improvement over time*. The short term game is dissimilar from the long term one, and so we must play by neurophysiology and habit’s rules.

We are not trying to force myself into a state of horrible purgatory, we are trying to *redefine* my pleasure systems; it is not that I am going to “live a less entertaining life”, it is that I am authentically learning to appreciate the things which I should enjoy. Again, as Keirkegaard says, boredom is “the despairing refusal to be oneself”. It is the physiological tendency to oppose the things which our wise selves know to be important, for the pleasure of the instinctual selves. I know what the ‘*most me*’ (the truest self) part of me wants to be, therefore it is foolish to succumb to behavior which

does not realize it. If we want our wise selves to succeed, we must win this battle against our brute instinct. What a human task—what a will to power—that we should grow a particularly large frontal cortex, and realize that *we can stray yet further from entropy*. Perhaps I am not one to judge this, but it seems that this is a noble* task, if not a *human* one.

Without an option, as we know, the *most* interesting thing available becomes genuinely *interesting*. I must be disciplined in this, as we know this is a slippery slope. It seems to me (I say this with emphasis particularly as someone who was birthed into this digital world) that there is little chance* at epicurean moderation with this digital world of distraction. As we know, this digital world is infinitely designed to capture our attention and keep it—this is the very basis of the attention economy. Our world is increasingly becoming designed to keep us distracted, and it is *chillingly good at it*. I think we should understand this addiction mechanism to be similar to basuco, heroin, cocaine, nicotine, or any other drug which is seemingly *designed* to be

addictive. These substances, the digital world of distraction included, are *feedback loops*. Because of this, despite its ugliness and unorthodoxy, *abstinence* seems to be one of the only chances at succeeding against this beast. Similar to what I mentioned earlier about your 'will power over hundreds of millions of years of biological evolution', it is not reasonable to think that our 'will power will succeed over an infinitely refined and unrestrained algorithm which was born with one purpose: destroy human will power'.

It is for this reason that it seems wisest for someone like me, particularly because I am young and in the habit of forming life-long habits, that I should implement *full abstinence and restraint* from these terrifying worlds of distraction.

King Midas

Here speaks to us only a full, indeed a triumphant, existence, in which everything present is worshipped. And thus the onlooker

may well stand in real consternation in front of this fantastic excess of life, to ask himself with what magical drink in their bodies these high-spirited men could have enjoyed life so that wherever they look, Helen laughs back at them, that ideal image of their own existence, "hovering in sweet sensuousness."

-Neitzche,

let us imagine how in this world, constructed on illusion and moderation and restrained by art, the ecstatic sound of the Dionysian celebration rang out all around with a constantly tempting magic, how in such celebrations the entire excess of nature sang out loudly in joy, suffering, and knowledge, even in the most piercing scream.

...

Excess revealed itself as the truth. The contradictory ecstasy born from of pain spoke of itself right out of the heart of nature.

...

*Individualism, with all its limits and moderation,
was destroyed in the self-forgetfulness
of the Dionysian condition and forgot its
Apollonian principles*

–BOT Nietzsche

There is a blissful comfort in accepting the state you are in. There is a human desire to stretch the sensation of your experience to be something else, something “more correct”. In this painful contortion, our experience becomes tainted; we are left only with the pain of confused and unsuccessful transition from one authentic state to an inauthentic one. It is fundamentally æsthetic, any *thing*, can be pleasure if you make it so. It is what you make it. Pain is pain, sadness is sadness, discomfort is discomfort, this is true. But these are states that happen to you, you may choose to respond however you wish. It can be difficult, it is all too easy to succumb to the influence of the state you find yourself tainted with.

With practice, however, you can find that there is (in theory) infinite satisfaction in this unchangeable singularity of a state. It is the bottom floor, it is the

human foundation for all else; it is your perception. As conscious agents, we can influence this to our whim* (if not entirely, to a great degree). When you learn to perceive stimulus as good, your life is a continuous vat of unexplainable beauty. It is the best way to succeed, position yourself where you feel good even when you hit rock bottom. It is an unorthodox and rare way to deal with the human experience, but I believe it is *robust and the way I would like to live*.

We allow ourselves to receive beauty, pleasure, and joy from the *banalities of life*. The simple things offer endless joy if you give them the attention you deserve, and keep yourself from oversaturation.

“A crust of bread when you are hungry, and a glass of cool water on a hot day,”

What greater luxury? Even with an endless IV drip of dopamine—infinite happiness pills at my disposal, I would require more and more to feel pleasure. What then of life without the IV? Flat, painful, and a chore until you get your next hit of whatever you call pleasure.

What happens when you take the very basic elements of life, and call them your luxuries? What if every step on the Earth was a profound joy? Every sip of water was delicious? Every sting of pain is a fascinating look into neurobiology? Every moment you exist, every ounce of consciousness, every cup of coffee, every word, every conversation and opportunity, you found endlessly wonderful? What if everything you touched, even things barren of 'value' turned to "gold"?

I can imagine no greater luxury.

I think we often fail to realize we can do this. I know this is possible, because I have experienced it. While writing these words I'm experiencing it. If I had endless wealth, I would not buy cars, drugs, or whatever pleasure money owns, I would acquire the smallest space possible; A large empty room, clean water, good bread, good coffee, access to untrampled nature, ink and paper. It seems to me that time and space are significantly greater luxuries

than they seem at first. Time is money and money is time, so lots of time is expensive. It is my goal to earn precisely the amount of money I need to have access to the luxury of nothing.

I can imagine no greater investment.

Materialism

The discussion of material ownership and the messy pile of virtues, vices, and valuables that come along with it has long been had. Now, it can be argued that this is a discussion that should be had more than ever. Each generation of humanity typically and inevitably deals with some amount of uptick in the materialism game as time pushes on. Nonetheless, I argue that what *shouldn't* be ignored is the unprecedented explosion in the global attitude towards consumption in the last 100 years. Linda Weiser Friedman, a long-time professor at the

Zicklin School of Business, observes this dramatic progression:

“After World War II, economists and business leaders believed that the only way to achieve growth was to do everything possible to encourage consumption. Victor Lebow encouraged making consumption a way of life: “We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever-increasing rate” (Barash, 2009). This is in fact what happened. Thus, for example, the average house today is more than twice as large as it was in 1949. Since 1940, the American people have consumed more mineral resources than all previous generations. Our country, in the last 200 years, has lost 99 percent of its tall-grass prairies and 95 per cent of its old-growth forests (Barash, 2009). From 1950 to 1980, the personal consumption / GDP ratio was a stable 62 per cent. Since 1980, it has surged to 70 per cent.”

-{[Voluntary Simplicity, SSRN](#)}

What this is referring to is not that there has been some ambiguous worldly change in mood, making people more inclined to *want* stuff, but rather an economic lean from the “affluent societies” of the world (as coined by John Kenneth Galbraith with his 1984 book “Affluent Societies) towards a direction of blatantly glorifying overconsumption, disposability, and hyper materialism.

“According to Diamond (2008), population growth is not the real problem facing humankind, the big concern is overconsumption. If the entire world were to consume as much as the developed countries do, this would be the same as if the world population increased to 72 billion. No one believes that the world can support this many people. The solution is for everyone to reduce their consumption levels.”

-{[Voluntary Simplicity, SSRN](#)}

I am not here to argue what I think should be done with our economy or what we need to do to better the grotesque tragedy of our global environmental

impacts (I certainly don't *know* what the right actions are). Perhaps I do not even have the facilities, reputation, or voice to do so meaningfully. Rather, my facilities allow me to instead bring some attention to these things and advocate for personal and individual awareness and discussion through *more* intuitive, *less* discussed routes of action. The discussion of what actions to take to make the most good is for another time... (see page ...? On effective altruism and the pros and cons of the method.)

I feel what may offer a meaningful perspective on is the materialistic mindset which I have found functional, meaningful, freeing, and sustainable in my lifetime.

We already intuitively know that our consumption or lack thereof is influenced mostly from our own habits and psychological attitude towards the use of things. If we are psychologically against using "X", we are unlikely to use "X" unless provoked. Thus, we can deduce that someone who has developed a habit of almost exclusively drinking out of a single, aluminum metal, insulated bottle is far less likely to use a

disposable, non-biodegradable, plastic water bottle. Notice that the relationship doesn't necessarily have to be a direct confrontation of decision—the person who has psychologically trained themselves on the habit of reusable drinking is free of the battle of deciding whether it is an option for them to use a plastic bottle or not. The indecisive individual with no habits or psychological attitude in the way of these decisions err on the side of practicality and convenience—the plastic water bottle. (I will use this opportunity to again proverbially quote this beast of a proverbial quote: “Human nature follows the law of least effort”) This is a fairly intuitive situation which is often used in the discussion of changing consumption habits and it begins losing its meaning once you've heard it too many times.

Now as said before, this is not the time for discussing habits to eliminate single use plastics, but rather the time for establishing a greater awareness of the underlying, influential psychological forces that are at play in similar situations. These things add up—there is a remarkable difference between people at either end of the material spectrum. There are

those with matured systems in which they repeatedly use the robust things they need with minimal waste, and there are those with equally solidified systems who produce much more disposable waste, and less object curation. (This spectrum has a great deal of valuable information on the topic of socioeconomic patterns in poverty, monopolistic-consumer relationships, and the vast divide of equality. That is for another time.)

This discussion usually and unfortunately ends up revolving around what we might call “bandaid frugality,” the approach of sacrificing aspects of living to make other disposable aspects proportionally cheaper. Bandaid frugality is not what I am here to explore or advocate. The ultimate punctuation of this ritual often ends up with equally wasteful lives and a proportional decrease in comfort. This faulty human methodology uses a similar unfortunate exploitive tool to others like it; the process convinces the individual that they are indeed succeeding at pursuing their ultimate desire, when they are actually redefining it.

*“We have always known
that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we
know now that it is bad economics”*

-Roosevelt, 1937

(The year of the recession which was America's third-worst downturn of the 20th century. With real GDP dropping 10 percent and unemployment hitting 20 percent)

Instead of trying to squash the hard numbers to cater to our own stubborn psychology, let's instead attempt to explore some of the underlying motivations, needs, and wants that it consists of. This exploration is in the hopes of developing awareness of what we might call “stitches frugality.” The idea of this method is to find the minimal necessary input or consumption which still allows you to function comfortably. An important but difficult variable to consider in the world of stitch frugality is that the brain is highly adaptive to its environment—you are almost always capable of being more happy in an objectively worse context. This phenomenon is described powerfully in an excerpt from existential

psychotherapist Viktor Frankl in Peterson's
Architecture of Belief,

“Take as an example something that happened on our journey from Auschwitz to the camp affiliated with Dachau. We became more and more tense as we approached a certain bridge over the Danube which the train would have to cross to reach Mauthausen, according to the statement of experienced traveling companions. Those who have never seen anything similar cannot possibly imagine the dance of joy performed in the carriage by the prisoners when they saw that our transport was not crossing the bridge and was instead heading “only” for Dachau. And again, what happened on our arrival in that camp, after a journey lasting two days and three nights? There had not been enough room for everybody to crouch on the floor of the carriage at the same time. The majority of us had to stand all the way, while a few took turns at squatting on the scanty straw which was soaked with human urine. When we arrived the first important news that we heard

from older prisoners was that this comparatively small camp (its population was 2500) had no "oven," no 38 crematorium, no gas! That meant that a person who had become a "Moslem" [no longer fit for work] could not be taken straight to the gas chamber, but would have to wait until a so-called "sick convoy" had been arranged to return to Auschwitz. This joyful surprise put us all in a good mood. The wish of the senior warden of our hut in Auschwitz had come true: we had come, as quickly as possible, to a camp which did not have a "chimney" – unlike Auschwitz. We laughed and cracked jokes in spite of, and during, all we had to go through in the next few hours. When we new arrivals were counted, one of us was missing. So we had to wait outside in the rain and cold wind until the missing man was found. He was at last discovered in a hut, where he had fallen asleep from exhaustion. Then the roll call was turned into a punishment parade. All through the night and late into the next morning, we had to stand outside, frozen and soaked to the skin after the strain of our long journey. And yet we were all

very pleased! There was no chimney in this camp and Auschwitz was a long way off.”

Peterson goes on to reinforce this idea:

“We can make lists of general goods and bads, which might appear reasonable to others, because we tend to make judgments of meaning in a relatively standard and predictable way. Food, to take a simple example, is good, assuming it is palatably prepared, while a blow on the head is bad, in direct proportion to its force. The list of general goods and bads can be extended with little effort. Water, shelter, warmth, and sexual contact are good; diseases, droughts, famines and fights are bad. The essential similarities of our judgments of meaning can easily lead us to conclude that the goodness or badness of things or situations is something more or less fixed. However, the fact of subjective interpretation – and its effects on evaluation and behavior – complicate this simple picture. We will work, expend energy, and overcome obstacles, to gain a good (or to avoid

something bad). But we won't work for food, if we have enough food – at least not very hard; we won't work for sex, if we are satisfied with our present levels of sexual activity, and we might be very pleased to go hungry, if that means our enemy will starve. Our predictions, expectations, and desires condition our evaluations, to a finally unspecifiable degree. Things have no absolutely fixed significance, despite our ability to generalize about their value. It is our personal preferences, therefore, that determine the import of the world (but these preferences have constraints!).”

Keeping in mind the awareness of our emotional and experiential flexibility, not only being able to *endure* a less “objectively pleasant” context, but be *equally as comfortable* in such a state, we are able to more freely flex the walls of our comfort bubble. The more that one is able to flex their comfort bubble, the more that they combat the outwardly unacceptable and harmful habits that are encouraged by previous habits and methodologies.

