IN THE REALM OF SILENCE, I LONG FOR THE MISSING

Tran, Tuyet Trinh

Introduction

The other day, as I was thinking about the topic for my synthesis paper, the first thing that came to my mind was the song "Sound of Silence" written by Paul Simon.

"Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains"

As the melody started to play in my mind, I thought, what was so special about silence that I felt as if I was spelled by its charm? I fell in love with it. Silence. Is it a dead valley of sound or a deep well that hides ancient wisdom whose existence has been long forgotten, I wonder? And in listening to this sound of silence, whether or not I was able to touch the treasure that it's hiding – "*a vision softly creeping, left its seeds while I was sleeping…*"

Wandering with that thought, I slowly followed the path of silence, which led me to Beethoven – a giant figure of musical talent. He is one of my favourite composers – a tragic genius who struggled with deafness during the last 10 years of his life. Those years were the most challenging time for Beethoven, but it was also those very years that brought him to the apex of his career. In the midst of this trial, he was able

to summon his creative intuition from the depth of silence, as he composed his best masterpieces. I wonder how he trained himself to get familiar with the sound of silence from which he was able to draw the sweetest drops of honey even as he also tasted the bitterness of life. Encouraged by Beethoven, I thought, perhaps, I can also draw the most beautiful sound out of silence. I am not sure how I am going to make it happen. Yet, 'how' shall not be a matter for me now. I just have the desire to do so.

By the time I settled myself in the presence of silence, I was overwhelmed by its gravity. But strangely, this overwhelming somehow filled up the void within me, giving me a glimpse of wholeness – the thing that I have been looking for. Floating on the ocean of silence, I started longing for what was missing. And there, my voyage commenced.

"…Within the sound of silence
In restless dreams, I walked alone…"

The Missing Truth

The flow of thought slowly brought me to a famous saying of Socrates, "I know that I know nothing." I somehow felt like him as I experienced this inadequacy. The more I learn, the more insufficient I find myself. I cannot exactly recall when I became aware of my thirst for knowing and for truth, triggering my curiosity and desire to know all that there is. I asked many questions but the answers that I received did not really quench my thirst. There was always this sense of inadequacy that continued to disturb me - not necessarily because of the incompetence of those who answered me - but because of something else. I tried to ignore this restlessness but could not.

To calm this thirst for knowing, I cannot but sink myself into the unknown and the missing, longing for the more and the greater. The unknown pertains to the things waiting to be discovered but yet to be discovered or cannot be discovered because they are hidden in the realm of mystery. The missing, on the other hand, is the one that has been discovered, albeit only in part, so that one remains restless from within. W. Norris Clarke was on point in saying that one hardly finds oneself at ease with conclusions merely from the authority of someone else without subjecting whatever one perceives to the critical test of one's own intelligence and experience. One cannot easily take the truth of things for granted. Yearning for the greater, one is not satisfied by mere fragments of truth. If it's not the whole, one remains restless and continues to look for that eternal spring. One would keep asking: What is the truth?

Encountering difficulties in defining the term and its essence, one might be tempted to take on the notion of relativism, insisting that there is no absolute truth but different truth-values varied by context. This notion of relativism has been there since ancient times, as we see in a typical statement of the Sophists who claimed that "man is the measure of all things". This reflects the belief that truth depends on one's subjectivity and contexts, denying the possibility of a single truth shared by all. On the one hand, the Sophists might have a point in asserting a relative approach towards truth, acknowledging the diversity and richness to be found in human experiences. This approach, to some extent, allows further insights to emerge and enrich the human understanding of what is true. On the other hand, Truth – understood as the greatest Truth - is not relative. What is relative is only our perception and interpretation. If Truth is going to be modified by a subjective point of view, Truth will no longer

be itself but something else – a fiction, probably - that people make up like a strawman to serve a particular purpose. By fiction, I mean Yuval Noah Harari's concept of imagined reality - a product of imagination that allows people "to weave common myths," like the nationalist myths of righteous war and different types of truth that there is. Though an imagined reality, myths such as these can seem frigtheningly real and powerful, as long as people continue to believe the fiction[1]. Truth, however, is irreducible, being neither a fiction nor a tool that one might manipulate to serve personal interest. Truth remains be free to be itself, independent from human subjectivity and propositions.

