

When I think about me as a learner and thinker, a specific quote comes to mind, "A 'free thinker' is usually just someone too dumb to know where they got their ideas from." (@existentialcoms on twitter, August 7th 2021). This random, throwaway statement has stuck with me for years now and gets at something that has grown to be very important to me. We all operate within specific lineages and traditions of thought; always pushing past ideas further, refuting others, and just generally responding to things that are came before us and are concurrent. From that perspective, there's something very important about an intellectual biography. It is an exercise in accounting for the loans you've taken, given, and balancing the ideological books. The structure of mine will go as follows: I'll talk about my upbringing and the ideas I grew up around (Christianity), the first major period of divergence (New Atheism), a subsequent misstep (anti-Feminism), an ideological mixed bag (Marxism), and, finally, where I'm at now (Marxism but different).

I am driven by an urge, a need, to find out - to know - what is, how it is, why it is. The truth about myself, other living things, the world, and whatever drives the universe. It's the First Commandment for my life, and although I don't understand why, it must always be the First Commandment: keep wanting to know, trying to know. (*Pihkal*, Alexander & Ann Shulgin)

My upbringing was very Christian. It was expected that I go to church every Sunday and I did up until I was 14 or so then we all just about stopped going. I'm not sure exactly how much of it I believed to be honest, it's very easy to project yourself into the past and say "I never actually believed. I was always destined to become myself." I actually don't know if I really believed in (The Christian) God or not. I remember going to the preacher of the church and telling him that I wanted to accept Jesus in my heart. Did I do it because I felt something deep inside of my heart that could've been Jesus himself that

encouraged me to express my devotion for him publicly? Or, did I realize it would get me positive attention from the Christian adults around me and what was desired or expected of me? It feels like any clear decision on the matter by my current me has the potential to distort, so I will leave it at that. After getting publicly saved in front of the church, I later on went to get baptized. I think I did that in part because the church had a tub up behind the pulpit where they did the baptisms and I was curious about it and desired the spectacle of it all. It was a pretty fun experience, getting to be soaked in a dress shirt and pants and change in the church was an interesting break from the normal. Like I said, I ended up going there until I was 14 or so, I don't know exactly what happened we just stopped going. Even so, for the years prior to that, I don't think it was a significant part of my life. It was just somewhere went on Sunday, then came home. It didn't feel like it effected other aspects of my life at all really. It was around the time that my own intellectual history began.

Certain changes in my life around 15 that led to me being and feeling a lot more lonely that I had before. Ruptures in family relations led to cousins I was used to coming around not coming around anymore, sexually and romantically I felt different than those around me and I was working that out, I was a gifted child™ and in honors classes which came along with high expectations and certain complexes (that probably still apply), and my mom had remarried a few years prior to that and I was still working through the changes in attention and dynamics at my house. Something about that combination of factors (and hidden ones that I am probably not aware of), led me to fall into a deep depression. It's probably a little odd, but I kind of see that period as a point of origin for who I am now. During that time I was essentially always stuck in my head and it lead to me ask bigger questions of myself and the world as a whole. It was then that I stopped believing in God. I think later into the depression I developed logical arguments for it, but to begin with I think it was just that reality was too

painful for there to be a god. I eventually got drawn in by the New Atheists—Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris. In the 90s and 00s, it was really popular to put theologians up against atheist intellectuals in public forums to debate about god and religion. I ate those up, and was constantly watching content like that; learning all the arguments for the new perspective I was crafting (now I hate the people I previously mentioned, for the record). In that period I also stumbled onto Albert Camus' "The Stranger" and the specific ways in which the main character, Mersault, was dysfunctional and othered resonated with me, so much so that I read the entire novel in one sitting and it led me to look into what Camus was about. His own specific philosophy is called Absurdism and is about the what to do when you're confronted with the absurdity of meaning in a meaningless universe. It wasn't his intention or point at all, but the things I read into his works and ideas allowed me to feel validated in my developing nihilism. There was no god, no meaning (maybe for other people, not for me), and that made suicide the obvious choice. Of course, I'm not dead now and I consider that period to have ended about 8-ish years ago, so something changed.