So then, what does this look like on a more practical level?

When we consider the things we consume and the things we dispose of, it is important to not limit this to physical objects. Particularly as our world is transitioning more and more to a new, virtual one, (*insert picture of a hotdog in the metaverse*) we must consider the influential and real economy of the virtual. As I explore later, the economy of attention is equally (if not more) applicable to our discussion of consumption. If we know time equals money, the tech giants are getting scarily wealthy with our donations. For now, we will quantify time as “use” with hour units.

With that out of the way, it might be helpful to list the things one uses in a day. That can be a bit of a lengthy one, so we will keep the “use list” to things perhaps slightly above the services offered by a chair (A chair offers multiple services, all of which I use/consume: vacancy, comfort, time, aesthetic pleasure, consistency, structure, etc. This can get a bit infinite if we aren’t too careful to limit ourselves.

Just goes to show how much we are able to ignore the worth of things). For example, today—in no particular order—I have used:

- Electric Kettle
- Lighting
- Water
- Clothing
- Space
- Bedding
- Medication
- Pen
- Paper
- Ink
- Phone Charger
- Computer Charger
- Computer USB Dongle
- External Keyboard
- Mug
- Online Dictionary
- Online Thesaurus
- Wikipedia
- Coffee

- Coffee Filter
- Coffee Brewer/Decanter
- Electricity
- Electric Radiant Heat
- Headphones
- Bluetooth
- 6 Hours Spotify (White Noise)
- Phone
- Phone Case
- Speakers
- Phone Dongle
- Rugs
- Chairs X5
- Car
- Gasoline
- Shoes
- Keys
- Mask
- Wallet (Including money and cards)
- Insurance Paperwork
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrush
- Mouthwash
- Floss

- Dentist Bib
- Dentist Tools Including X-Ray, Polishing Tool, Suction, Picks, Mirrors (Used on me)
- Travel toothpaste
- Plastic Baggie
- Toothbrush (again)
- Floss (again)
- Gas Station Bathroom
- Protein Bar
- Backpack
- Books X3
- Computer
- “Square” Card Register
- Milk
- Espresso
- Ice
- Plastic Straw (recycled type PET 1)
- Plastic Cup (recycled type PET 1)
- Plastic Lid (recycled type PET 1)
- Drop Leaf Table
- Google Docs
- 3 Hours attention to Google Docs
- 20 minutes attention to Wikipedia
- 30 minutes attention to SSRN.com

- 5 minutes to Thesaurus.com
- 1 minute to Dictionary.com
- 10 minutes on scholar.google.com

It is 12:30 PM at the moment of writing this, and I have exclusively gone to a dentist appointment, gas station, and coffee shop. With a list already as restricted as this, we begin to draw attention to the extent of the relationship we have with materials and those who provide them.

If we briefly look at this list through the lens of bandaid frugality, there are sacrifices that should be made. For example, I can sacrifice things like radiant electric heat, coffee (X2), the entire trip to the dentist, gas station, and coffee shop, some of my clothing, paper, pen, and ink, and more. Let's consider the cost impact of reducing these items from the list (all things considered, this is about half of the list), and then what that means for us. With some simple and boring math that I'll spare you from looking at—the money “gained” from not doing these

things, the opportunity cost, equals about \$5. What this leads us to consider is whether all these sacrifices are making as significant of a net impact as they *feel* like they are.

To combat this cost, I could choose to spend 5 minutes of intentional effort in the right field (such as homemade jewelry sales [which I have found to be a great field to sell things]). This can (and regularly does) lead to 4 times the amount of profit as the cost from these comforts.

I need to briefly acknowledge that this is not, in fact, an empirically sound argument against this budgeting attitude. This is, of course, a highly idealized situation for the sake of consideration. As a privileged 18 year old, I have an extremely low cost of living, low standards, low pressure, and life is much smaller for me. To be a rational and functional human being, there are many sacrifices (or rather lower standards) that you *must* make in regards to pleasures such as coffee shops, food, or even lighting. I am not arguing against these basic elements of human discipline, but rather providing a

fairly weak example demonstrating impact density and its potential uses in the effort of using less and staying comfortable.

Some Fears

“When we have acquired these immense powers, to what end shall we use them? Man has survived, hitherto, by virtue of ignorance and inefficiency. He is a ferocious animal, and there have always been powerful men who did all the harm they could. But their activities were limited by the limitations of their technique. Now, these limitations are fading away. If, with our increased cleverness, we continue to pursue aims no more lofty than those pursued by tyrants in the past, we shall doom ourselves to destruction and shall vanish as the dinosaurs vanished. They, too, were once the lords of creation. They

developed innumerable horns to give them victory in the contests of their day. But, though no other dinosaur could conquer them, they became extinct and left the world to smaller creatures such as rats and mice.”

–Henry David Thoreau, (I think, maybe it was Bertrand)

This section is an anxiously constructed synthesis of pervasive and profound fear which, strangely and indirectly, led to this project (at least in the form of text) being born in the first place. The issue with this section, however, is that it feels incredibly foolish to try to articulate the scale of such horrors in such a short amount of time. Woody Allen once said, “I took a speed-reading course and read *War and Peace* in twenty minutes. It involves Russia.” I feel similarly about this futile attempt to sum up the vast reasons for concern I have towards this subject with such few words, such little time, such little patience, and so much fright. It seems to me that within the next 10 years or so, I will likely end up having to write a separate book of its own just dedicated to this issue.

Perhaps even that format will not be radical enough to calm my nerves. For now, however, I have chosen to *lightly graze* this subject, because it is very applicable to my motivations.

It is important to think sufficiently before expressing one's fears. I wish to express my fears, but I would like it to be in a different manner than fears are usually expressed. Some things on the nature of fear expression:

People have a strong proclivity to talk passionately about the things they are concerned about, and it is often their wish to get the listening party to agree with or validate their perspective at all costs (This is perhaps an extension of survivalistic behavior towards danger). What this ends up looking like is the passionate person sacrificing quality discourse for that which is focused on *agreement*. If you feel like you are at risk of getting eaten by a lion in the dark, it is in your best biological interest to get your party on the same page, so you are not in a dangerous position.

And yet, people *hate* changing their own opinions. The change of an opinion rarely happens in a yelling match, because yelling—a discourse of opposition—is not a landscape tolerant of thought. It is one of immediate self-preservation. Though most discussions today are not held in the form of yelling, they are often had with similar *attitudes* or cognitive states. Think of where most human discussion takes place in this world; online, a place of negligible context, and infinite anonymity. Here, the playground for divisiveness has no boundaries, and the parts of the self-concerned, stubborn, scared human psyche show themselves fully. Admittedly, many fears are shared in person. But one must acknowledge the significance of fear as a real currency for cheap journalism, attention, divisiveness, and advertisement. And, somewhat frighteningly, how much has our physical discussion changed as a result of this time spent in a virtual and restricted lingual environment?

I digress. The idea I am trying to articulate is that discussion with these variables in place creates an inevitable precedent of debate, where one party is

expected to 'win' at the end of it. This often leads to embarrassingly *distorted* discussion, where nothing much gets done, and everyone has their adrenaline up. I would like to avoid this flavor of discourse to the best of my limited abilities. Again, this is not the correct context to provide the *sufficient* and *endless* amount of evidence-based research there is to know about. I want to express that this is something which I strongly believe influences our lives significantly more than we acknowledge, and that can directly better the lives of our current and future selves. This is the discussion of dopamine, technology, addiction, development, attention, mind, consciousness, health, and etc.

I hope that acknowledging the unsavory characteristics which usually exist in the passionate expression of fear allows for a better reception of my observations; this is one of the few opinions I feel comfortable expressing with gusto, as it has impacted the life of me and my fellow human beings drastically and directly.

Positives

To start on a positive note, let's acknowledge an important truth about the subject of technology: the contemporary age of information and technology has provided unprecedented benefit to the human race. This age of technology, information, media, and internet (AKA the Information Age, Computer Age, Digital Age, New Media Age, Electronic Age—let's refer to it as "this thing") has been a significant beneficial influence on the person I am today as well as the person I will become. Humans in general have gained incredible opportunities, resources, freedom, and development because of this thing. Countless lives have been saved because of this thing, countless lives have been bettered by this thing. This is the most connected* humanity has ever been, distance decay has shrunk to negligible size. We can not, and should not ignore these things. Truth be told, I could talk about the benefits of this thing for just as much time, if not more, than of the negatives. I am not discounting the profound beauty and power of technology. I believe technology of *a specific kind* is an unprecedented

tool which exponentially enhances the capability of humanity.

Negatives

The problem with this, however, is that there is no free lunch. In other words, there are profound and humanity-threatening parts of this thing which are threatening to become irreversible. This is a particularly frightening issue, because even those who are aware of how bad this thing is are still subject to its hand. Most of the time, we don't meaningfully acknowledge the negatives. The more that something becomes commonplace, the less we are likely to question its validity. The more that we are calibrated to a specific, unacceptable mode of life, the more that we become unfamiliar with the *acceptable* mode of life. This is a frighteningly devious force which, in almost every right, is difficult to combat. It is a faceless, omnipresent, hyperinvasive, infinite, world which is quickly, with our permission, taking over our own.

I fear that this next bit is too general of an observation to confidently assert, so I will throw it out there with an emphasis on my ubiquitous disclaimer: take this with a fat grain of salt.

This *thing* is such a vastly accepted feature of our existence now that it has crossed the threshold into the things humanity just doesn't consider changing. It is with things like climate change, social change, pandemics, and technology that a bitter form of cynicism arises in me. I have too much of a foot in the door of scientific thinking, psychology, and pessimism to think that, realistically, the will of 8 billion people will realize beneficial change until something catastrophic occurs. This pattern plays out time and time again, and will likely continue until the expiration date of this species. Of course, there are theories which are dedicated to this particular problem— how do you take a largely uninformed population of unique individuals and herd them towards a beneficial end, and who gets to decide? This is where my interest drops off. Similar to advanced math, chemistry, or law, I struggle to see myself making meaningful waves within these fields.

In other words, I would much rather herd sheep than people; with sheep, I feel like I could get something done.

I have not done enough thorough* research within sociology to identify this particular phenomenon, though I am sure it exists in one way or another; it is the relationship of gradients to the human mind. It is here that a spinoff book is most necessary, to explicate the nitty gritty details of such a phenomenon. I presume this will continue to concern and pessimistically fascinate me for years to come. For now, we will shallowly acknowledge it. Sociology is essentially psychology writ large* (to any sociologists reading this, I hope this is not a sacreligious thing to say), so we might benefit from considering some of the influence of technology on brains; particularly young ones. I make this clarification—I hope not foolishly—because we are at a bizarre anthropological scenario wherein two generations have been raised in *different dimensions*. In other words, most youth at the age of 10 have spent more time on their devices than 95 year olds have in their life, and they will continue this

pattern. In my lifetime alone, I have witnessed the nearly complete substitution of touchscreens where there used to be chalkboards, ipads where there used to be crayons, and televisions where there used to be paintings. I witnessed the *teeter* of the analog world *totter* to the digital one. Now, there are adults who have lived full analog lives, and 20 year olds who have lived completely digital ones. What a strange renaissance and apocalypse of developmental psychology, sociology, history, infrastructure, linguistics, culture, *anthropology*...

Digital infinitude, and the influence on the brain

I think the field of digital music production offers a great metaphor which carries over into this line of thought. In the same way that we head into the 'unrestrained and infinite' digital age in which we are able to play with material unfathomable by earlier generations,

"Electronics were really compelling in the fact that it isn't limited to an

instruments range it's not limited to the 88 keys in a piano, you have [everything] at your fingertips ... You also have the ability to create frequencies that are above and below human perception”

-Daedelus (Music producer, not the greek architect)

there is the same unrestricted danger and excitement with the technological information age. With the internet, there is unrestrained freedom of experience, knowledge, identity, and activity. I fear that, without a completely developed prefrontal cortex nor a basic understanding of moral philosophy, this precedent of unrestrained information to those who do not have the physiological means to completely control their actions or development is *exceedingly* dangerous. The relationship between generational differences and the protean, algorithmic nature of social media has caused a *huge* blindspot towards the true nature of what young people are dealing with in an

unprecedented amount. The quantity and quality of time spent on a phone by a 13 year old is VASTLY different from the time spent on a phone by a 45 year old. The experience is entirely different, each world perfectly suited for either user. 40 year olds do not, and perhaps *cannot* understand the true nature of the type of stuff some 13 year olds are consuming for *the majority of their waking life*.

An important characteristic of this technology is its precise adaptation to the user; and yet, we treat it as *one thing*. Billions of people, living in a virtual world hyper-personalized to their own psychological thumbprint, completely compartmentalized in their own reality filled with a virtual community identical to themselves; a flimsy world labeled 'infinite human connection', when it is one of infinite human division. No wonder our species feels so disconnected from itself...

Those who are raised in an environment of obscene saturation and dopaminergic gluttony *have no other standard for life or reality*. This is unacceptable, and what I believe is undoubtedly one of the most

fear-worthy risks to the human race. In this brief stretch of time, it has become so good that we are *aware* of how bad it is, and can *still be ruined by it*.

The undeveloped prefrontal cortex issue

How do we treat it as reasonable to provide a creature *without the biological means to restrict themselves* towards proper decision making in a world with virtually no laws, negligible social standards, and the freedom to spend all of their time in the hands of an algorithm designed flawlessly to harvest and exploit the maximum attention from every user it touches? Youth is *the time in their life where the development of their brain determines who they are as a person for the rest of their lives*.

Humanity has welcomed this way of life into every part of their existence at a speed never before seen in human civilization.

I am terrified that this is something we do not know the true danger of.