How, then, can I know what is true and what is not true? According to Heraclitus, humankind cannot perceive the absolute truth because they only see the seeming, not the truth itself. There is no exception in this seeming, he insisted. Even the most esteemed people "ascertain and hold fast" to this seeming.[2] If that is the case, even the way Heraclitus perceives the seeming is also a semblance. More importantly, there is no way that genuine truth or knowledge can be attained. That would be bad news for those who love truth as much as their lives. Is Truth a mere illusion of human desire that we seek in vain? Perhaps, as one asks this question, one might feel like throwing the quest into the deep valley of silence. Faced with inadequacies in intellectual perception and linguistic expression, one becomes aware of one's poverty and helplessness in reaching one's goal. Nevertheless, this awareness need not

[1]Yuval Harari, "The Tree of Knowledge." in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind* (New York, Harper Perennial, 2015), 23 – 39.

[2]John Burnet, Arthur Fairbanks and Kathleen Freeman (trans.) "Fragments by Heraclitus," *Antilogicalism,* accessed January 28, 2023, https://antilogicalism.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/heraclitus_fragments_final.pdf, DK B28, 4.

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prevent one from pursuing Truth. One might not be able to achieve the Truth *per se*, yet thanks to the inexhaustible desire to know all that there is, one has the hope to go beyond and have some foretaste of this Truth in the reality as a whole, at least by way of one's intention and desire.

Moreover, the reality is that the world in which one lives carries within it the multi-folding of the true and the untrue - a haven of mysteries and riddles that one sooner or later might encounter. Determining the "gray area" is the most confusing. Or perhaps, there really is no black, white or "gray area" because the separation might only exist in the human mind. In other words, there is nothing that can be considered as "true" or "untrue" in "Truth" itself. This reminds me of a saying from Fr. James V. Schall who restated Plato's point of view about Truth, saying that "the whole truth includes a knowledge of what is not true and all error is based on certain truth". In light of this, everything is worth considering, even the ideas that seem most erroneous and ridiculous. All are fragments of Truth, offering a glimpse of Truth. Whether or not one can sort out the gold among stones would be another question. Perhaps, with a sharp eye to see through, an undivided mind to perceive, and a pure heart to conceive, one would be able to find the gem that one is looking for.

Yet, what does one look for as one longs for truth? On the one hand, Truth has such a beauty that attracts one's attention, urging one to reach out of one's castle to know all that there is. This desire to know more, on the other hand, might generate a temptation to possess Truth *by all means*. Thus going further in this quest of truth, one might be tempted to satisfy one's desire of knowing rather than seeking for the Truth itself, only to find out in the end that what one has been looking for was a mere satisfaction of one's egoism. To follow

this path is to deceive oneself with a mere illusion of Truth and to get involved in "endless crusades" to fight for Truth and justice. Yet Truth does not depend on the seeker for its survival or demise.

There are also those who might search for Truth for the sake of freedom as it is said: "the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32). A desire for freedom is one of the distinctive traits of human beings. Yet not all truths can liberate human beings. Truth does not always generate liberty. In fact, it can at times be so painful to the point that one chooses to deny or ignore it. To stay in the comfort of lies can feel much better than to be tortured by the light of truth. Plato's allegory of the cave well illustrates how people can perceive truth as a burden or even a threat. If it is so, would one act in accordance with the truth that one perceives or shall one consider the cost that one might pay before acting? To betray the Truth and to act against one's conscience, a person is likely to be imprisoned by the feeling of guilt – with or without one's awareness.

Moreover, since the incomplete leaves one restless, one might long for truth only for the sake of peace and wholeness. Thus, given the development of technology and science, many people tend to trust and rely merely on scientific truth - the knowledge of the mind, taking it to be the only source of true knowledge, whereas there are many types of knowledge that cannot be proven by evidence or experiment alone. It also seems easier for one to obtain head knowledge by spending time on studying and researching. The knowledge of the heart, in contrast, requires one to ponder and live it. It might even be the kind of knowledge that one just "knows," without being able to explain how one knows what one knows. It is not the kind of knowledge that can be proven and validated by facts and evidence either, but is sometimes perceived as

mystical intuition or "personal revelation". The knowledge of the body, on the other hand, is the knowledge that is generated from body memory that we can find in many athletes who can perfectly perform difficult movements. Although they might not be able to explain how they do it, their knowledge of the body is not invalidated because of that. There are even more types of knowledge that people have not discovered yet, but all these kinds of knowledge have their own place in contributing to the greater understanding of human beings - from which genuine truth can be obtained. To forsake any of them is to frustrate the longing for the missing truth.

