

**Teach yourself about yourself:**

**Using storytelling to re-contextualize self-actualization**

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## Prologue

Originally I thought if I could finish my first college degree as an engineering technician, then I would be able to move on with my life and pursue a career in that field, not having to worry about school anymore.

I was wrong. Not only was I rejected in my first interview with the degree, but also how the sense of accomplishment in completing the degree quickly faded away. And the two in succession made me reevaluate my original assumption of what I believed I wanted to do with my life. Starting a search for trying to understand what was that which I wanted to do.

And as I continued searching, I found opportunities and believed they were each the one goal that would have helped me finally settle on what I wanted to do with my life . Like earning an associate's degree in engineering, qualifying to transfer to a university, or getting interviews for jobs using my degrees. Thinking that each of these goals were steps towards the answer, ones that would finally allow me to stop searching. And was proven wrong each time, where completing each goal again satisfied my search, but for a brief moment. And with the sense of accomplishment being dulled, the anxiety in wondering if this really is where the search should stop would always set in.

Which has led me to this project where I have rephrased this search into the research question that I will explore within this document: How humanity affects art and vice versa - how does analyzing storytelling recontextualize the role of students in self-actualization?

Starting back in public school, I had no idea on how to even start my search and through higher education I've found challenges to overcome that have inched me closer to an answer. But while staying within the context of a student of engineering I have been unable to completely satisfy my search. Within the decision of studying it, I have found pieces that help me begin to understand what I want to

do. And I have also had opportunities to peek into other disciplines in animation and teaching and find more pieces that have helped in understanding what I want to do. With being a student of animation through hobbies and a student of teaching through experience, neither of which I had to study for in a classroom. I have found that overcoming challenges is common between all three.

And so to better capture an understanding of that which I am searching for, I have decided that examining the role of a student in a general sense is required. And having been fortunate enough to share stories with other students, I have found commonalities in how challenge is inevitable when attempting to come up with an answer to my original search. And through hearing others share their experiences like we were sharing stories at a campfire, I've recognized how that same challenge I face can look different for another in their attempt to use higher education as a step towards their own goals.

Which is why I will approach the answer to the research question by examining a theme of inheriting observations: like the process of a teacher passing down information to a student who then decides on what to do with it. As if in a relay race: a baton is passed through the hands of its contestants and how running against the resistance a contestant experiences is analogous to the challenges. Where

From there I have broken down my analysis into three parts: what is the source of this inheritance as the self, how does the process of inheriting observations work with stories and what happens after that inheritance occurs in my experience with schoolwork. Keeping in mind that they are all equally important to understanding the research question, while also staying as intros to how I've come to understand their respective topics.

Starting with observations: an overview of how information is passed within the physical sciences will be covered and applied to later sections of this document, setting up the process of citing and publishing information explains how the passing of information is analogous to passing a baton during a relay race. And use that analogy to explore how self-actualization could occur throughout the document.

Next with the source, the student will be examined from the Kierkegaardian concept of the self. From there I analyzed what he believes regulates the self and how that plays a part in the self looking for observations to inherit. Then I used Heidegger's explanation of Phenomenology as a method to organize the nature of the self, inheriting observations of others.

Then with the process, I used storytelling to explain how phenomenology can teach a self about itself. And do so by focusing on Campbell's Monomyth, which breaks storytelling down into a methodology that describes how myth-like figures become a self-hero and work to aid the world that they come from. And observe how experiencing a story that has elements from the self-hero plays a part in inheriting observations from an author to their audience.

And finally address what happens after an inheritance of observations and stories occurs as I return to the original search for the missing component within my own experiences, this time with a reworked understanding of what the student gets out of choosing to pursue education by reconnecting with that which I have come to understand about myself through inheriting the observations of others.

Working as an elaborated outline, this document will only provide a general examination of each topic. With each separately offering insight into the topics covered that could be elaborated upon at a future date, and in tandem offer an example of what the answer to the original question could look like - but not necessarily what the answer is.

## The Information

### The quote

If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants. (Chen, 2013, p.163)

In Chaomei Chen's *Mapping Scientific Frontiers The Quest for Knowledge Visualization*, this quote has been used as an understanding for how progress is achieved through the physical sciences: equating being able to see far from being carried on high from the giant's giant size to being able to look at previous publications and use them as citations in another work.

In this way, the publication is an observation that someone had successfully published while the citations are someone else inheriting the information gained from the original publication. And like in a relay race, the information is the baton and the process of publishing and citing this information is the passing of the baton.

Chen (2013) then calls attention to Derek Price's urn model of Lotka's Law, and its ability to characterize scholarship in a single person as a continuity of successful publications and citations that lead to further success in new publications and calling of old citations.