I am terrified that we have gone so far that humans won't be able to change it.

I am terrified that I regularly see myself succumb to this thing.

I am terrified that the next batch of humans will have been raised in it.

I am terrified that humanity is losing valuable things because of this misuse.

The economics

To varying extents, the physics of economy pervades in most fields— if there is demand, there must be supply. There is no such thing as a free lunch. It seems that the internet provides a free lunch—free, infinite entertainment, interaction, media, tools, etc.

Where is the supply? What are you paying?

Without sounding too much like a conspiracy theorist; your attention *earns these companies*

money. The more time you spend on Instagram, the more money Instagram makes. The ever-perfecting algorithm will study you infinitely until it has perfected the psychological experience of blindness, until it has exploited the way your brain uses dopamine. Again, this is a subject which demands more attention than I am able to currently give it. I think it is beneficial for *everyone* to repeatedly remind yourself of the attention economy, with things like things like this podcast (<https://www.commonsense.news/p/honestly-your-attention-didnt-collapse>), or of course, *The Social Dilemma*.

This profit does not come from the æther, it comes from your time, your attention, your gullible character, your money, your processing power, your data, your opinion, your hunger, your disgust.

The jack of all trades issue

I would like to describe a violent downfall for many young creatives in this digital time and context.

My use of media, like many others like me, is diverse in form and content. Holistic consumption of diverse material, I believe, enriches the perspective of a person's life and allows them to become a more well rounded, versatile, effective individual. An issue that arises with the vast quantity of *stuff* there is on the internet, however, is that creatives who are concerned with *production* or their creative *self*, are faced with a parasitic phenomenon.

Independent consumption, particularly of a curious individual, creates a false reality of the amount of stuff a person is reasonably expected to achieve in one lifetime. For example, in a single day, I may consume 2 hours of content from various artists, in various mediums, at various ages. If this content generally consists of a person outlining their life work, there is a lot of achievement being described. A successful artist has achieved a lot of things, has a lot of experiences, and continues to achieve because of the resources they have worked towards.

From experience, I tend to consume the works of one artist, in awe and appreciation and inspiration.

Within minutes, I could be onto another artist, doing the same. My brain now takes the accomplishments from 2 extremely hardworking achievers and doubles my standards for what I think is expected of a lifetime work of an individual. With each artist, my inspiration leads me to delve into their work, create something by myself through their medium.

Naturally, when one person does this with 12 different fields, he runs into what we may call the jack of all trades dilemma- wherein a lot of work goes into the work, but the work is dispersed over a vastly unreasonable array of projects, ideas, and medium. This produces a net total of nothing, and the individual is discouraged, tired, and uninspired. The motivation towards a craft becomes far less as one's feeling of unlikeliness of completion rises. "How was this artist so prolific?"

It is because they did one thing, and one thing strongly and with discipline. This is being lost, and those who do try to follow one thing and one thing only, are discouraged in more ways now than ever, simply by consuming.

Human experience as a droplet on glass

Here is one of my models of the human experience. We humans are water droplets progressing down a pane of glass. We influence and are influenced by the droplets most near to us. We leave a vague, amorphous trail behind us which sways those who encounter it. The droplets around us—the texture of the glass, inhibit movement, provoke movement, and influence the path and shape of the droplet as it continues at varying speeds through the y-axis of time. Because this universe is spatio-temporal, we have the ability and inevitability of meandering both left and right along the x-axis of space. Typically, because of the downward, continuous pulling force of gravity (y-axis), most droplets follow (within a margin) a fairly predictable and regular path from the top of the glass to the bottom in terms of activity, movement, space, and experience. Some droplets reach the bottom of the glass quicker than other droplets (e.g. death), some stay still (e.g. health issues, addiction, philosophical death), Etc. The droplets around us, people on the same

spatio-temporal pane, are in relatively similar situations to us, but vary in shape, composition, sensation, activity, and position. Droplets are primarily motivated by cause and effect from the strongest forces around them, the most accessible routes, the most statistically likely action*. Some droplets come across dust particles (e.g. culture, books, ideas, doctrines, philosophies, interests), which influences the composition of the drop, and thus the path it takes. To our knowledge, water droplets are not completely sentient*, and have no likelihood of consciously choosing any highly unpredictable action*. Perhaps, despite our insistent position of transcendent, narcissistic, divine, wretched self-obsession as a human species, we too are fated to the unchanging ritual of falling down a pane of glass—stuck to it, defined by the causal likelihood of the path laid before us.

But this does not mean we are restricted to a 2 dimensional existence. We have spoken of the x and y axis, but what of the z axis? I like to consider this the 'axis of transcendence'. Yes, we are pinned to the pane of glass because of fundamental

forces—surface tension, gravity, hydrophilia—but there is a way to go *outwards* or further *away* from this 2 dimensional pane of existence. Admittedly, this is rare past an extent— most water droplets are not given the opportunity to splash outwards into the unknown space of the z axis. Some, however, do—these are the droplets who have experienced the unlikely, the unusual, the forceful, the profound, and the radical. To overcome the fundamental forces limiting us to this shallow plane of experience—the few millimeters the droplet protrudes outwards from the pane of glass, we must experience something unusual, radical, and powerful. As extremely uninformed entities*—simple in many regards and complex in others—us ‘water droplets’ aren’t certain about most things outside of our little plane of existence. We do not know about the infinite turbulence of rain, the complex formation of clouds, the *nature* of water cycles, but we do have a vague memory and sensation of what it is like to be a small part of it. We are indeed unique, but we are also one droplet in a torrential monsoon.

We recognize our limits on this pane—the seductive doctrines of entropy—but we reject them with our inherent propensity towards the unlikely. We are the absurd, the droplets which invite the radical, the unusual, the profound; we are willing to separate ourselves from the shallow, but simple life of the pane of glass, in hopes that one day we become part of some larger body of water—some larger body of being, knowledge, experience. Most of us will fail, for that is our nature; but it is this very nature which has given us the privilege to scoff at chaos and turn the other way. In this, I see some divine will to power, some transcendent force, some beautiful, primordial motion bloom. This might very well be the only time I will see something so unlikely, and so I choose to tango with this enigmatic flux in awe.

Multipotentiality, J.O.A.T., Da Vinci

“There's all this talk about investing in medical breakthroughs predominantly through the National Institute of Health that's the primary sort of government

agency for medical research what I
caution is fun we all want to live
healthy no that's not even here to
debate but keep in mind that if you take
a tour through a hospital and look at
every machine with an on/off switch that
is brought into the service of
diagnosing the human condition that
machine is based on principles of
physics discovered by a physicist in a
machine designed by an engineer. Nowhere
in that equation was there a medical
doctor or medical researcher and so you
can't just fund one branch of scientific
inquiry, you have to fund them all
because these advances for example the
MRI came from principles of physics
discovered by a physicist who had no
interest in medicine. This wasn't his
point, that wasn't what drove him, yet it
has this marvelous application that we
could diagnose or at least probe inside
your body without cutting you open first.
So the cross-pollination of disciplines

is fundamental to truly revolutionary advances in our culture and so you can't fund any one thing without the other lest you believe you are right on top of a solution when in fact you're you're not."

-Neil deGrasse Tyson:

"Actually, during the Renaissance period, it was considered the ideal to be well-versed in multiple disciplines"

-Wapnick

"Our life is frittered away by detail...simplify, simplify."

-Henry David Thoreau

“Creativity often requires drawing analogies between one body of knowledge and another. Pablo Picasso merged Western art techniques with elements of African art. He was struck by the way African artists combined multiple perspectives into a single work, and that helped lead to the development of cubism. Similarly, great scientists often draw parallels between different areas to create new ideas. In the history of science, Johannes Kepler struggled to understand how the planets could move around the sun, and drew on his knowledge of light and magnetism to try to understand the force that moved the planets.”

—Adam Dachis (same goes for Paul Simon with Graceland, J Dilla with anything, Vanilla Ice, Tom Sachs, intertextuality, etc.)

“Everything I ever let go of has claw marks on it.”

—David Foster Wallace

Renaissance people must be encouraged if we value progression, but we need to pair it equally with creative discipline and intelligence. In the same way that consciousness is argued to be everything, creative discipline and intelligence, the manner for which a creative pursues the synthesis of anything in their life, almost directly determines their likelihood for success. Habit and routine don't come naturally to artists or renaissances or romantics, which is why so few of them find the importance of them. Those who do are often great. Technology and social media worsens this concept, and teaches people instead to glorify the IDEA of things, the interest of things, but not the action or the work of things. It is about the end result, it is about the feeling it gives you. One of the reasons this so difficult to articulate, particularly with examples of social media, is that there is a vast amount of it and it is different for everyone. There are almost these standards that we must concede to, how many numbers of likes or followers or whatever and the correlation to the content and demographic. The idea of content for the sake of

algorithms is terrifying and has great potential for issues.

Stoicism

“It is foolish to tear one’s hair in grief, as though sorrow would be made less by baldness.”

— Marcus Tullius Cicero

Stoicism can be easily disguised as masculinity in an intellectual flavor. Young boys who dream of being men often fall into this rabbit hole of finding professionally successful and powerful figures to admire and imitate. Figures like Jordan Peterson or Ben Shapiro, perhaps without knowing, often bend the intentions of philosophy and social discourse to be a playground of ego and shallow intellectual facade. It saddens me to see philosophy and wisdom tainted by this naive competition, where skepticism has less power than ego, vocabulary, and the speed with which you can present your argument. I am frustrated by seemingly reasonable figures, figures with above-average intellect, making

such unreasonable generalizations and presenting them in an insufficient manner. Many of these people might very well have meaningful things to say; the seems to be in the way they choose to hold their discourse. In the audience's eye, debates are won by who talks louder, faster, and with quicker vocabulary. Snippets which *sound* compelling tend to get a far greater reaction than ideas which *are* compelling. It is this attitude of social discussion that evolves into a strange theatre, similar but different from politics, where the ego or image of the speaker is directly tied to their content. I fear that snippets which exist without context gives the opportunity for direct misinterpretation by these young, eager-to-act people.

I digress. Stoicism happens to be one of these genuinely learned philosophical traditions which is hyper-processed and misinterpreted by this form of social discourse, and then consumed similarly to a shot of alcohol; a small amount of content which drastically changes one's behavior.

There are too many young people in today's world without viable mentors, so they fall unto those who have the most exciting delivery. People like when a speaker can get their adrenaline up, they like the idea of changing themselves to be better more than the process of changing itself, it *feels* like you're changing for the better when you hear people talking about self-betterment passionately. It is easy to mistake *understanding* self-betterment with actual progress.

Initially, it was for this reason that I stayed away from the study of stoicism; it felt like an easy name for hollow self validation. It felt like an easy route for someone who felt any desire to fulfill some role of moral obligation to tell themselves that they have done something when they hadn't. I understood the practice to be advocating this motto: "If you practice stoicism, you are what a man should be. If you don't bat an eye when you feel pain, you are wise and honorable. This is masculinity, and that is what you should be."

I do not pursue this ideology out of admiration of the practice, I implement it as a post-op descriptor for a mindset I independently explored out of necessity. I methodologically deconstructed and reconstructed my conception of the relationship between myself and nature and found that I had arrived in the same place that the stoics had. I hope this doesn't *at all* sound like I am arguing any sort of claim of intellectual property in this field, I am nothing but an admirer who found myself entering this philosophy from the back door.

Stoicism asserts that the responsibility of a moral and rational agent is to hold an orderly mind. As a moral and rational agent, I ought to live in accordance with nature. If I can't control something bad from happening, it is irrational and negative to the state of the universe to react negatively to it. The same is true for positive events. We all are born and we will die, the particles which compose my body came from this Earth and shall return to it. The Stoic philosopher makes the best out of whatever situation they were born into in life. It is about

organizing my fear, so that I may fear bad action more than pain. We can't control the world, but we can control our response to it.

At this moment, I apply the philosophy of Stoicism to myself only: there are deep-running social and political facets of this tradition, but it is myself where preliminary action must occur before all else.

I am confused, and I seek understanding. For understanding, I require orderly and effective conduct. For effective conduct, I must combat my handicaps. To combat some of my handicaps, I utilize the discipline of Stoicism. This is a necessary philosophical discourse, dialogue and meditation with the goal of understanding the relationship between myself and the life that I receive, in hopes to calibrate my mind with the most existential confidence I can get my hands on.

I am an anxious, solipsistic*, young, distorted individual by nature. If I hope to reach my potential as a human being, I then must implement a *robust*

framework of emotional dogma that protects me against my proclivity towards emotional *distortion* (emotional *distortion*, not emotion by itself).

There are a number of powerful psychological tools that become available when someone is determined to implement stoicism into their life. Regardless of the degree to which you succeed at practicing stoicism, you are likely to be heading towards an organized perspective. Perspective can lead to power to change one's self for the better.

I will never claim to be remotely in the same universe as a "proper stoic". What I will claim, is that I have seen direct and tangible benefit from pursuing these principles to the best of my abilities.

I am one in the increasing population of socially anxious individuals. I feel comfortable saying this confidently because I have dealt with physiologically debilitating symptoms in my past, and still deal with aspects of them now. I choose not to go into as

much detail as I could, because anxiety can be a wholly rancid subject to hear about:

Most forms of anxiety (arguably) can be described as a *distorted* physiological response. The thing which combats distortion, is perspective. If you stand before a mirror and it is bent, you look short and anamorphic. Naturally, we should have the freedom to look closer at the mirror to see a truer perspective; the mirror is bent, which results in distortion.

In this metaphor, an anxious person would be unable to comprehend the fact that the image in the mirror is not representative of the real world. The image of the mirror is indistinguishable from reality, and we no longer have the facilities to *intuitively* accept the notion of potential inaccuracy.