From the depths of silence, however, one would not be easily satisfied by earthly truth to be revealed in the realms of reason, of senses, and of emotion. One longs for something more than the visible and the finite. One looks beyond and sails further into the land of mystery that cannot be seen through the eyes of the flesh but through faith – one descends to the realm of the infinite. There, one finds one's soulmate – the One – through whom the greater truth is revealed. By way of intimacy with the One, a person encounters a different type of knowledge that one cannot perceive by the power of the intellect nor explain by the cleverness of reason. These I call religious experiences. However, for those who believe in the absolute power of reason, one may wish to argue whether religious experiences or faith is a kind of knowledge. If one is going to use Gettier's justified true belief (JTB)[3] to judge, one would doubt the authenticity of faith. JTB model is a helpful outline; nevertheless, it is not an absolute standard – a "one-size-fits-all" model that can adequately define knowledge or perfectly determine the authenticity of knowledge.

[3]Gettier's justified true belief (JTB) is a traditional analysis of knowledge. If a belief can prove to be true with good reasons and well justification, that belief is considered as knowledge.

There are certain beliefs that can satisfy JTB's criteria but cannot be considered true knowledge and there is genuine knowledge that does not meet its criteria. Religious belief belongs to the latter. It is not a kind of knowledge justified by reason nor achieved by effort in learning but through the depth of relationship and intimacy with the One. In addition, it is not the kind of knowledge that is reserved only for the elite or the intelligent but is open to anyone who will allow oneself to be sunk in the ocean of mystery and be embraced in the light and wisdom of the One. In this process of encounter, one cannot rely on oneself but wait for the knowledge to be revealed and unveiled.

The Missing Identity

In searching for Truth, one is not merely searching for the reality from "without" but also the reality from "within" – one asks the question Who am I? What makes me … "me"?

When I was a child, I was not troubled so much by these questions. I was satisfied with answers like, "I am a child of Mr. A and Mrs. B, I am a student, I am a Catholic, I am Vietnamese, etc. Yet, when I grew a little bit older, I started to wonder what if I change my religion, my nationality, my career, my living environment…Would that change my identity as well? Would that mean that I am no longer "me"? If this identity of mine fluctuates and varies, it would seem impossible for me to establish any solid ground to anchor myself. And that thought irritated me.

Even though uncertainty is a very common experience that humankind shares, it is not an experience that leaves one at ease. I think Descartes can understand quite well this feeling of restlessness that uncertainty brings up. For him, everything has the potential of being an illusion, except for the *Cogito* that he arrives at – "I think, therefore I am." But I might take that

challenge further to the point that if everything is capable of deception, the thought that "I think, therefore I am" might submit itself to the same risk. In other words, the act of thinking is not self-evident. Descartes, perhaps, might wish to wonder if his claim of the Cogito is made in a dream or in real life. In describing this fluctuating condition, Heraclitus put it in a different direction, focusing more on the changing nature of the universe rather than its potential of deception. He insisted that the universe, including human beings, is in constant flux. Everything is subjected to change. Therefore, "one cannot step into the same river twice." In this sense, it would be no surprise if one's identity is mutable and wavering. However, even though a human person and his identity can be changed, it is essential that one find a ground in which to root one's being - from which one's being can grow and manifest. That I refer to as the essence – the core of one's identity.