The thing that changed is I graduated. After years of being depressed and never leaving the deal, I eventually reevaluated and realized I had other options than just death. I think a large part of it was I met a guy online who had a crush on me and it made me realize dating men was an option. It gave me something to desire and work towards (even though that eventually crashed and burned). It was during this period that the tides of atheist Youtube dragged me along to being opposed to feminism and social justice. It was the result of being young and developing parasocial relationships with certain people I considered to be rational and authoritative. They were originally very critical of religion and would post very combative responses to religious Youtube videos that felt very validating to watch, and then moved on to do a similar thing for videos expressing feminist and anti-racist views. During this period,

there's never a time I would consider myself right-wing, but I was heavily opposed to, what I now consider to be, foundational left-wing positions. One thing that's really difficult about getting out of toxic ideologies is the way that beliefs (re)configure your emotional responses. It leads to the things that you agree with causing certain emotional affects within you and further enforcing the pathways they activate making more difficult to tolerate other perspectives and other discursive approaches to communication. That phase of my life lasted for a few years and is the period I identify with the least now (and the version of myself that I like to clown on the most). As is probably quite obvious, I didn't stay that way forever; now, I'm definitely a feminist and a supporter of racial justice, and just social justice as a whole. That happens next.

This point signaled a significant departure for me. I ended up stumbling upon another Youtuber named Contrapoints. Her content was funny, didn't take itself too serious, and seemed much less stuck-up than other left-wing people. It seemed like she was better at explaining left-wing ideas and reaching people who were in my position at the time. Along with stumbling upon Contrapoints, I started watching other left-wing Youtubers, though of different orientations and focuses. Contra's content tended to involve around feminism and gender, while other content I watched (and was probably more interested in) was about economics and politics. I stumbled upon Marxists talking specifically about the ideas of Marx and Engels and it was with that that I became a Marxist. Marxism is probably a big scare word and gives people a certain impression, but it's actually an incredibly diverse discipline with a variety of views and thinkers who disagree about pretty much everything. That being said, when I initially got into Marxism it was through Marxism-Leninism. Marxist-Leninists are people that usually read Marx and Engels through the works and perspectives of Vladimir Lenin, and are overwhelmingly pro-Soviet in their perspectives (in a way it feels like the only 30s they care about is the 1930s). I think that

MLism relies very much on the lack of knowledge about historical events and an unaware of how historical investigation works. I ended up being very convinced by it and spent awhile learning the language and views of these sorts of people and arguing for those perspectives. I think that late-stage capitalism and widespread corruption of our political system leads people to completely distrust all of these institutions and it's really easy to fall into belief systems and counter narratives because they're oppositional (e.g. "US bad, Soviet good"). If the institutions that you distrust say a thing, you (erroneously) believe the opposite must be true. I also think that American society socializes people to be nationalist, and that anti-American ideologies redirect that nationalism towards other things. I was like that for awhile, I don't think it was a happy time for me. I was very nostalgic for a society in which I didn't live in (and, also that in large part didn't exist) and a future that I felt was robbed from us in some way. I'm certain that there was a gradual process of achieving clarity, but there's one specific book that I associate with getting past that period: Kristen Ghodsee's *Red Hangover*. She's an ethnographer who's lived a lot in Bulgaria and I think her more nuanced feelings and musings about post-1990 Eastern Europe helped me free myself from a very reductionist, largely politically motivated belief system that I held.

To become is never to imitate, nor to 'do like', nor to conform to a model, whether it's of justice or of truth. There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at. Nor are there two terms which are exchanged. The question 'What are you becoming?' is particularly stupid. For as someone becomes, what he is becoming changes as much as he does himself. (*Dialogues*, Deleuze & Parnet)

Nowadays, my main focuses are Deleuze and Guattari, and Cybernetics. Deleuze and Guattari are French philosophers who wrote mostly between the 60s and 90s. Their works are notoriously difficult and borderline incomprehensible sometimes, but there's something about them that is ensnaring. Their work is very fluid and anti-essentialist. It tends to talk about the way the ways that flows of desire and "rhizomatic" thinking can have radical, liberatory potential and the apparatus of capture that nullify them. It's all so interesting... Cybernetics is similar though the prose is more grounded, the concepts are more fixed and it's a lot more approachable (*Designing Freedom* by Stafford Beer is a good introduction). I think I like the direction I'm going.

Intellectually, I feel like I've been on a long journey with very different stops along the way that have felt like destinations. At any of the points that I mentioned, I felt like I was completely convinced by the worldview that I had at the time even though they were all at odds with each other to a large degree (and probably internally contradictory themselves). I think that just sort of shows how good ideological frameworks are at cutting up the world, justifying their categories, and perpetuating their own internal logic. I'm not naive enough to try to say I'm past all of that; that I'm outside of ideology and have an unmediated perspective on things. I think it's situations like that that ideology is at its most pronounced. I've been a strong atheist, an anti-feminist, a Marxist-Leninist, and, now, a Deleuzoguattarian. There's no end to it. I will be someone else in a year; someone probably further away in five years; and even further in ten. Any act of continued existence is an act of becoming someone else.

## Works Cited

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