Perspective is virtually *non-existent* in a fit of anxiety. Anxiety is a psychological blockage which does not allow you to *understand* perspective. Perspective very well may be sitting under your nose, but it is as intelligible as an alien language.

I have found that the results of stoicism and mindfulness, when implemented in a necessarily habitual manner, are *unmistakably* more effective than any of my results with Prozac, Lexapro, Zolaft, Propranolol, or Hydroxyzine.

I used to lose weight from my social-anxiety–induced nausea. After the study and the implementation of some forms of stoic discipline, I have begun to welcome social activity with such a stable state of mind that this notion is unimaginable. This is not to say that I don't still struggle with this fundamental problem of anxiety; these aren't problems that you definitively *solve*. But this is *certainly* an effective approach to have in my arsenal. For this, I am grateful. This gap year has allowed me to intimately familiarize myself with things such as tangible philosophical discipline in a way that would not have been possible in the normal passage of education. I believe that this unorthodox, independent, intimate retreat of education has allowed me to more effectively and authentically face my future.

HEDONISM

Perhaps I am a hedonist, just one of a different kind than you might first think. To live to pursue pleasure, that is to be a hedonist. By pursuing anything I am inclined to pursue, I am attempting to pursue pleasure to the greatest extent; in other words, I want pleasure *without the corresponding pains*.

I find pleasure in being in an *absurd* world, living in accordance with nature, finding knowledge, pursuing wisdom, fulfilling my obligations, realizing the nature of my humanity- it is a reformation of the default pain pleasure complex. Intoxicate yourself with drugs if you must, but it seems to me that there is more than enough inebriation in human sobriety alone. We speak of illusions and hallucinations as alien things, when they are, in fact, the same things which construct your perception of the universe: your eyes and brain. If distortion is what you seek, profound emotion and cognitive pleasure, *entirely disregard* cocaine and sex, turn to cosmology, cognitive science, mathematics, philosophy, prose, meditation, informed contemplation. Forgive me for how disgustingly dorky this sounds on the surface.

Do not turn to narcissism, morbidity, gluttony, rebellion for the sake of rebelling, causing pain on others or yourself; *these are hollow pleasures*. A true hedonist seeks the furthest, truest, extent of pleasure, and these are not it. What more pleasure is there than turning the banalities of life into sources of infinite awe? What more pleasure is there than an infinite joy in existence? What more pleasure is there than having *infinity* to experience and to know? Philosophers pursue wisdom; what greater pleasure is there to be in control of yourself, in all pleasure and pain, and how you exist in the cosmos? The rich pleasure exists in infinite surplus, the hollow and finite pleasure is just easier to get your hands on. You have the freedom and resources to do this. The brain is the bottleneck between ourselves and the universe.

I am not defending hedonism which harms our society. If I did, I would be defending the enemy of my home. I am defending Hedonism which broadens the potential of human beings, disregards that which has proven to be harmfully restrictive, and expands

the goodness of our species' experience on this natural world. It is a kinship towards nature, a sustainable pursuit, a stewardship of truthful joy.

Many of us search for pleasure through painful behavior, it seems to me that the greatest amplitude of pleasure is found buried deep within precise moderation and simplicity.

Editors note:

I've only just realized after the fact that what I've essentially done here reinvent Epicureanism, just a couple thousand years too late...Woops

Synesthesia

Something I find really interesting is the gap where science kindof fails at dealing with sense perception. We can certainly associate mechanisms with consequential experience, but the experience of the stimulus is generally indescribable without a sense

of *empathetic* communication. Try to describe red to a colorblind alien, salty to a mollusk, and the sound of a choir to a rock. You can explain how the experience enters you and how you understand it, but from there, you are only able to describe it as an understanding or consumption of characteristics. This leads me somewhat indirectly to what I believe is one of the most fascinating neurological disorders(?) I have learned about: Synesthesia. Perhaps the reason I find it so interesting, is that it deals with such common and fundamental parts of our existence, that it is surreal to imagine what a severe case would be like; consideration of abnormal sense perception often brings up some interesting questions on existence and consciousness and idealism because there is a physiological abnormality in the 'movie' which is our experience.

My favorite theory of the reason for synesthesia is that all children are essentially synesthetic until they develop the correct neural pathways and regions to distinguish one form of stimulus perception from another. I have no empirical basis for why this theory

feels so correct to me. Perhaps the only reason I lean towards this theory is the distinctly ambiguous experiences of childhood. Intuitively, it feels reasonable that a child may not determine the difference between hot or cold as we do: from left to right on a spectrum of temperature. Rather, there would just be an *unnamed* spike of sensory sensation. It would make sense that this period of confusion is generally pretty brief.

I feel inclined to acknowledge another example of learned helplessness within young humans—when they fall over, sometimes they don't know how to act. They know something has happened, but they don't know the form of response they should give next. When an adult swoops in to coo and comfort the child as if they have gone through something excitable and negative, the child associates this action with badness and cries as a result. If the adult pays no mind (or perhaps even better, smiles), a positive or indifferent emotional association is formed, and falling over becomes an action which holds negligible consequences. As long as the child isn't causing meaningful harm to themselves or

others, it seems to me that independent and organic emotional learning is a powerful playing field for healthy and robust development. I also just find it to be a funny little observable moment of gears turning, carving a path for future habit.

Consciousness

In *The Art of Happiness*, the 14th Dalai Lama: “As long as there is a lack of the inner discipline that brings calmness of mind, no matter what external facilities or conditions you have, they will never give you the feeling of joy and happiness that you are seeking. On the other hand, if you possess this inner quality, a calmness of mind, a degree of stability within, then even if you *lack* various external facilities that you would normally consider necessary for happiness, it is still possible to live a happy and joyful life.”

- Attention
- Perception
- Proportion

- Perspective
- Knowledge
- Cognition
- Experience
- Sensation
- Intuition
- Linguistic
- Emotion
- Reflex
- Awareness
- Location
- Deprivation
- Hallucination
- Temporality

These are some of the things of which consciousness is composed.

There are different degrees of mental awareness and activity which can be both scientifically and experientially acknowledged. “Despite millennia of analyses, definitions, explanations and debates by philosophers and scientists, consciousness remains puzzling and controversial, being ‘at once the most

familiar and [also the] most mysterious aspect of our lives” {Susan Schneider}.

Consciousness is one of few words which tangibly contains a linguistic representation of the entire human experience. Without consciousness, our awareness of the human experience ceases to exist. Without an agent to perceive a subject, we might practically posit it as ‘not existing’, or ‘not consciously acknowledged’. If a tree falls in a forest, but humans hold no consciousness, it doesn’t consciously ‘matter’ to them. The same idea might be applied to the entirety of human experience; without consciousness, it may or may not ‘functionally matter’ or ‘meaningfully exist’. Therefore, consciousness is one of the most direct subjects one should study if they wish to examine the human experience. Because I hold an understanding of the human experience to a very high degree of value, consciousness is fundamentally important to me.

I have spoken before of this intuitive sense that consciousness is related to *life* and *living* as we

know it, and that the absence of consciousness represents a sensation of death. Whenever I experience a high degree of consciousness, I experience a larger sensation of *living*. I feel *more alive* as I feel *more conscious* and I feel *less alive* as I feel *less conscious*. This is a very distinct reaction which I clearly remember experiencing all the way back to age 9. In other words, this sensation is not new, nor is it directly correlated with an increase of articulation, knowledge, and maturity. This sensation gives me the impression that it is something instinctual to my physiology.

The development of consciousness from an evolutionary standpoint has always fascinated me; this is perhaps because of the unexplainable complexity and profundity, among other things. Maybe the evolutionary 'life-force' of genetic mutation provokes this inherent thirst for expanded consciousness. Behaviorally, consciousness serves to be an incredibly effective tool for survival. It has also led to suicide, depression, criminal action, and many of the pains of human existence. Neitzche calls this the "burden of consciousness", a

somewhat Freudian explanation of self inflicted pain through the medium of consciousness as a way of releasing deeper instinctual passions.

With increased psychological complexity, we see an increase in diverse action.

There is much more to be said about this topic, but I have chosen to keep the remaining essays on consciousness in the tank for now.

'Rubbish' Exposition

This is one of those sections in this book that, unless you are really in a specific mood, you may be better off skipping. The following section of words includes uninhibited ramblings which attempt to articulate the utter confusion I am experiencing. These change in subject and passion, and have no particular universal theme, though they often share similar syntax. These words always fail to sufficiently articulate the ideas which I am trying to recognize. The translation from passionate internal narrative, a

language built from infinitely complex neurological dances, to a simple language is a difficult one. These are ideas you feel in moments of rapture, clarity, creativity, profundity, celebrealty, peace, and turbulence. My attitude towards life changes drastically for the comfortable and energetic when I fully embody the scale of these ideas. Yes, if you are not in the correct mood to read this, it will likely come off as a horrible attempt to impersonate a romantic and sepulchral french existentialist.

Yes, even I realize the extent to which most of this might effectively mean nothing. Yes I realize that some of this can feel very intimate and cheesy; this is a side effect of trying to combat confusion. If this is worth anything, use it as a tangible example of what it looks like when someone attempts to quickly and intuitively approach a concept which *can not be wrangled sufficiently by language*. I invite you to really experiment with the taste of these superficial yet profound thoughts, not shrug it off before trying. At the end of the day, however, this is just for my own satisfaction. I think this can be a

therapeutic, entertaining, and potentially meaningful exercise. It has the side effect, however, of making you sound and feel crazy. I do it because I think this state is more exciting than the other options. I am 18 and horribly confused; outside of my little black journals, perhaps it does some good to document these lingual tumbleweeds. I have given less editorial attention to these excerpts partially out of laziness and partially because it is more representative of these experiences. There is a place for messy discourse, and I believe this is it.

A good example of how language is insufficient for dealing with Existence

I exist. I could *not* exist, but I do. More precisely, as Descartes would perhaps like me to say, “I can not *ignore* this show, this incomprehensible consciousness, this stimulus, which is undoubtedly occurring, seemingly* from the space in between my

ears.' What do we make of this? In the realm of certainty, this is about the furthest I am comfortable going. In terms of possible considerations, however, we seem to have an infinite universe in front of me to acknowledge. What do I make of *me being*? I suppose that from a methodological or logical position, it would be of use to consider what the opposite of me being is as a means to learn more about what being is. Let's assert, outside of hard certainty, that idealism is not the full story, and there is *space* outside of myself, where I am not present. In other words, there is an anti-me in every location where I am not. If we look at the relationship between anti-me's and me's, I seem to occupy one unit of me, and the anti-me's occupy the rest of the ratio's sum to infinity. I exist precisely in the space between that which is not me. In this way, *there is one less than infinite me's which aren't*. With this assertion, I am present where I have an almost infinite probability to not be. At this point, many people start to count their blessings, and be thankful for the universe allowing them to *be here* and now, of all chances! But what about the areas which we are not? What of the theoretical possibilities of the

self, which I will never be? When is the line drawn between pure, hard, experience, and theory of the mind? In other words, is there meaning to this form of discourse? Are mathematical concepts concrete? What then of the experience that I won't have? Unquestionably, I would experience it—if I experienced it. But there are things which I will not experience. What do I think about that? If this logic is concrete, if these ideas hold volume or meaning* in the cosmos, then this further experience exists. With this idea, that there is further feeling, emotion, understanding, pain, pleasure, confusion, understanding, I can navigate a mental landscape of immense profundity. Admittedly, the experience of this profundity seems to be unchangeably limited to its own sphere of cognitive activity; in other words, when I imagine being in France, it seems to be different than actually being in France. And yet, the separate experience of either position—imaginative France and physical France—are both unquestionably states of existence I can experience. It is perhaps here that materialism and idealism confusedly shake hands and form neutral monism

(though, of course, I don't hold certainty in any of the three).

...

Perhaps is not immoral* to giddily love the things you have, the life you live, the joys you love. I was preaching to myself over how dearly and emotionally blessed and happy I was to live in this home, this true paradise, everything I could want. I realized that the things I have, I felt guilty for them. I feel that I appreciate these items, but I am unworthy if I appreciate them because there are others without them. I feel that I have been given, in many respects, a life of pure-individualized bliss. I also realize that I am living in a single room apartment in a barn with no heating, running water, shower, microwave, or kitchen table. This shows the utterly flexible, arbitrary nature of our perceived material joy. I am soaked in the sacred luxury of a life sculpted by myself with the available materials, and thus have felt free and happy- and I am living on the floor below a squirrel's stash of walnuts in an old pole barn in the middle of nowhere indiana, alone.

The world is violently contextual, and it is time we start treating it as such. We are an unfathomably, continually changing, amorphous blob of undecided thoughts that present themselves as reality, and we cram ourselves into painful and failing homemade systems that have grown from the soil of time and minimal meaning.

The world may be as profound or as simple as you make it, and either option has empirically equal value in the system of this idealism. The curious homeless may live in a penthouse of wisdom and a stockbroker may live in a cage of status, but both of their worlds are equally real, equally confused. For the sake of uncovering refreshing ground, let's consider perception from another direction. We choose here, to also not idolize hedonism, for there are far more interesting- far more profound places to trek than ecstasy. Pleasure in a purified state is certainly a pleasurable thing, but it is cousins with ignorance and simplicity. The more pain you are able to tune out, the more pleasure is left over. What we pursue, is rather, the complex and esoteric, and infinite black noise, scraping and singing below what

we understand to be the top level of consciousness. The world has a place for this sector of existence, but this is not it. We are pursuing the other direction of intellectual experience in the vast capabilities of experience that exist within a human mind's potential. The body is a slave to the mind when it has done all its work correctly, therefore our physical world has the potential of transforming to any worldly or unworldly pleasure, pain, and confusing in between that indeed dwell in the absurd quantity of synaptic combination. I am disappointed by those who pursue one or the other, or claim to pursue this state with their art. Many have felt the potential of this field, none have experienced it all.