In terms of essence, Jean-Paul Sartre insisted that existence precedes essence and there is no pre-given human nature or intrinsic universal design for all human beings. It is the human person who is responsible for creating one's own identity and essence. Sartre, for sure, is not a fan of predestiny. Instead of offering one's fate to be willed by someone else, he preferred to hold it in his own hand, taking responsibility for his own life. He believed that one is free to "behave like a fool or a machine" and no authority can impose any moral guideline or code upon another. Rather, such is left to the individual moral agent who exercises one's own freedom in defining and shaping one's own life. However, this freedom does not seem to be a good thing. It is experienced as "an anguish of freedom", according to Sartre himself. This anguish summons the image of a child abandoned by its creator, living and walking its earthly journey alone. Is it true, I asked myself many times?

Wandering with the thought, I looked at the plants on the balcony. While enjoying the beautiful greenery and admiring the intricate design of a leaf's veins, I wondered if a plant without a seed can exist and thrive. And having no essence, from which base is one going to create one's own? Can one create something out of nothing? I think that is hardly the case unless one is the Creator, i.e. the First Cause. Hence, instead of nothingness, I tend to perceive human essence as seeds given to each one of us – a quality that is inseparable from our existence.

Human essence might not appear fully as how it is supposed to be, yet it does not mean that we are born with no essence. These seeds carry within themselves the potential to be manifested along the journey of seeking for the true Self. Yet, one might argue that a seed has no freedom to choose where it is planted. If one's essence is perceived as a seed, does it indicate that the person has no freedom from the beginning? I shall reply that it is true that a seed cannot choose where to grow, yet this does not mean a seed has no choice to will its life. It can will to either accept the given and make the most out of it or reject and give it up. In the same manner, one is free to either embrace or reject these gifts of the essence by making choices in life. Being born from the heart of the intellect, the will does not limit itself to the finite, limited, and particular good. Its object is the Good-lacking-in-nothing. Under the act of the will, one is free to choose what is good for oneself. And this good, subjectively formed in the intellect, however, appears to be an impediment to the search for the greatest Good pursued by the will. On the other hand, the freedom, lying at the heart of the will, can grant one with decision-making power to achieve one's subjective good but not the greatest Good. One can, for example, decide to stop living in a toxic environment or stop associating with toxic

relationships that prevent one from living one's true identity. One, therefore, is still free to design one's own life.

Furthermore, in growing a tree, besides watering and fertilizing, trimming is an essential task that keeps the tree healthy and makes sure that it would bear fruit abundantly. By the act of trimming unhealthy branches, water and nutrition is not wasted but directed to healthy ones. In the same manner, one also needs to be trimmed so that one is in a good state to develop one's essence. Yet, how does one determine what needs to be kept and what needs to be trimmed in oneself? While the essence acts as the root of one's being hidden under the soil, identity is the manifestation of the essence visualized through the shapes and components of a tree. However, as I discussed above, the key elements of one's identity are not biological characteristics and external properties but an internal force that roots itself from the essence – that I call the Self.

In terms of the Self, it is usually divided into two types – the false Self and the true Self. The false Self, also known as the idealized Self or the Ego, is the identity that one thinks one is, being mentally and socially constructed through interaction with living environments. In Buddhist teachings of the Anatta, the Ego is the imaginary Self characterized as one's false belief about who one is. It is the root of selfishness, distorted attachment, pride, egoism, and so forth. One who indulges the Ego is also tempted to indulge pride, the root of all evil. The false Self is what needs to be trimmed.

In Vietnamese, pride is also translated as *lòng tự ái* which means "the love for oneself." Instead of a healthy love for oneself, *lòng tự ái* is more about narcissism rooted in the illusion that one is the best. When ruled by *lòng tự ái*, one easily gets upset whenever people say or do something that does not go with one's wishes. We talk about pride and the

Ego as twins, being inseparable and supporting the growth of one another. The greater the Ego, the higher the pride. And sadly, one who is blinded by pride will soon forget from whom all things spring forth. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna reminded Arjuna of this very truth, "I am the source of all; from Me, everything flows. Therefore, the wise worship Me with unchanging devotion…. I am the beginning and the life, and I am the end of them all."[4] Those who make themselves the center of living and deny the role of the One let the fire of pride take control of themselves and will sooner or later be consumed by the same fire that they set. The destruction of pride, moreover, does not stop at hiding one from its true Self. It also prevents one from growing. If one finds oneself as the best, one has no wish to learn new things. If one is adequate, one refuses to long for the missing. Pride, in this sense, brings about the death of the being. And unfortunately, once toxified by the venom of pride, the person is no longer able to realize its destructive side, "…misled by pride, thou wilt not listen, then indeed thou shalt be lost…."[5]

