

Exploring Morality, Spirituality, and Human Nature:

The Impact of Reading and Writing on My Life

(Revision)

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As I began to write this narrative, I was flooded with vivid memories and connections to the development of my literacy journey. From grade school with the *Great Illustrated Classics*, to the present day with philosophical and metaphysical readings. Had it not been for the early readings and teachings, I would not possess the current interests I have now. My life has greatly been influenced by my reading and writing; however, a common theme has been morality, human nature, spirituality, and my emotional and mental state throughout my life.

The journey of my interest in reading and learning began with visual stimulation and positive reinforcement from my parents, leading me to become curious and adventurous in exploring the world through books. The best way I can describe my journey is chronologically, so let's go to the beginning. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... too far back but relevant. My mother noticed it was difficult for me to sit and read unless I had visual stimulation, "Who can tell us what makes a subject difficult for a student?" (Tobias, pg.4) luckily for me my greatest teacher, my mother. She would provide simple picture books of religious stories through which I unconsciously learned about morality. I noticed the admiration my mother had towards specific characters in these stories and took an interest and tried to emulate the qualities of these men. I mostly enjoyed the conversations I had with her where we reviewed what I learned and asked questions. If not for her positive reinforcement, I would not have been interested in reading as I preferred learning via computer games or videos. **T** The first book, besides religious stories, that I can recall as a child would be *Curious George*. I no longer was just looking to be a well-behaved boy but curious about the world around me.

This is where the inner rebel was born, and I began to challenge and explore the world around me. Looking back now I can see why I was mostly interested in adventure books such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and

many more from *Great Illustrated Classics*. My father must have noticed or guessed that these would be books I would like since he bought most of the collection from this publishing house. My journey into my early world of reading and learning has been a transformative experience shaped by visual stimulation, positive reinforcement, and a natural curiosity for the world around me.

During my early preteen years, my interest in reading decreased, leading me to rely on movies and analytical summaries for my assigned reading. Although the topics were very interesting, I found myself easily distracted and disinterested when reading. I watched movies such as *Animal Farm* and *The Giver* instead of reading the assigned books. I distinctly remember thinking that I could get the answers to my reading assignments much faster if I just saw the movie or read analytical summaries. Another reason for my disinterest in reading was being bullied by older kids. I was short, chubby, and acne-prone, in other words, an easy target. The last thing I wanted was to be judged as a nerd or dork, so I read less, began to work out, played sports, and heavily relied on my personality and comedy for friendships. I purposefully didn't carry books so I wouldn't have them thrown or stolen and I didn't dare to tell my parents because I hated the idea of being weak and unable to defend myself. I say all this because I rejected reading for survival and though it may sound sad, I am grateful for it. That bully, Matthew, became my source of strength, although at the expense of my reading journey. The only real reading I did at this time was during Bible study with Jesus who much later became a great friend.

As well as an animal encyclopedia that my father got me. I remember making the connection that people were very much like animals, each with their unique traits and habits. Learning about the creatures of the world fascinated me and the fact that I grew up with many

pets made me curious to learn more about them. I also got heavily into music because of my father; I would research and reflect on lyrics. My father is a bit of an encyclopedia when it comes to music history; 1950s through 80s. I feel I learned many lessons from interpreting the lyrics of popular artists; many songs challenged me such as “Sympathy for the Devil” (Jagger, 1968). The impact of personal struggles, bullying, and lyrical interest in music during my early preteen years led me to reject reading for survival, but ultimately, it sparked a fascination with animals, shaping my future interests and friendships.