There is infinite experience in this field, and we have free reign. I am slave to my margins, but I have been blessed with the unfathomably vast distance that exists between them.

...

There is a sort of utopian anti-tradition tradition that I deeply enjoy tasting In my creative and analytical

brain. To get an understanding of what I am talking about, watch “tea ceremony” by Tom Sachs. I understand it to be a fundamental re-representation of traditional Japanese tea culture, but in its own way provides a radical new understanding of our freedom over the format of what we perceive as traditional or habitual function in our lives. What is so exciting to me is that the possibilities here are continuous. Like Bauhaus—not a style I feel an instinctive yearning for that which is settled in the stone of tradition, but soft in the way of simplicity and flexibility. It is both a product and a necessity of modernity, not frivolous as style, it is an overarching philosophy. Good design which provides renewal, hope, sustenance, and health. I picture a beautiful selection of fictional regularities such as waking up with a shifted circadian rhythm, colored lights at specific time, sanctity towards our fundamental aspects of human health- in the same way that putting on clothes is necessary to us—in this hypothetical world— such is true of meditation. It is my drug, an escape from this world to one of an individualized, personal world of bliss and health. The needle exists—it is sharp and shiny—it's a matter

of picking through the hay. *This is often difficult for young people because they are taught to harbor passions but not to act on them.*

...

Stillfare of the second bout, to honor prose, her sanctity and fullness, and the parts of myself left unseen; which hold necessary to be worn on my corneas. Dasein, human in the world. There are three parts; disorientation, '*fearfjallen*', and discourse. I argue that there is also narrative; a fundamental material, fabric of the experience. This is an innate thing, unendable, irremovable; it is the story of what the person experienced. "He was born, he felt lights, and then he forgot them. He grew up, and over 10 years can not recall most of the years. He is a healthy young man, he gets into a car accident and receives amnesia— in his experience he has no childhood, in the narrative of him he *has*. He has only lost his ability to remember. It is a human part of physics, irremovable from our ritual, and a source of joy if you are to revere it for existing at all. It is a way to look at existence visually and

timely, as if we have someone there recording every part of your experience, so that they are *irremovable* from the entity of you. There is a thing in the universe, and that is the story of you. You will remember some of it, lose some of it, and misinterpret or remember some of it. You are ‘*fearfjallen*’. The narrative is not, it is pure and moves in one direction regardless of your awareness. This is a feature of Dasein, perhaps just difficult to access.

...

A busy brain is a slow and effective asphyxiation. It gives the illusion of a blessing, of an endless source of potential. This is not without reason, a flow of continuous stuff is hard to come by, and is valuable. These things do have potential. But conveyor belts move quickly. I would like to clear my brain, Displace its deficits with asceticism, pour gold into my cracks; Kintsugi. To split cartilage from bone, and remove that which is not needed. I don't want to float. I would be bothered by death.

Fill cracks with gold, intentional pain, wash yourself, fast, and become he who cleanses and is clean.

Throw yourself out there, you will find something of fear and something of authenticity. You revolve in the stagnant turbulent pools, filled with scum from the surface of the cosmos. You mingle with the current, but fail to diffuse into it.

...

The biggest thing is the dialogue of perception. I don't want one, I need them *all* or I will not be satisfied. I need the ultimate dialogue which is the sum of all the individual dialogues; the metanarrative. With each situation and thing, each person sees it differently and therefore there is the potential for infinite nuance in every perceived situation or thing. This is disturbing for me, because I like to have the privilege of choosing what I ignore rather than ignoring it by default. There is a difference between not knowing something and ignoring something. It is impossible* for the human brain to have the simultaneous experience of infinite

lives, therefore I am frustrated to be a human because I want to know the Be rather than the be. It is a curse that grows more painful the more that you learn of the potential, similar to how you always have more questions with the more that you learn. An infinite exercise of purgatory. Is there a way of living correctly? If there is, wouldn't it be that of a perfectly philosophical skeptic who has learned precisely what to ignore as to not kill himself but also fulfill his expected moral obligation as a soul? This is the peak of rationality, the peak of correctness that we will ever be able to reach. We don't even know if we know nothing. It is our curse to choose how to cope with this. Some take much of a larger burden unto themselves, some cower in the bliss of not wanting to know, or not knowing that they want to know. The only thing I can say which I feel remotely comfortable saying is that I will never achieve the right answer, nor know if I have, nor if there is a right answer. This is as far as reasoning can take me, and I feel fairly confident in this method of exploration. I think it is certainly one of the most impressive things to come from humanity.

It may very well 'mean' absolutely nothing, but it certainly brings me closer to what bliss I have conceived to be the ultimate pleasure. Pascal did better with this idea than I will, but I would rather choose the route which is best for me. I may very well be atoms in the void, but *I feel* better when I am bundled up in a blanket rather than nude in Antarctica. There is pragmatic use of this notion of nothingness in living a good life to the standards of one who has accepted their existence to certainly hold 'meaning'. I very well may be an animal crawling towards warmth—pleasure. Or I very well may be a meaningful soul who has some universal motives towards pursuing being the 'best human' I can be. Either way, it is a win. Admittedly, it is a Pandora's box. Aldous Huxley explores this idea, in whether it is preferable to feel pain and be aware or to feel pleasure and be a 'mollusk'. (*Michael Surgrue 'Brave New World' Seminar*). Once you have a taste of the pleasure of knowing, you must have more, and you inevitably reach a point where you have more questions than answers. Perhaps this is ultimately less pleasurable than prodding the portion of my brain that makes me feel good. The deepest

part of me, the animal in me, wishes that I could wrap myself in a warm blanket, and soak myself in the drugs of the world which keep me from experiencing the complicated. The other part of me gets irrational and emotional, and is unexplainably motivated to make use of what is possibly an infinitely universally and conceptually rare event which is my existence, at this point, in this brain, and some means to put my tentacles into this occurrence. A leaf out of Rene Descartes book, I know therefore I am. Under the protective shingles of reasoning, my experience is *empirically* not nothing. If it were nothing, I would experience nothing. This is my motivation for exploration. It is, to me, an unavoidable occurrence of the universe. There may or may not be complicated strings attached to this thing, but I do not have the facilities to confidently make any concrete statements about all of them. What I do feel confident about is the fact that something is happening in the universe, and my biology is wired to crave knowing rather than ignoring (which is different from experiencing, knowing and having control over the variables is the wish, perhaps it is immoral to want this because then

I would be a god, but it conflicts with my strong inclination to be the most impressive human I can be, for this feels like a worthwhile project to dedicate my time in this universe to)

...

I do not believe that we have access to our complete will, though we have access to more of it than to which we give justice. For example, I have major depression. Because of the constructive feedback character of this disease, it is quite easy to lose the 'will' to get out of bed and take progressive action which is likely to better myself. I do not have motor control in the particular portions of my brain which are responsible for my serotonin deficit, and I can not consciously inhibit the firing of a specific set of neurons which provide a sensation of authentic happiness. However, In my *conscious* reservoir of information, I hold the awareness of specific, tangible actions which can directly result in physiological changes to my mood. These exist in degrees large and small, but are surprisingly monumental when you take a closer look at them.

For example, I could make the conscious decision to either look at my phone or at the window. The latter is more likely to lead to me getting up in 5 minutes rather than 25. Looking at my phone is likely to shock my brain with an unhealthy amount of overwhelming chemicals. As well as this, I will have just exited the unconscious state of sleep, and have now returned immediately to an unconscious state of consumption. Any action which follows without a conscious self-check will be a continuation of this unthinking, distracted state of incoherent daydreaming. If we think of a point on a mood spectrum—left being negative direction and right being positive—the choice to pick up my phone moves me a startling distance leftward.

Let's consider the window option, wherein the potential boredom of staring at nothing is likely to result in me getting up to do something more interesting. (Truthfully, this is a sacred time and window staring is never a boring activity. I find that my clear state of mind usually leads towards an idea or sentence I need to write down, and this is what results in me getting active).

Getting up in 5 minutes means that I have 20 more minutes of activity (in comparison to the phone) which might be spent on other activities to inhibit *further* growth in positive mood. This decision is a catalyst for a virtually endless chain reaction. When we consider the ridiculous *difficulty* of things such as depression, this concept becomes pretty compelling; a miniscule decision has the power to transform exponential, tangible variables.

...

I struggle with many of the fundamental sensations of moral analysis, particularly because I often exist as an anxious, guilt-ridden, confused soul. This perhaps offers an explanation of my affection for the moral project of Immanuel Kant. Kant introduced the “Categorical Imperative”, a *universal* algorithm which serves as a “moral yardstick” ([sugrue](#)) which measures the morality of every action taken by every rational agent. The approach taken by Kant is one of the most prevalent conceptions of morality in our human world, and thus I believe it is important to

know about. What's perhaps more compelling about this conception of morality, is that Kant has assembled this moral framework exclusively "upon the demands of *reason itself*."

You can see how this arrangement is appealing to someone like myself; morality is foundationally a product of the metaphysical world, and easily influenced by human bias. For something as fundamentally significant to human activity as ethical activity, it can be a surprisingly blurry world to navigate.

Morals hold a surprisingly fluid essence (it seems) during the developmental era of a human.

...

I fear the abstract as much as I love it. I am mortified of abstraction.

...

Shouldn't philosophers control the largest decisions made for the largest number of people if they are the ones trained in the act of wisdom? Or is this naive? Is there actually no determined definition of success or wisdom? There are, indeed, philosophers of power; the Stoics*, Neitzche*, the Sophists, Foucault, who advocate nature and power wholeheartedly in their own ways. In these eyes, he who has the stronger hand, is *correct*. The word of the creature with the most power is the leader. This is how nature is often governed.

I feel inclined to question; if the structure of this life lends power to the most powerful entity in a given system, does not nature rule even the most powerful men? Muscles are no match for worms and time.

Gun barrels will rust. If we all fall into the hand of a more powerful being of nature, should not the justice of the universe be of our greatest reverence?

Expecting anything from this, however, is to assume that someone is listening to the philosopher, something which I think is unlikely.

Philosophy may not be the material in itself, but the light which illuminates it. There exists philosophy in

the soul of every-thing; the philosophy of a rock is indifference. The same goes for physics; the pufferfish knows not of biophysical terminology—neurotoxins or buoyancy—but it utilizes both. I fear this misconception in both the apprehension and practice of sciences. The philosopher can easily forget that the philosophy he practices is nothing beyond theory in the form of language. Perspective, the deeper facet of the universe, observes merely a bag of meat, interspersedly uttering grunts from an orifice; the philosopher sees a deity.

...

There is a point* where knowledge transcends into sensation, and it is for this transformation the human species holds no justified language. It is no longer the concern of those who have transcended past others to express things in an accessible way, as that would hold an element of sacrifice. The fact is, he who knows more than anyone else, will be able to

place his knowledge upon someone else in fullness. This is what I mean by knowledge becoming sensation: there is a translation fault which renders knowledge as a functional experience rather than social entity.

The world is the size of our perception. If our perception is handicapped, so is our universe. The universe may or may not exist without me there.

It seems that the defining observation of my intellectual exploration of yet is the relationship between the described and the indescribable. It is about the transformation of things. The advantage that this statement holds because of its ambiguity is that it is more or less applicable to the whole of human experience. Human experience is defined through perception, without perception there is no experience. To derive the greatest *possible* understanding as humans, we must examine the relationship between what “is” and what we “experience”. The game is to turn the real stuff of the universe into knowledge with which we are able to handle to our benefit. It either helps us, gives us

some sense of power where there previously was none, or gives us pleasure.

...

The Chasm between Language and Experience

There *is always* sacrifice that is made when a translation must occur. We have pure thought, and then we have thought in the firing of the brain, and then we have thought put to relative words, and then we have tangible discourse on the thought. The area of focus if we wish to understand the brain further exists precisely in the chasm between the thing, and the method used to handle or describe the thing. In other words, and this can be seen clearly, we do not have the means to handle a great deal of our human experience. There are problems of our human experience, particularly mental health, habit, and faulty social structures, that would become resolved or more resolved with the presence of such a dedicated language. Brentano claims that this understanding of the brain, a legitimate language or formula for anger, is out of reach. I think we are

potentially heading into a new age of sociolinguistic medical renaissance which holds great implications for the trajectory of the human race.

...

Similar to context, our skepticism should be carried as far even as our language. Our language has a strong grip on our capabilities, and the way we navigate our world. Lets examine it.

This is my understanding of the *hierarchy of detail* which exists in various forms of *linguistic experience*:

(In order from most advanced to least)

Other

Advanced civilizations other than humans?

(Fermi paradox?)

Enlightenment...?

Drugs...?