And yet, pride is not the only problem of the false Self. There is another thing generated from the false Self that destroys the being even more – the masking. On the one hand, the Ego, because of pride, loves to be pleased. Masking, on the other hand, strives to please people so that one is loved and accepted. Yet the one whom the Ego desires to please the most is itself. For the sake of respect and approval, the pseudo self is urged to mask oneself with an identity that is favored by people – a devoted Christian, a caring friend, a

[4]Shri Purohit Swami (trans.), "The Bhagavad Gita," *Holy Books*, accessed January 28, 2023, https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Bhagavad-Gita-Translation-by-Shri-Purohit-Swami.pdf, 27-28.

[5]"The Bhagavad Gita," 50.

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friendly priest, a dedicated sister, and so forth. In accordance with one's wishes, the false Self creates a collection of masks that one can put on in varied contexts. Living a life that is no different from a "fashion show" where people make an effort to be special and standout from the crowd. Sadly, though the false self might seem to achieve what it desires, it struggles, at the same time, with the restlessness of living a fake life. One is burnt out to be "on stage" most of the time, putting on someone else's face but not one's own. The enjoyment of praise, admiration, and flattery will soon become tiresome and meaningless. Once the person starts masking oneself, one finds an obligation to put on a mask whenever people are watching. One becomes imprisoned in one's own masks.

The mask, from a quick glance, is not bad and evil. They can be beautiful masks associated with virtues and characteristics that human beings pursue. Some might ask what is wrong with these beautiful masks if they help one to become a virtuous person. I then reply, there is a difference between one who tries to practice virtues and one who masks oneself as a virtuous person. Motivation distinguishes the two. While the former is driven by a true love of virtues, the latter is triggered by the desire to be loved and accepted. More importantly, the problem with masking lies in the authenticity that it violates - one claims something that is not part of one's reality. Wearing masks, in this sense, is lying and betraying one's being. And I wonder if there is any experience as agonizing as the pain caused by self-deception and self-betrayal. Of the many people one can lie to and betray, it is oneself that one would want to lie to and betray last. Regardless of its fancy appearance, masking is an excruciating experience for any human person. The longer one puts it on, the more painful it is to remove the mask.

While reflecting on the Self, I suddenly thought about death. I wonder how long one's life might be to play around with vanity, fame, and the like. If one day death comes as a surprise, would one regret the past of wasting time to live a fake life? And because of this, would the "I" of the present hate the "I" of the past, stirring up one's peace with a sense of self-hatred and resentment? Perhaps, one who is wearing a mask once tried to live a life in one's bare skin. Unfortunately, one quickly learned that people did not welcome and even rejected this "true color". This painful experience remained and became sealed in the phantom of the Ego, establishing a whole lot of defense mechanisms and masks collection for the sake of survival. In this light, the Ego is not always one's enemy. It is thanks to the Ego that one survives. For survival, it triggers the defense mechanism to protect us from the painful reality that one, at that point, cannot accept yet. However, in order to protect us from a truth that we cannot accept, it consequently also deceives us a lot.

On the one hand, one cannot pursue an ethical life and be happy being a liar, not only to others but especially to oneself. To live such a deceitful life, one prevents oneself from being loved as who one is and achieving true happiness. On the other hand, the false Self or the Ego can be one's friend if one can eventually detach from its illusion. Lord Krishna said, "to him who has conquered his lower nature by Its help, the Self is a friend, but to him who has not done so, It is an enemy."[6] Let us hope that there will be a time that the Ego renounces the stage and allows the true Self to emerge and guide the person.

The true Self, from first sight, is the opposite of the false Self. While the false Self appears as strong, the true Self is a vulnerable Self, hiding its true beauty behind tenderness and fragility. Yet, vulnerability is not a sign of weakness but

[6]"The Bhagavad Gita," 17.