Fast forward to high school, my teen years, my reading and writing interests began to grow, partially from Bible study and great teachers. I strongly desired to travel, explore, and socialize outside of school. My closest friends were all from my congregation, Jesus, Ariel, Claudia, and Mario. If I were to spend time with them or even my high school friends, my mother made it clear that I had to participate in church by responding to a question by memory with a quote from our reading or scripture and providing an example. I'm now realizing what she was teaching me is very similar to what this class is teaching; to effectively read, study, and analyze text. However, being forced to practice this religion for me to have the freedom to spend time with friends left a negative taste. I grew disdainful; I couldn't understand how so many people could follow God so blindly. My approach to reading and writing about holy scripture felt more like a task, a means to an end, rather than a personal endeavor. Although I unconsciously absorbed many lessons and became more confident in my public speaking, my interest in reading focused more on challenging religion by learning about the world through science. Naturally, I pursued mathematics and applied sciences; they both stimulated and satisfied my desire for finite answers. My best friend Michael had an English teacher, Ms. Romero, who sometimes let us have lunch in her classroom. She wasn't my English teacher; however, I appreciated and

respected the conversations we had. She recommended certain books to me from our conversations, most notably, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. Although I saw the movie first, I committed to reading the book because the subject matter intrigued me. Concepts of human nature and influence, and unlike *1984*, it showed a world where mankind was ruled by pleasure rather than fear. Give mankind anything and everything that they want, and they will subjugate themselves. During this time, I felt both like an insider and an outsider to human nature and wanted to explore more. I saw mirrors in religion and dystopias and although people seemed happy, I wondered if they were truly free and following truth, objective truth, for it would be neither good nor bad just plain truth. I pondered my curiosity and desires; I wondered if I too was a slave to them. My reading journey accelerated; and because I didn't have many people to discuss these topics with, I dove heavily into psychological thriller movies and literature such as *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis. I did however have an amazing physics teacher, Mr. Lim, who let me borrow his book *The Fabric of the Cosmos* by Brian Greene. I had an incredible interest in our universe and its laws; back then I wanted to become a theoretical physicist like Michio Kaku. These subjects highly intrigued me but once I started dating Nikki, my first love, I began to neglect many things in my life such as my friends from church, my family, and reading. My journey through reading and writing during my high school years was shaped by my experiences with religion, literature, and science, ultimately leading me to question the nature of human existence and my desires.

The transformative power of reading and self-reflection has played a significant role in reshaping my perspective and understanding of human nature in my early adult life. After high school, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. There was little reading and writing at the time except for class when learning about my MOS (military occupational service). One day in my attempt to

skip duty, I chose to go to mental health services where I met Lt. Sparks; this is where my journey of rebirth began. Becoming introspective about my interests made me a better learner, “Our purpose was to give them an outsider perspective on themselves, a way of looking at their own mental process so that they would feel more in control.” (Tobias, pg.3) Lt. Sparks cultivated an outsider perspective at a time when I felt the least in control of my life. One strategy she taught me was ‘mind mapping’. I still do this to this day and even apply a similar method with my class notes. Thanks to her, I read books on psychology like *The Social Animal* by Elliot Aronson. She provided clarity and perspective and, truth be told, she was the only one who understood me. She knew that by learning about human nature I would have greater tools to thrive on. I started with smaller books on Western and Eastern philosophies and religions, first with *Introduction to Aristotle* by Richard McKeon. I again felt like an insider because I resonated with what I was learning but an outsider since I didn't have people to discuss and challenge these new ideas with. Eventually, through my travels, I came across someone who introduced me to *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne. I was intrigued by mysticism and the occult, and even though this book seemed like one it wasn't; it offered a simplistic yet profound perspective. Such “self-help” books suddenly became one of my favorite genres. Many of the genres I read now are introspective and unbeknownst to me before now cultivated metacognition.

My journey with reading and writing has been a transformative experience shaped by positive reinforcement, personal struggles, and a natural curiosity for the world around me. From my early days of being drawn to religious stories and picture books, to my later exploration of philosophical and metaphysical readings, my interests have been shaped by a combination of personal experiences and influential people. The significance of my experiences shaped my

perspective and understanding of human nature, morality, spirituality, and my emotional and mental state throughout my life. These experiences have not only influenced my interests and passions but have also played a crucial role in my personal growth and self-reflection. It is important to recognize the uniqueness of everyone's relationship with reading and writing. Each person's relationship with reading and writing is deeply personal and can be influenced by a wide range of factors, making it a truly unique and individual experience for everyone.

## References

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