"Derek Price illustrated the nature of scholarship with the following urn model (Price 1976). To play the game, we need a bag, or an urn, and two types of balls labeled "S" for success or "F" for failure. The player's performance in the game is expected to track the performance of a scholar. The scholar must publish on paper to start the game. Whenever he draws an "F", the game is over. There are two balls at the beginning of the one "S" and the other "F". The odd is 50-50 on the first draw. If he draws an "S", this ball plus another "S" ball will be put in the bag and the scholar can make another draw. The odds improve with each round of success." (Chen, 2013 p,164)

These odds being linked to that one scholar in particular, illuminates how the odds at success in publication or having an observation increase proportionally with the amount of success in publication

the individual has achieved. Which will be useful as I further discuss how the aforementioned baton-pass is relevant to a student. But also keep in mind that a purpose to work towards new publications is to set up for those same new publications to one day become old citations to be inherited by something new in their discipline.

## The Self

### The definition

Based in his Christian beliefs, Kierkegaard equates a human being to the synthesis of the finite and the infinite. Originally derived from the belief in an afterlife and the transition that delivers the former to the later, his definition is dependent on the idea of a single lifetime being a part of something greater than itself while still being itself. Understood as an existence consisting of the life we lead and the legacy we leave behind, this synthesis is a paradox that is concerned about both at the same time. And yet this is not the self, just the kernel from which the self is derived from. That kernel being composed of the finite, the infinite and the synthesis between the two - all as separate entities that relate to each other. The self is what is regulating those relations, and it itself is a relation between any and all three of its components.

### The doubt

And being an established relation, relating itself to itself, the self relates to another of itself: another self that has the same claim to exist as the self (Kierkegaard, 2000b). The possibilities and opportunities available to both are the same, what separates them is the decisions made and experiences gained to get to the present version of the self. With their outcomes being what decides the self that survives over all the others that did not if circumstances had been different.

Relating back to the student, the opportunities they do or not take: classes, extracurriculars or even job offers are often what helps form the self that the student find themselves being while offering a moment of pause to wonder how different that self would have been if even one of those opportunities been different.

And in comparing the self to its other possibilities, it is testing whether or not the self that survives is in equilibrium with that which it wants in either its present or its future. And with any result being off balance the self is struck with what is known as despair, a misrelation or flaw in the self, proportional to how far off it is from what it wants.

Being in despair over not being able to give itself what it wants, the self is not despairing over not having that something but actually is despairing over itself.

For example, when the ambitious man whose slogan is "Either Caesar or nothing" does not get to be Caesar, he despairs over it. But this also means something else: precisely because he did not get to be Caesar, he now cannot bear to be himself. This self, which, if it had become Caesar, would have been in seventh heaven ... , this self is now totally intolerable to him. (Kierkegaard, 2000b, p. 355)

The point of the test is to gauge how far away the self is from it, and this man is now at the farthest point away from equilibrium resulting in his intolerance of himself. And in that intolerance is a terrible tragedy: by not being the self that could achieve its desires the man will spiral further into his despair with each reminder of his incompetence driving that intolerance further, like a hammer that drives a nail, embedding it into himself and him being unable to escape it - and himself.

And in its definition is a second paradox, where despair is an ailment of the self and its cure at the same time.

The self wants to arrive at equilibrium with itself; despair therefore, is a guide that gives the self something to work towards - the possibility of possibilities. And as long as that possibility exists, the self can continue attempting to reach what it believes equilibrium is. In our Caesar example, the man concedes his attempt at becoming Caesar and there destroys that possibility of possibilities which results in the worst case of despair in which possibility to escape does not exist.



In this way, the baton analogy emerges in a form that this document seeks to understand. Starting from the self and its possibilities, each test is assessing the trajectory the life a self leads and as despair points that self into a certain direction that self must acknowledge the possible selves in front of them and choose which one to pass the baton off to. While also recalling that like the urn model and publication: the results of these tests are providing a similar function to be called back upon as the self in future tests as just like citations, while setting up for the idea of how a success rate in these tests might occur the more often they occur.

So to continue working towards equilibrium the self must learn to cope with the ailment of despair while also using it as a guide when relating the self to itself. Then to zoom out, how the self interacts with other selves can be examined: particularly how the self can benefit in its despair by relating to others.

## The method

Wanting to investigate what it means to be a being, Heidegger sets up the concept of Dasein or the human's being to distinguish it from other types of being to single it out and study it further:

Dasein is a being that does not simply concur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of Dasein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being... (Heidegger, 1927/2010, p.11)

And by recognizing this concern as the concept of despair in my interpretation of his text, I am asserting that the concept of the self as previously described in this document is a close match the constitutive being Dasein needs to have. Which establishes a relationship between the self and Dasein. With Dasein and the self as it relates to the finite looking into the nature of being on an individual level

where Dasein and the self as it relates to the infinite are being used to look at the nature of being in regards to a collection of selves.