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courage. It is only with the grace of courage that one exposes one's vulnerability to other beings. With love and resilience, the true Self will grow to its fullest capacity to be able to generate authenticity and wisdom to direct one's life. This true Self, in the teachings of Buddha, is the "well-subdued" self - "the lord of the self" that only a few can find[7]. This victory over the false Self is achieved by renouncing self-centered desires that make one selfish, arrogant, biased, proud, and ill-willed. The realization of the true Self cannot be attained unless one is able to overcome attachment to pleasure and power.

Where can we start, one might ask? For me, I believe in the statement that every change starts with awareness. Awareness can be achieved either by listening to the wisdom of other people or by self-reflection. To achieve self-awareness, Hinduism teaches one to pay attention to oneself in the act of meditation through the spiritual wisdom of yoga, spending time to reflect and examine one's life. Sharing the same thought, Socrates also emphasized the importance of reflection for the growth of the human being, "life without reflection is not worth living". Among the two, self-awareness is essential for change to happen. In many cases, words of wisdom and enlightenment do not work. If one cannot be aware of the masks that one is wearing, one finds no need to remove them. However, if one allows the light of reflection to guide oneself, one is able to experience a moment of awakening. One then has a good starting point for transformation.

Yet, for one who has been through the painful experience of being rejected to remain resiliently wearing one's bare skin, it is not an easy thing to do. However, may one find consolation in what Lord Shri Krishna said to Arjuna:

[7]E.A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New York: The New American Library, 1995), 60.

"Those external relations which bring cold and heat, pain and happiness, they come and go; they are not permanent. Endure them bravely…. be steady in truth, free from worldly anxieties and centered in the Self."[8] Trials will come and go; they are not there forever. And for those who manage to walk through it, they grow and thrive beautifully as plants after the rain. Injuries and damages are inevitable but by looking at one's scars, one knows how courageous one is in battle. Slowly walking through this tunnel of darkness, one will realize, "the wound is the place where the Light enters."[9] While earthly things can be discouraging, one is encouraged to keep one's gaze not only to the Self but to the One whom one loves and from whom one may draw strength.

To live an authentic life does not always equate with a joyful and pleasant life. It is always easier to wear masks. We can observe this phenomenon in social media platforms. In the cyber world, one can create any kind of identity that one believes will be well-accepted. One can slowly get addicted to virtual living, perhaps to the point when one cannot anymore distinguish between what is real and what is fake. Consequently, one later forsakes one's "real skin". Having no wish to leave "the stage" where one is the lead act, one becomes hooked to people's attention, admiration, love, applause, etc. _ things that one seems to lack when simply being one's true self. Moreover, a world full of liars would not make it easy for those who love truth and want to live truly. It is an ongoing battle and one can foresee its fierceness. In facing both the temptation of an easy life and the challenge of a true life, one might still doubt if it is possible to fight for an authentic life.

[8]"The Bhagavad Gita," 8-10.

[9]This is a statement made by Rumi - an 13th-century Persian poet.

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Nonetheless, as Rumi said, "You are not a drop in the ocean; you are the entire ocean in a drop". The human essence is not something that can be destroyed by all these forces. Its reality is shared in the living of the One – the Divine. Therefore, as long as one does not cease seeking for one's true Self, there will be a time that one can find the way to the ocean where one encounters one's finest essence as the ultimate identity of one's being –the reality – the Atman. And even if one cannot wait until one meets one's reality, one soon realizes that one is already there, at least by one's desire and hope to be there.

In living an authentic life, one might recognize that there is a common point shared by authenticity, humility, and wisdom, springing forth from the act of knowing oneself. It is the wise self who knows who one is, achieving a proper proposition of the human condition. By accepting both light and darkness in oneself, one perceives oneself as neither superior nor inferior to others. Similarly, humility is to know oneself and be grateful for the gifts one has been given. And how can one know oneself without living authentically? The one who lives truly and sincerely, wearing no mask, suffering no vanity, practices wisdom par excellence. Max Scheller used to associate humility as a virtue of the rich; whereas, pride belongs to the poor. As soon as one is aware of one's non-deserving condition, one is then given all that there is. Adoring the depth of humility, one touches the heart of the Self and allows it to enlighten and enrich the being. Furthermore, humility is not to be found merely in gratitude for all that has-been-given but also in acceptance of all that has-not-been-given that makes one remain imperfect and limited. In facing one's limitations and vulnerabilities, one keeps longing for the more, the missing, inspiring a movement of boldness, of courage.

