

what we do when we do nothing

We think.

I was once told one should think as a hobby. Fair enough, but a luxury one, as I see. So luxury that we contemplate on what all the fuss was about only after a whole day's hustle, that we brood over our remaining life only after it has got off the track, and that we do it only when we've got nothing to do.

It was in midnight, when all the work had been done, that such a discovery came into my mind. As a man, the thinking animal, it has undoubtedly left me with endless humiliation and quizzical self-mockery. It seems that we are distinguished from those live in the wild only when we are idling. Consequently, it obliged me to renounce my supreme esteem towards Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, for they were nothing but absolute faineants who got nothing essential to deter them from thinking.

Now, as for thinking itself, extravagance as it features, it entertains me no more than it bothers. Especially when it comes to profound and abstract issues, thinking becomes even more irritating and detestable. My thinking, as it was, usually starts with vexing deliberation on my future career, and ends up with infinite rumination of life and death, men and women, or goodness and badness. It kills both my leisure time and brain cells only to deduce the conclusion that there is no conclusions. Maybe I am too worldly to perceive anything metaphysical, or too shortsighted to conceive anything distant, or we all do, at least most of us. From thinking, sometimes people attain despair, thereby suffering from psychological depression; sometimes they attain self-inconsistency, thereby becoming lunatics or cynics; or, in most cases, they obtain nothing at all, thereby generating what we call nihilism. What a pity that we human are endowed with the ability to think, but not the ability to abstain.

But nonetheless, thinking lures me with its tempting disguise like an alluring lady, and it succeeds all the time with its unexpected canniness like a mischievous boy. In the darkness of the unknown she presents us with only the gleaming path but not the

bottomless abyss. And in silent nights when we do nothing looms large his figure. Consequently, thinking turns out to be an irresistible impulse to me, sharing the same primeval essence with lust and appetite, but covered with a civilized disguise.

Exhausted from doing nothing, I write down this article and commence thinking of something else.

Conventions and Calculations

Whenever I find myself compelled to cater to all kinds of social conventions, it strikes me hard how against human nature, or at least, my nature, these man-made rules are. The deeper one is involved in adulthoods, the more likely he would agree that human society is by no means based on fraternity, but mendacity. That kind of mendacity, which is composed hardly by deliberate malignity or conspiracy though, but is rather innocuous or even involuntary. Why, there are conventions, and lies ensue. Same hypocrisy manifests in men's luxury suits and women's delicate dresses, in blurting-out honorifics and hollow smiles, and in every following the conventions as we don't feel like to. It is literally ironic that all these endeavors of graceful disguise serve as an adequate proof of the fraudulent essence shared by every one of us.

As a consequence, men like Confucius should have been held in utmost detestation, for they are literally convention-makers who have been advocating such hypocrisy for thousands of years; and men like Diogenes should have enjoyed supreme esteem, for they are, I dare say, convention-breakers who have been precursors of nature and honesty. But Diogenes had gone too far to be a paragon to follow, I guess he intended to symbolize himself by acting exaggeratedly. When he was urinating on the street, laughing at the pedestrians as enslaved by their conventions, I suspect he didn't realize he himself had been confined to his own ideal. But that was what great philosophers, like Cato and Nietzsche, always do. They stuck to, and even made sacrifices for their own creed, but not some "acknowledged conventions".

However, I agree that it doesn't render us guilty not to venture to follow cynicism and discard all social rules. Actually, we are entitled to the right of pretending under conventions. And this is nothing to be accused of, because we are such queer animals that are capable of drawing pleasure from others' goodwill even if we know it is merely semblance.

But what with this weird capability, isn't it a fair deal to obey the code of conventions? From the perspective of utilitarianism, one can avoid unnecessary trouble at little cost by following most of the conventions, by pretending to be what is expected by others. For one who is truthful at heart, it turns out to be calculations that motivate his conventional behaviors. Thus, eventually, there are only two fatal disposition in modern society, frankness and foolishness. Why, Meursault wouldn't have been guillotined, only if he had realized it, and had pretended to weep on Mother's funeral.

Now if I were to be censured by Diogenes, to be a servant of conventions, I would tell him, with ridicule, as if he was an old folk out of fashion,

No, I'm not subordinate to conventions. I take'em into calculations.