Meditation

Neutral Monistic Philosophical Contemplation

Dualistic Philosophical Contemplation

Conscious, intentional Contemplation
Formal Writing
Oration
Oration with questions
Written Letters
Verbal Discussion (many different types)*
Two sided video content (long form)
One sided video content (long form)
Two sided video content (short form, youtube,
television, equivalent)
One sided video content (short form, youtube,
television, equivalent)
Verbal Discussion through Phone
Virtual Discussion (texting, emailing)
Social Media facilitated Virtual Discussion
Social Media Content (in order from least to
most: tiktok, instagram, twitter, facebook)
Body language
Subconscious cognitive dialogue
Endocrine stuff
Synaptic fire

There are two worlds in which the acquisition and handling of knowledge exists: the 'introchasm', and

the social world. As humans, we have various forms of discourse that exist in these fields of conceptual awareness. One of the things which has allowed humans to become what they are is the formulation of language: the principal method of human communication. This is a series of various, tangible, symbols—some of which can exist longer than the lifespan of a human. With this method of social knowledge acquisition and handling, we gained the ability to retain and build upon knowledge of future and present generations. This radical shift in the way organisms are able to handle knowledge led to exponential growth of our species, and is still one of the most prevalent features in human life. With such robust neurological facilities and the means with which to handle information as it can *best* be used, humans have a great number of activities they may choose to pursue—much more than, say, a mollusk.

It is largely due to this that humans are *social* creatures. Social schemes have often proven themselves to be a promising approach to survival and arguably, the social reinforcement provided by

language is the reason we hold the hierarchical position in biology that we do.

From our beginning to our present, language and communication are absolutely *vital* for success in almost any human realm. This is becoming increasingly the case as we progress as a lingual species (perhaps to the dismay of Nietzsche); those in power are increasingly those who best *know their way around words*. No longer are hierarchies (necessarily) led by the most physically powerful. Hitler probably couldn't bench press 225 pounds, yet he held monstrous men under his gross little thumb.

In the age of technology, unprecedented quantity of expression, negligible distance decay, and virtual influence, the word is perhaps more valuable than ever.

...

If we are to think that as intelligent people become more intelligent they grow closer to the threshold of madness (Van Gogh, Camu, Henry David Thoreau,

Sherlock Holmes, Michel De Montaigne, Hunter S. Thompson, Nietzsche, Goethe, Faust, Alexander Scriabin, Isaac Newton)

and we respect intelligent people, shouldn't we hold some form of reverence for the mad?

...

On the topic of increasing collective human knowledge over time: I hold such reverence to those who allow me to enlighten myself at proportionally exponential speeds. Instead of dedicating a life's work towards *one* element of the universe, I may feed from the array of knowledge teets on the underbelly of mother inquiry.

...

I am biased as a young solipsistic figure to assume a distorted perspective on the importance of my activity, I am one of hundreds of thousands. If I was special, I would still be one of thousands. If I were really special, people wouldn't understand me anyway. This gets dangerous, because when one

starts talking about the importance of their life in reference to the world around them, they often are inclined to take a narcissistic stance, often unintentionally. Many aspects of what it means to be a socially accepted and normal social figure in our human world is (arguably) laughably narcissistic. This is perhaps why stargazing causes such a profound response in people, they realize that despite the sensation that everything around them is everything, they are proportional to dust on the floor of an infinite gymnasium. To even make *this* stance, is perhaps narcissistic. The assertion that I “believe” something, shows that you are asserting your value over the universe, trying to conform it to your limited standards. Someone so small believes they hold the universe in entirety to themselves. This creates circular reasoning, and perhaps there is an argument that most life is fundamentally narcissistic. Or solipsistic.

...

This thought was from this morning but it might count. I want to talk about the psychiatric necessity

of an independent space, determined to be a creative and existential space, for creatives or curious people. David Lynch in catching the big fish, you must have a space. If you want to make a chair and need to make a chair, you must first have a place dedicated to making chairs. This is SO IMPORTANT. Equally important is that the creative (I can not speak for others who are not similar to me in this compulsive need to figure out their place in the world) must have a place for every single item to go. There must be a predetermined equation for a disordered mind to clean with. Cleaning can be a creative activity or an autopilot activity. The important thing is that you are left with a clean slate. Depressives and creatives often need a clean slate to survive. When a creative is not in the state to clean, they must have a system in place that allows them to clean without it impeding on their state of mind. Everything must have a place to go, if it takes five minutes, do it now. On the surface, I am not organized. If you look slightly closer, you will realize that I am borderline compulsive about organization—just in an unorthodox way.

...

It is now, in the fervor of youth, where I am most inclined to pursue answers to the big questions of the human universe*.

- Theology
- Existence
- Morality
- Pragmatism
- Emotion
- Reason
- Identity
- Physics and Metaphysics
- Language and Communication
- Evolution
- Perception
- Scientific Method

I have, to my sadness, determined that it is necessary to temporarily sacrifice this pleasure of academia in order to put some hens in a row. Without a solid foundation of means with which to meaningfully handle to stuff of the cosmos, how am I to arrive at a valid conclusion? It is because of this

why I must pursue the *banalities* and what people understand to be *commonplace* features of the world I am heading into. In the same way, an infant may desire the sweetness of candy, but not know how to properly swallow. Acting without the means to successfully achieve will lead you to an undesirable outcome.

Fortunately, humans have a portion of the brain which allows them to deal with this dilemma of desire versus the fulfillment of desire. Put (too) simply, the prefrontal cortex allows for strategical repression and planning so that we may get the best for ourselves *later* rather than *now*. This portion of the brain reaches maturity at approximately age 25. Because of this, there are a number of extremely evident traits of people under age 25 who exhibit particular behavior wherein they are more likely to pursue less pleasure now rather than more pleasure later. This fundamental change in cognition is perhaps comparable to the famous Piaget cognitive development threshold of object permanence*, in the sense that our practical world is distorted by a

physiological incapacity to retain ideal forms of discipline, reasoning, patience, and action.

Out of this distortion blooms the bizarre and fascinating world of adolescence—a dense thicket of potential, experience, emotion, and change. We will talk about the facets of this world later—I acknowledge this distortion now, of course, because I am 18. I am unarguably enveloped in what will likely be one of the most experientially distorted regions of my life. As I am writing, learning, exploring, inquiring, and acting, I must hold this understanding at the forefront of my approach. I have no place to say this, but I think everyone can receive some value of the self-awareness of one's limits. If, despite their imperfection, an individual believes themselves to be the ultimate truth, they hold the potential to cascade into a self-perpetuating solipsistic existence. I believe that this form of existence holds great danger for the individual and the society they are part of; I believe that it is a meaningful virtue to pursue the *opposite* form of existence. It is in fields like science, reason, philosophy, rational and thorough discourse, ideal

spirituality, skepticism, and diverse contemplation where this virtue is brought to fruition. I feel a powerful obligation to develop myself in a manner where I am best equipped to deal with the stuff of the cosmos. This pilgrimage requires skepticism*. (Or perhaps not, I should hold skepticism to skepticism too right?)

...

Importance of everything individually: without water, sleep, sunlight, ink, metal, I would not exist as I do now. If any of these variables were to not exist, nor would I. I am a product of the butterfly effect. I am the result of a cascade of causation. There is a sacred honor that can be found in this, there is a power in every variable of the perfect system of my existence which has led me to be. Instead of 'counting your blessings', realize that most of the atoms in the universe have either directly or indirectly caused your existence and will cause your death. There is great power in this on a practical and emotional level, because something as simple as a glass of water becomes something sacred and exciting.

...

A Melodramatic and Pessimistic Response to Road Rage

God, have we lost our love for wisdom, has the eternal feminine left us for something more briefly pleasurable? For a saturated veil of distraction, for as more is discovered less is had? Surely there are more philosophers now than ever, but also more humans *not* philosophers than ever... It is foolish for me to outwardly observe, for my eyes are but closed to my exochasm. But surely—our world no longer defines itself by this path, it has become enlightened, and thrown it to the side like an infant with a toy.

Aging in reverse— we were once united with nature; cultivated the Earth, and then we learned to love it and the effort and stewardship we gave it, and then we learned the pleasure of ourselves. We met hubris, and we drank in the image of our mirrors until we became gorged with ourselves, and the pigments we tore from the Earth to cover our blemishes. And then we dug further into the scars of

Earth, because our stomachs were stretched and hungry, and our muscles sore from sitting. And we bred and bred until Her crust is crawling with billions of creatures who know not the soil from which they emerged; who fight over what food is left, and what pain they believe to be unprecedented. And because we have more brains than ever, with ample space for knowledge, we have every chance to become infinitely knowledgeable. But we can not help but choose to fill it with drugs of our own synthesis; we destroy our attention, and the young know not a world of focus. We are born into it, each generation more blind than the last, and more convinced of their clarity of vision. A species of negation. A fast burning, fast spreading flame, which releases toxic smoke. This waste suffocates its own flame. And so it burns in different ways, releasing more toxins and less light. This flame is contained, and so the pressure builds. The monstrosity evolves backwards.

(PS, this isn't how I feel about humanity most of the time, i'm not a full blown misanthrope I promise)

...

Yin yang, contrast, one world two world,
monism, being not being, existence

We have 2 fundamental nodes of thought exploration to consider. Let's start (as usual) quite broad and consider the vaguely termed traditions of intellectual thought from two genres of philosophers: Anglo-American (AKA Analytical) and Continental. These two genres are one of the more popular distinctions in philosophical methodology. I won't get too far into detail, but the characteristics of either are as follows—

Analytical philosophy is concerned with a method based in analysis, reason, logic, science, and *a priori* thought. A priori is a Latin term used to describe justification for knowledge through deductive reasoning, using defined principles to flesh out conclusions.

The continental tradition of philosophy is concerned with thought based on human intuition, experience, literature, heightened skepticism, and thought *a posteriori*. A posteriori is justification of knowledge

through evidence, experience, and inductive reasoning.

In these two fields of knowledge, there is a fantastically voluminous quantity of work to consider and play with, and I am blessed to have had so many thinkers before me.

Once again, I thank those who have spent their lives thinking so that I may leech off of their effort.

For the sake of general contemplation, I am going to vastly oversimplify these two fundamental traditions of philosophy into a Yin Yang-esque system (as usual). On one side of our existence, we have thought. On the other, we have experience. Both of these regions are ways in which to make sense of the world. Both of these modes have ways of drifting into one another, but can also be pragmatically separated if needed. In the balance of Yin Yang, the light can not exist without the dark, the good can not be good without the bad, and knowledge can not exist without experience. Contrast between the perception of these elements is what we understand to be our world. Because one can not exist meaningfully without the other, we must be careful to

balance the weight on either side of the system. An axiom: If one only experiences and has no time to think about it, they are not perceiving the experience. If one only thinks, and has no experience, they have nothing to think about.

Again: contrast between either end of the spectrum of our perception is what we understand to be our world. If a picture is just white or just black, you can not make sense of the image. There must be a composition of elements, a difference between things—light and dark—for it to be perceived.

With this in mind, we have two ‘muscles’ to train as people. If my goal is to perceive as much as possible, make the best out of my resources, then I must create the strongest element of contrast possible between thought and experience. Without thought, there is no experience. At the moment, I am heavily training my thought muscle. I said: “both of these modes have ways of drifting into one another, *but can also be pragmatically separated if needed.*”

With this gap year, I have separated these modes of existence. Let me be clear, this is not a normal thing that people typically do, nor is it possible for almost all of human civilization. My circumstances have led to an utter and unprecedented stroke of luck.

...

I've noticed that the work of most continental and mathematically trained philosophers is intended to undermine everything before it—to completely foundationalize as it has never been done before. In fact, each time a thinker appears, they discover the universe through their own (equally valid) terms.

Side note on “*equally valid terms*”

Each term is equally valid to each individual's experience. This is a somewhat messy idea, but I often advocate its acknowledgement for the sake of some discussions: behaviorism shows us that there is (in theory) a cause for every human action.

In other words, someone might use an offensive word in discussion which causes offense. The

offender, *regardless of moral intent*, said this word due to one reason or another. Though the offende may not agree with the moral intent of the action, they *must agree* that the action was made, and was made for a reason. The reason for this action is often a highly complex combination of hundreds of variables ranging from endocrinology, to neurology, possibly epigenetics, to whether the person is hungry. The reason I explain this idea is because it naturally cultivates an intuitive practice of empathy in humans. In the same way that you were sculpted throughout your entire life, so were they.

In the public arena of communication, there is often a lot of important material left unacknowledged in general discourse. This lends itself to incorrect assumption, which leads to misunderstanding, which leads to anger, which leads to irrational and distorted discourse. With an *intuitive* understanding of this idea, that the other person is as valid in their actions as you are, civil discourse is much more likely to follow. Civil discourse is necessary not only for

the progression of humanity, but also for individuals to just feel way less unhappy about human interactions.

I find this to be both endearing and relatable to my experience of youth. I think it is largely representative of the creative human soul that we seem to strive for a form of simplicity and in our efforts create something vastly overcomplicated. Philosophers deal with the curse of earning more questions with every answer they get. The more that these people who strive for understanding get to nuance, the more they have to deal with. The more they have to reckon with, and the more there is to be emotional about. This is why I think the work of a philosopher is similar to the development of a young person; we are unknowledgeable creatures in a world full of potential knowledge. We know nothing, yet remain curious. With this algorithm in place, there is often an intense hunger for universal acquisition which holds weighty ramifications; mainly confusion. It is confusion, uncertainty, desire, absence with the knowledge of presence, which spurs us fervently onwards. Some people grow out

of this hunger, and the others become philosophers and thinkers. I am too young to know who I am, but I know that I am experiencing unprecedented fulfillment and benefit from the race towards understanding.

I am a kid who has locked himself in a candy shop—the ultimately curious person who spends all his time learning. I get emotional when I realize the value in this educational meander* is understood to the truest extent only by me.

Also, I digress.

...

I need to find the absolute thing which articulates the division between these two concepts. We have the materialist vs idealist, the positivist vs methodological antipositivism, we have one worlders and two worlders. There is a division between thoughts which have to do with the universe in general, and those which have to do with humans. We either treat humans as humans, or we consider them to be gunk in the void. I want to devise an understanding that epistemologically utilizes some of

the core benefits from both in a sort of ultimate pragmatism, It is my way of taking in this information and using it in my own life. I love the pursuit of wisdom, I do, but only for what It can give me in my desire to be the most I can be. This is where the concept of does a tree make a sound if it falls in an empty forest comes in.