Last but not least, God created humankind among other beings. To be born and to exist is to be in a relationship, firstly with ourselves, our parents, relatives, then friends, the environment, and other creatures that this universe embraces. We are more or less interconnected and it is beyond our will to choose to be in a relationship or not. Hence, one's identity is not defined independently by self-awareness but in relation to others. As the concept of Ubuntu puts it, "a person is a person through other persons". Though self-awareness is found in the very structure of the soul, this knowledge is best brought out by knowing other beings. In the search for the "I" or one's "whoness," the intellect, as the mirror of things, reflects its act and reality, seeing itself in others. On the one hand, this knowledge of the "I" is enhanced through the free act of will, perceiving itself as the cause of whatever might result from its autonomy, for it is one's will through which the person claims responsibility for the "I". On the other hand, one cannot perceive the wholeness of the "I" outside the context of "the others," the "we." In seeking for one's identity, therefore, one is also seeking for the "wholeness" of the "we" – the belonging. In this light, for one to live truthfully, one will need support from the community to see the "I" within "the others." Moreover, it is also important that the person feels safe to live an authentic life by knowing that one is not judged and condemned for being one's true self but instead, encouraged to actualize one's potentials and overcome given shortcomings. In seeking for our identity – our whoness, let us accompany one other, becoming light and inspiration for others through our authentic life.

Conclusion

One who longs for the missing usually struggles with a state of restlessness, desiring something more than what is given and

available. Yet, this restlessness need not be an obstruction for one to enjoy and appreciate the gift of life. As the saying goes, "you cannot wait until life isn't hard anymore before you decide to be happy." Neither shall I wait until I feel complete inside to live fully. Happiness is something that I decide to do for myself. Happiness is not generated only if wholeness is achieved. To live fully without abandoning my longing for the missing is a way that I express my gratitude towards life and practice the virtue of humility towards the mysteries hidden in the missing. At the end of the day, regardless of how much one possesses in life, one never ceases to be a being of longing. This feeling of restlessness would never cease until "it rests in Thee."

I would like to end my paper with a statement made by one of my philosophy professors and he said: "You will forget what you learn and you learn so that you can forget." There is something interesting and profound in what he said. It is easy to realize that one's memory will fade as time goes by. However, when I thought of the second part of his statement, I could not understand what he meant. While wandering with the thought, I was reminded of the story of a guru who asked his disciple to go to the river to take the water and fill some vases in the house. However, the guru gave the disciple a basket with holes in it. Thus, the water could not be kept in the basket but leaked out. By the time the disciple reached the house, the water was all gone. The disciple got angry at his master, being asked to do a non-sense thing. It was a waste of time and energy, thought the disciple. Later, the guru said that what the disciple did was not useless at all. Thanks to what he did, the dirty basket now became clean. The water that leaked through the holes also brought with it the dirt. And thanks to the leaked water, sideroad flowers now bloomed beautifully. The disciple who focused too much on his work and anger could not see this until the guru showed him.

But then, one might ask, so what is the connection between the story and what my professor said? The dirty basket with holes is similar to the mind's limited capacity in perceiving reality. The mind is covered with dirt because of the ignorance and stubbornness that one refuses to let go of. As the water cleans the dirty basket, thanks to these holes, knowledge would act in the same way to purify one's mind. And that's the reason why one learns so that one can forget. Let us allow the power of knowledge and the flow of time to wipe away our stubbornness and the foolishness of the old days that clogs up our minds. Then, there will be spaces for new wisdom to emerge.

At the end of my reflection, I was tempted to ask the last question: Where did all this longing come from? I hesitated to dig any further into the nature of my longing. And I thought it might not be a good idea to do so in a rush. Hence, to respect the profound truth that the mind fails to capture and words fail to express, I might just dwell in it and let my longing for the missing grow as it wishes. And somewhere, a whisper keeps echoing, "…go to the limits of your longing…embody me…."[10]

In awe, once again, I am embraced by silence.

[10]*Go to the Limits of Your Longing* is a poem written by Rainer Maria Rike – a Bohemian-Australian poet and novelist.

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