Yes, ultimately I am broadening my knowledge. However, my main goal is centered around finding the necessary and applicable portions of this discipline as to utilize it in my life. This is not to say that I am arguing that harsh, vast, cold existential methodological argument doesnt have a place, because it does. What I am arguing, is that I am in the role of a human being. Thus, according to my goals, it is most rational to utilize the elements of this pursuit in reference to the facets of these explorations as tools to best prepare me for the world.

And there are things that directly better how I interact with the world, I am going to argue the postulate that Indeed, focusing on the intro chasm,

as a rational agent, is directly correlated more than any other action to the outcome of my experiences, actions, and stuff of the world. Essentially, if your goal is to get from point A to B and you have a car, it is most rational to first learn how to drive it or turn it on. No matter how hard you press the gas pedal when it is off, or push the car from the back, you aren't going to be nearly *nearly* as effective as if you were to briefly study the manual, and learn the basic, necessary elements of the variables involved with moving from point A to B.

...

Profound liberation

We are, **so good** at forgetting, losing ourselves, and perceiving an innacurate world. So many points, I find myself completely and entirely hopeless, as if I have appeared on an island with no memory of arriving there. Meditation is the boat, you must work for a long time in the right direction, it is the only way to leave. This island is real, so is the boat. We need to acknowledge these things to young people.

For Gods' sake, teach yourself how to sit and do nothing, teach yourself the health of not thinking or taking in or putting out, for gods sake it is *everything*.

Spend time, every day, to remind yourself who you are. What are your traits, your downfalls, your ultimate goals, what do you do, what do wish you could do, why you are making sure to remind yourself who you are, why it is important to step outside of one's self to get things done and to be the best you can be.

...

I am at a human stage in which my brain is structured to question itself and the universe around it. In this activity, the self desperately searches for identity (or, if you want to overcomplicate things, meaning). These are things that come with existing in the biological shell of a human vessel. There is a system for this (insert psychological brain development) Without an understanding of the world

around me, I did the rational thing which is to attempt to learn what is going on around me. This means reading the life works of those who have lived longer than me (I have the headstart of having access to millions of lifetimes, back in the old days you had to live a whole life to have experience and now I have free access to that whenever I want), it meant playing with things myself to experience them (like a puppy or a baby who puts everything in their mouths), I had to sit and think and understand and Identify—this all requires time. This is the rational recipe for what I believe to be a far more complete sense of bearings in the confusing world we are dumped into with no context. Ok great.

In this activity, I have either made or discovered the fact that I am, in fact, quite into this learning thing. Of course most people need to establish their understanding of the world to an extent, but I have realized that this is the activity I have pursued for my entire life, and want to continue for the rest of it. It is the mechanism through which I exist, desire, and etc. So- in this search for understanding the world, I have knocked out the other bird by developing a

sense of identity as well— something that young people often don't have the time or context to be able to. I believe that my decision to pursue this effort is and will be one of the best decisions of my life, despite its unorthodoxy (or perhaps due to its unorthodoxy). In this work, I hope to offer an empirical argument (to get you off my back) of why this decision should be respected, how to rid yourself of the inevitable stigma or lack of context and understanding of my situation, and to come away with a broader lens of expectations for the world as well as perhaps some things that you are able to apply to your own life or find interesting.

...

What is going on, for real, I would love a clear answer

What's this whole life thing about? How do we talk about it? Are the banalities of life to be accepted without question? What is the best way to reach understanding or truth? Is truth the best thing to search for? What do the most learned thinkers of the human species think? What is virtue? Is there such a

thing as certainty? Who am I to be asking questions? What is wisdom? What role does Ignorance serve in effective awareness? How do I treat this thing which I am a part of? how do I fit into the larger sphere of the human world? how do I fit into the even larger sphere of the physical world? Who am I? What is? What is what? huh? why? where?

The devil's advocate in me, the lazy hemisphere of my brain is thinking for the 12th time today, “Oh great, Sam's getting all existentially angsty again...” truth be told, I am. I suppose then, that designating some energy towards shrinking that angst when I can makes a reasonable deal of sense. Preferably, this energy will not go towards complete ignorance of deep-reaching curiosity. Perhaps it's a bit too late for that.

...

Here lies the reason for my love of words which come from early language like latin— audio, video, disco, philosophia. Or words like composition, dynamic, aürshtuff, cosmos, logos, mythos. These

sacred words which serve as universal descriptors of things like movement, change, idea, stuff. They feel like an atomized version of the world, and it is beautiful to me on an intuitive level. I find great satisfaction in words which exist for nuance and specificity, but those which describe incomprehensibly omnipotent features of *everything* hold equal sanctity. The love of good language makes humans better things.

...

I am an advocate and provocateur of unfettered possibility. My idea of room-temperature is standing near a raging fire in a freezing blizzard. It is my goal to enhance and expand the potential of the human mind and soul to the best of my abilities.

I exist in an inevitable and endless state of confusion because I exist in an infinitely indescribable and describable universe. I am both disturbingly simple and terrifyingly complex. There is a great deal of the universe which I understand, and a majority of it that I can not and will not understand. I aim to exist in the order of nature as it occurs, for it is the mode of life to which I am fated.

I know not of even the most fundamentally certain parts of myself. I change continually by the second, in the same way that turbulent air tumbles through the atmosphere; we are made from similar things, and we act in similar ways. My form changes infinitely, and I am not entirely in control of it. Among physical elements I am also composed of irrational elements like mood, bias, fallacy, and limits.

My only rationally justified desire that I can ever achieve is perhaps *to exist as I will exist*. I will do no more or no less than I will do. I hold negligible and profound power towards the Cosmos. I am a cell in an organism of the human race. The organism can shed me, and it will continue forth without concern. But I am a gear in the machine of Cosmos. The Cosmos can not rid itself of me if it desires, for I am an inherent feature *of* it. My role is irreversible and irrevocable, and an innate feature of its system. This is not to say that I control the machine of the cosmos by much at all, but that it could not be *as it is* without my role in it. A small gear may not be of utmost *power* to the clock, but it is inherently vital to tell the time.

Despite my efforts, I almost always forget the important* and righteous* things that the human mind has discovered. I will continue to confusedly and sporadically navigate the maze of terrifying emotion or lack thereof, occasionally coming across holes in the structure which reveal some overarching form. I implement a homemade sense–language–to construct a rudimentary model of my experience. From this cumulative effort, I hope to construct a model which best represents my experience as a human being.

I was born and I will almost certainly die. At the moment, I am.

...

I am a man of contradiction, extremes, moderation, and redundancy and redundancy.

Statements, pre-conclusion

This time was intended to be a radical synthesis and acquisition of knowledge.

This whole project, and the vastitude of complexity it fails to give justice to, seems to boil down to one certainty: Confusion.

Every line of thought, when I have driven it to its furthest extent and held it to the forces of human perspective, *without fail* resolves to uncertainty, contradiction, or confusion. It may be a game now, of not even making *peace* with this confusion, but acknowledging it in a way which allows us to perhaps live in an acceptable way. I went into this looking for certainty, and I found certainty: confusion and uncertainty. This may imply that I consider this project a failure, nay— *it may be the greatest success of my life*. I have completed my goal, I know *considerably* more than I did before, and I now am free to steep in the wisdom* that *I am not wise*. I care very little about these words, but I care greatly about the ritual they play a part in. I have gained vast understanding in degrees I previously thought

impossible, but perhaps the best knowledge I now have is that I know *nothing*. It seems that my greatest source of wisdom is the acknowledgement of my *lack of wisdom*.

My greatest comforts, opinions, perspectives, and perhaps reality are things which are completely subject to skepticism. These things are subject to bias, perception, perspective, and the unending complexities of the cosmos. Now, I find comfort in this notion. I feel familiar with this notion—if I am not content with the horrifying contingencies of my existence, at least I am better *informed* of them.

Again, even *this conclusion* should be held with skepticism. I have a hard time believing that I *won't* find myself in very different regions of thought in the future. Again, all of this is meant as a scaffolding to best utilize the fertility of my youth. If this potentially fallible conception is temporary, so be it. Regardless, I have achieved a synthesis of thought which directly influences the quality of my psychological, physical, and socioemotional life in a beneficial way.

Gratitude

My experience in this world is supremely paradoxical. Because of this, for every ounce of dread, there is a corresponding ounce of jubilation. As humans, we are inclined to focus on the negative. Negativity bias constructs so much of our contemporary life; doom scrolling, anxiety, depression, too much news coverage, fear, hate, divisiveness, etc. And yet, I can not help but feel as though there is a corresponding reflection; one that we (more so I) neglect. In the negative infinitudes of badness, there exists a positive infinitude analogue of goodness. Perhaps the very contrast between these two infinite forces is responsible for the presence of an ethical landscape.

With this in mind, though I have already failed, I want to bring some balance to the order of observations I have yet made. It is often said that philosophers are good at describing what they don't like, but are horrible at saying what they do like. It takes less deliberation to destroy or critique than it does to

uplift or appreciate. It seems to me that the wise man does not only know what pleasures to avoid, but also those which are necessary to pursue and revere. Despite its common necessity, I think it is a tragic feature of humanity that we (I) tend to focus on the former pains.

As with the pains of the human experience, I could speak infinitely on the pleasures.

Some facets of life which inherently deserve some form of reverence: as humans,

- *We could not exist*, and we do
- We have senses which allow us to taste, smell, feel, hear, and see a representation of the world
- We can speak, learn, collaborate, create, and destroy in the presence of our own or different kind
- We get to question
- We get to be aware*
- We get to experience emotion and memory and 'meaning'
- We can change ourselves*
- We have a sense of aestheticism

Regardless of if you enjoyed your life, I think it counts for something that you had the opportunity to be a rational, conscious, growing, experiencing, spatiotemporal agent. The universe is made of one less than infinity of not-you, and those are slim chances. I think this deserves some sense of awe, if not appreciation.

I am privileged. As a human capable of empathy, this is bittersweet. A robot or a lion, agents with less empathy*, would perhaps argue that I should wholeheartedly appreciate my position in the human strata. In the majority of our social systems, the profile of person who tends* to have the easiest time* are straight, white, healthy males (forgive me on how vague this statement is, I'm happy to elaborate if you would like to hear an argument as to why I believe this to be the case). I am a straight, white, healthy male who was born into a completely wonderful family life without poverty. Because of these things, I am likely (and already have) faced significantly less hurdles* than someone who is, say,

a queer, latinx, disabled woman who had a traumatic childhood of poverty.

Is this imbalance fair? No. Can we change the fact that this is true? No..? Can we change the outcome* of my privilege? Yes.

Philosophically, we have observed the sanctity which exists in balance. It seems to me, as a randomly privileged agent among other randomly less privileged agents, that I should attempt to better distribute the pleasures of life from myself to that of the less fortunate.

What this means is that I should not only acknowledge my privilege to the best of my abilities (and most effectively, not to virtue signal), but also uplift the lives of others. I should do this in a sustainable way which preserves myself so that I might continue to better others and myself. Though the intention is perhaps attractive, it does less good* to sacrifice one's whole livelihood in the name of selflessness if they could have done more in the longer run. In other words, you would be helping less

if you stood as a shield in front of the enemy's machine gun rather than stealing and disposing of their ammunition.

To be precisely as happy as a clam* is of no use to myself, and thus the human race. In other words, there should not be irrational hedonistic gluttony and ignorance of the unavoidable and important problems and tragedies. But there also should not be (equally irrational*,) endless dread, suffering, destruction, and pessimism. It is perhaps when these things are effectively and wisely balanced that one might best navigate this paradoxical landscape of attitude, focus, and ethics.

As 1984, Fahrenheit 451, and Brave New World argued, it is the very facts of hard truths, limitation, and pain which are necessary for the existence of romanticism, liberation, or pleasure.

And boy—as much as I cry, whine, hurt, and beg—this beautiful evening in front of a fire, the incredible coffee I had earlier, the smell of evening dew, and

the color of the fields in the setting sun deserve some attention too.

...

Wise is he who enjoys the play of life. From about any angle I look at it, even the pessimistic ones, it seems to make sense that I should enjoy my life to the best of my abilities*. I think it's important to know how to be happy. Happiness can benefit you on a journey or as a destination. It is useful, important, valuable, and one of the few things that humans can be quite good at. I feel some sort of cosmological or divine urge to appreciate the universe from which I came. I can not offer much philosophical justification here, perhaps nor should I. Most philosophers can give you a great deal of reason why it makes sense to be miserable, but very few can justify happiness. It seems that that is part of it. Happiness, joy, appreciation, thrill, pleasure, positive energy, and its siblings are all things to which humans seem to be fond of, though we are bad at finding it.

I also am fond of wisdom—philosophy: *Philosophia in latin*, literally means *love of wisdom*. In my examination of all of these modes of life, I have realized that my philosophical inquiry is no more justified than that of happiness, peace, and appreciation. Similarly, I am inclined to say the same of all perspectives; I am a perspectivist, and thus I get to swim from one pool of experience to another. I find logical equality* in the experience of discipline, pessimism, optimism, pseudoscience, science, hate, love, religion, atheism, etc. According to Kierkegaard, None of them have any proof which does not presuppose itself. I have an eerie suspicion that he might be right. Without an acknowledgement of all of these things, we can not acknowledge the unchanging, changing, uncertain uncertainty of the cosmos.

Experience is the be-all-end-all of my life, and thus I realize it through an acceptance of all ways of partaking in it. This is, in itself, a pleasure—a fulfillment, a motivator.

Absurdity

What to do between point A and Z?

To determine some approaches to the attitude one might adopt in answering this question, I think it would be worth our time to examine Alexander Camu. Camu was essentially dealing with the age-old question of “what is the meaning of life/is there a meaning of life?”. Historically and philosophically, he dealt with the problem of Nihilism. I’m choosing not to go into detail on why this was a relevant question at the time, but he was essentially trying to find a better argument than Nihilism.

Camu boils down the three attitudes one can have towards living (Trigger warning, he is pretty emo and melodramatic and mentions suicide. He’s that french guy who always has a black trench coat on and smokes hand-rolled cigarettes while contemplating Nihilism in the streets of Paris). Every person is

living in some form of one of these states*. As described by [The Living Philosophy](#):

“The Absurd arises from the meeting of our hunger for meaning with a universe that is meaningless. It is the tension between this drive for meaning and the impossibility of satisfying it. We are all immersed in this absurd tension and according to Camus we have three alternatives for dealing with this problem:”*

- Suicide
- Ignorance/Distraction (Philosophical Suicide)
- Absurdism

Camu didn't approve of suicide (obviously, because he was alive and not a hypocrite) because it was a disgusting evasion of the problem at hand—if there is no meaning in the universe, dying is no different from living. Suicide is to deny the beauty and power of humanity's potential.

The second option is what I call ignorance or distraction. Essentially, Camu was arguing that

certain dogmas, doctrines or ideologies would be equivalent to philosophical suicide; of living a comfortable lie so that you are relieved of your world weariness. You “*swallow a pill of bullshit*” so you can be free from the symptoms of true reality.

Lastly;

“Camus finds these two other options insincere and so he proposes a third option—to embrace the insatiable tension, to embrace the Absurd, to lean into it. This third option is Absurdism. Absurdism is a rebellion against meaninglessness. We do not escape from the absurd through death or philosophical suicide. We meet the absurd as it is without escape and with integrity and we maintain the tension of the absurd in us without turning away. He incites us to a life without consolation—a life characterized by acute consciousness of and rebellion against its own mortality and its limits.”

...

Even if I confidently* believed* the universe has *objective* meaning, it seems that this absurdism should still be implemented. What better can I do with this confusion?

“The Absurd is the meeting between two things: the [possibly] cold, apathetic, objective reality on the one hand, and humanity’s inherent drive for meaning on the other.”

I am not a devout or certain believer that the universe has objective meaning, because everything has uncertainty proven itself to be uncertain*. And so, even though I am not decisive enough to be a nihilist nor clergyman, I find solace in this passionate embrace. It's not unlike romantic love, where reason is abandoned for white-hot intuition.

The world is impossible to navigate with certainty, so don't. Manufacture meaning, even if it may not exist. Rebel against this cold notion, out of primordial and divine love for that which is new. I get more interest out of a universe that does something. To commit any form of suicide is to reject all of what *is*. To be

the most I can be—to live a life to the fullest truths of confusion, maximally capitalize, *wring out* the whole stuff of the cosmos, I hereby denounce a life of ignorance*; I will face this protean beast with my teeth bared, in a strange and eager smile.

What more certain could I make of a human life?
What a will to power? What is more beautiful?

Mistakes

‘Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life. ‘

-Neitzche, Beyond good and evil

What is the correct combination of premeditation and action? Is this balance linked to virtue? Again, who's virtues do we judge these by?

I wish to discuss that action without intention is, effectively, nonsense. If I act on the basis of something which might be false, my action is uncertain. When the virtue or effect of my action is

not certain, I have potentially compromised the lives of others, myself, and the valuable cascade of time. In theory, this concept is scaled up to be applied to all actions in a human life. Consider habit or addiction, two psychologically similar phenomena; thoughtless action often leads to the action of least effort and most immediate comfort. In this case, this might be the question; ought you eat a fast food meal while you're in town, or ought you wait 15 minutes for a significantly more nutritious meal at home. To the (average*) subconscious human psyche, this decision is a piece of cake. When the prefrontal cortex steps in, that's when you start to feel uncomfortable, guilty. If the subconscious wins—the unthinking action of least effort and immediate effort—you are literally changing the physiology of your brain to be more accepting of a fast food meal in town over a home cooked one. When you scale this up over time, this has the potential to be catastrophic; similar in experience to something as extreme as fentanyl addiction.

In other words, I argue that there is (Seemingly more often than not*) virtue in premeditation, or sufficient

contemplation before you act. As a spontaneous creative, however, I worry that this idea is aiming in a dangerous territory for creatives.

I would like to briefly discuss the 'spur of the moment' activity. It seems to me that premeditation does not *delegitimize* forms of improvisation, it actually directly enhances it. It seems to me that there is a philosophical misconception among many people who believe a person's authenticity is derived from their aimless candidness. For example, the romantic pianist who refuses to spend any of their time considering music theory; for they believe it will harden, institutionalize, and *artificialize* the authenticity of one's internal creative motivation.

What then, I ask, is a more creatively significant action unto the cosmos; a passionate soul bellowing unintelligible vowels for the sake of primordial abstractness, or the dialogues of Plato? This is not entirely rhetorical; I don't discount the potential for creative value of catharsis from the former. Yet, as a lover of the

maturation of human art, I can't help but choose the second action, by the virtue that it has *forward* creative motion. In other words, the cascade of creative inertia which future generations might build upon from the brain of Plato is more significant than those who relish in the catharsis of the passionate bellow.

Let us return to music theory, and this relationship between “authenticity” and “premeditation”, or “action” and “intention”. Does learning music theory influence your autonomy in creative decisionmaking? No(t necessarily*.) As described by professional music theorist Adam Neely, music theory is *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. Becoming familiar with the language of a craft, in observing the nature of such activity, does not (necessarily) influence the craft in a limiting way. What it *does* do, is provide the fluency which *better allows you to reflect your creative motivation*. If I want to ask for a bathroom to a non-native speaker, the way to complete my goal is to use a dictionary. If I wish to express a profoundly complex artistic

concept, the way to complete my goal is to use the language of the medium in the truest fashion I can. Knowing the patterns, rules, and standards of a language allows you to break them, and more effectively express yourself. Legendary jazz improvisation is not a result of an artist who is inherently blessed with the divine creative gift, it is the reflection of passion and education over time, and the correlated increase of fluency towards their given artistic motive. Intentionality and awareness does not rule out abstractness, nor spontaneity. It enhances your ability to navigate them and more.

Again, there is (seemingly more often than not*) virtue in premeditation, or sufficient contemplation before you act. Because this is necessarily scaled up to the size of your life, this premeditation can (and perhaps should) be very extensive (hence the amount of time I felt necessary to allocate in the gap year). With knowledge of the human brain, and the behavior which is implicitly scribed into its

physiology, we can better calculate the necessary ratio between action and premeditation.

Of course, we now must examine the other side of the coin. What is premeditation without action? Is premeditating a virtuous action in itself, and if so is it equal in value to action? Are both premeditation and action co-dependent catalysts which procure a magnificent reaction whence they are combined one to one? I can not say. I am 18, and I have spent most of my short life premeditating, as a young person is naturally left to do. So I am left asking a question from a biased perspective (like always), wondering, “is there some implicit knowledge which exists in action alone which I have yet to observe as meaningfully as pure thought?” I can not say for sure, but I can passionately say that I *feel* there is.

“We are in a party where we get to have consciousness, but that consciousness is made out of meat”

-John Green

Say what you must about the soul or the metaphysical essence of a human spirit, but it shall not sustain if it is not for food or drink. Food and drink and the necessary action which strengthens our bones and muscles and organs and thus soul and spirit, do not introduce themselves unless through the ritual of action. And so we must acknowledge in some way that action is a fundamental feature of human existence, and not to be avoided if we wish to have our cake and eat it too, and to survive our way through the act. This is, of course, larger than food and drink. Human sustenance in society* has effectively been expanded to include other variables such as relationships, acceptable shelter, reputation, monetary comfort, and other things. Interestingly, the value of these things in society often supersedes the human realm of emotional, personal, artistic, passionate, spiritual, and philosophical health. And yet many of these complex emotional needs depend on the sustenance of the societal nutrition of homes, money, career, reputation. Here, we see something of an expansion of our previous line of thought; we see the psychological reality, wherein the human

lives and acts in the mind and soul—a landscape of worldly conception, inward responsibility, and consciousness—and the physical reality, wherein the human lives and acts in the world of objects and spatiotemporal responsibility—a landscape of rigid obligation, outward responsibility, prudence, and many other things. We see the relationship between the two, and acknowledge that they must exist in harmony if either is to meaningfully exist at all. For a soul like myself, who yearns for a world of cognitive transcendence, where I am not limited to the constraints of time and the rigid worldly qualities of human life, who is more likely to contemplate than act on the contemplation, this is utterly and completely liberating. The world is no longer restrained to the sensation of thought, but equally valid and real when I handle it physically. The synthesis of both existential modes creates a robust contrast, and therefore a life of robust experience, effectivity, diversity, meaning, success, comfort, and achievement.

With this idea put in place, we are left with the following question. How do we effectively implement this idea into our life? How do we break the habit of acting without meaning, or theorizing without acting? It is, I think, necessary to consider the theme which I have explicated multiple times so far; in the realm of human life, it is important to factor in features and biases of our physiology.

“The student who secures his coveted Leisure and retirement by systematically shirking any labor necessary to man obtains but an ignoble and unprofitable leisure, defrauding himself of the experience which alone can make leisure fruitful. ‘But’ says one, ‘you do not mean that the students should go to work with their hands instead of their heads?’ I do not mean that exactly, but I mean something which he might think a good deal like that; I mean that they should not play Life, or study it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly live it from beginning to end.

How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?"

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

I have obtained an ignoble and unprofitable leisure, defrauding myself of the experience which alone makes leisure fruitful. From this perspective, I have made a mistake. Yet, I am much more informed than my previous self. In such a potentially ignoble intellectual retreat, a mere study of life, I have come to realize the profound necessity of the yang to the yin. In other, less cliché words, I have come to acknowledge an approach to life which cultivates balance between the contrasting forces of human life. In other *other* words, I no longer wish to be an omniscient observer, who exists purely for the currency of *knowledge*. I want to compound this intellectual currency as the means to promote *experience* in full. I have learned that certain forms of knowledge have their limits, and that if I hope to *be the most that I can be*, this requires (like usual) a far wider perspective.

I seem to have been looking for the objective answer to the human experience. The more that I learn about the human experience, the more that I realize that I am asking a fruitless question. Perhaps there is no correct 'answer' to the question of the human experience, because it is not a question. If the answer to this 'question' is confusion, so be it. Perhaps 'I don't know' is the most appropriate answer to a question that isn't a question. I know now that definitions are separate from the thing which they describe. I am looking for an answer which might be written on paper, spoken by the tongue, and structured as an equation. I am looking for the wrong thing, facing the wrong direction, with my eyes shut. It seems that the only way I might truly apprehend something worthy of being called an answer to this undefinable thing, is a life *authentically and fully lived*.

Each conception of the human experience is endlessly different from the others. This seems to be my current conception of the human experience. I suspect it will change as I move forward in this clear cut, undefined, variable, constant, ugly, gorgeous,

sensual, disturbing, evil, sacred, excruciating, blissful, neutral, provocative, organic, synthetic, miniscule, enormous, infinite, negative, mental, physical, true, false, deathly, lively, emotional, unfeeling, beautiful, meaningful, meaningless, spatiotemporal, and *indescribable* flux.

I was gonna write something here about how I don't like sharing poetry, nor do I like most poetry at all. I put this here because this book is for me, and this selection of words is helpful to my perspective. Forgive me for being cheesy and vulnerable, now is the time for it.

Poetry

I am still fragile, and frail

The habit is to find wires which run underneath the base of my physiology, and to correct them

This means that even if the surface of my existence is rippled and waving and storming,

My warm currents pulse on, gently and with
unchanging strength

There must be a foundation for a house to stand
through the gusts of time

Our world swims with lives of flotsam and jetsam

They never find the dryness of land

Let me be an island

For no man is an island

And I wish not to be just a Man.

We have few senses in a world of much stimulus,
few ways to experience

Yet I must cover my ears in silence, for it holds too
much noise

Yet I burst speakers because sound is not loud
enough

L'éternel féminin, das Ewig-Weibliche, Helen of
Troy— she which we ought revere

Is that which is outside of the human realm of
ignorance and confusion

Our lips will never meet, yet I daydream of her, write
her, speak to her

Pray to her, breathe her atoms which toddle around
the atmosphere

I offer a sacrifice to her; my human body.

Take my body and all that may or may not reside in it

its busy halls of blood cells, its inward eye, its
chemical fear

let it fall in the space between mold and loam

cracks of phosphorus and dressed up men who
failed at living forever

Feed me to the Earth through the mouth of fauna,
and through the roots of life born after my end

Do not honor me in the shallow way of Men, forget
my name, and instead breathe Her air,

for I never left her arms, nor will I.

I am not the start nor the end of her

Like her, I will carry on, doing what I do best: drifting

The same action I took while walking, just less
complicated

I was born drifting, and *will* die drifting.

That's all I know, and all I will know.

I shall not fail to revel in her movements, I have
married her,

And I am her; her who I shall never meet.

A quote from Bertrand Russell:

“By death, by illness, by poverty, or by the voice of Duty, we must learn, each one of us, that the world was not made for us, and that, however beautiful maybe the Things We crave, fate May nevertheless forbid them. It is the part of Courage, when Misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hopes, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to power is not only just and right: it is the very gate of wisdom.”

But then again, “Que sçay-je?”