To study Dasein further, Heidegger introduced the concept of phenomenology into his work as he studied the being of being. Describing it as a method that allows for a subject matter to illuminate parts of itself from within itself (Heidegger, 1927/2010). Like a dim candle being held aloft against a space devoid of light when nothing is understood, but each subsequent discovery exists in union with its predecessors which start to fill the space, reflecting an understanding of the subject. And as the purpose of being is another subject to study, with phenomenology its understanding is concealed and waiting to be discovered.

Going back to despair testing for equilibrium, how does it know what to test for? Now with phenomenology: it's waving that candle around in the beginning and with each subsequent test the luminance improves leading to a better understanding of the self which can then be used for future tests in equilibrium. In this way, an understanding of the self as it relates to the finite using despair as a guide to work toward better understanding what the self wants in the first paradox by using the second is established.

Calling back to the baton and the urn model: this could be an exploration into how continually testing for equilibrium through phenomenology reveals a path to figuring out what the self wants. And with the urn model: as a scholar continues in their field with a better chance of publishing the longer they stay there, a self might be able to have a better chance of understanding itself the longer they stay on the path revealed to them.

Relating back to the student, this is what is truly happening when they decide to take on opportunities that allow them to reveal the nature of their individual beings to themselves through committing to experiences and allows them to break through their preconceived limits as they decide to continue towards their respective paths.

And while this is key in understanding the self as the individual, it is a problem when understanding Dasein on a larger scale:

True, Dasein is ontically not only what is near or even nearest - we ourselves are it, each of us. Nevertheless, or precisely for this reason, it is ontologically what is farthest. True, it belongs to its most proper being to have an understanding of being and to sustain a certain interpretation of it. But this does not all mean that the most readily available pre-ontological interpretation of its own being could be adopted as an adequate guideline...(Heidegger 1927/2010, p.15)

Pointing out that these individual interpretations based on ontological, or existential reflections, which I am equating to despair, are what lead each of us toward our respective interpretations of equilibrium. Which introduces a third paradox: since understanding these paths to equilibrium lies within the tests administered by the self as an individual, it is easy to understand one's path as the individual and at the same time concede that it is difficult to understand another self's as their despair and the opportunities that develop it are different from the individual's.

And so with this gap in understanding, how does the interaction between the individual and others work? Going back to phenomenology revealing the self from within itself, the same action can occur as an individual reveals its self from within through retellings of past experiences with others. The individual doing the retelling has at this point already gone through the despair and tests from the experience but by sharing it with another, they might be able to offer assistance to the other if the despair of the other shares similarities to the reteller's when the experience took place.

Recontextualizing the baton analogy into the form I will focus on, this is how the infinite interacts with being a self: where the legacy an individual can leave is able to live on through the life that another leads. Only when despair lines up between individuals, can sharing an experience lead to a sync between two finite individuals and their respective despairs. The former individual has already done the hard

work of getting through their experience and has proof of doing so through understanding their path.

Meanwhile the latter has yet to do so; but by going through an experience and recalling the similarities within the former's retelling, the latter can come to an understanding of the former's despair.

Establishing the exception where it is appropriate to use the interpretations of others, for when the despair of two separate individuals align: the experience of the former is another self that can be related to only because that specific iteration of despair came up with a path to equilibrium that could potentially help the latter if they are attempting to go in the same direction.

## Intermission

I would like to cover how storytelling can be a tool that explores the third paradox, but will only be doing so in the document's current iteration through an outline that covers topics to be elaborated on in future iterations.

## The price

1. [The price of actualization is experience and its taxing on a person but the reward is being able to learn more about the self]
2. [Nietzsche's warning for the ill prepared - the minotaur of consciousness: with his thoughts on independence being a privilege, Nietzsche cautions anyone who would try to attempt to earn it should keep vigilant of their self-preservation using an allusion to a minotaur waiting within a labyrinth to be what awaits those that don't (Nietzsche 1886/2000)]
3. [relating his idea of independence to mine of self-actualization this metaphorical minotaur also stands in the way of determining what the self wants]
4. [How to get the idea to search for what the self wants into others - and within the prologue to *Thus spoke zarathustra*, Nietzsche provides an example of how simply offering that search to others leads to underwhelming effect resulting in the dialogue "But I need living companions, who will follow me because they want to follow themselves - and to the place where I will (Nietzsche 1883/2019, p.15)"]

## The preparation

1. [In the decision to seek out what the self wants ]

2. [In that preparation lies the start of a journey(call or refusal to adventure - take on challenges or play it safe and nothing changes)]
3. [How does one decide to take the call - especially if they have no idea what lies ahead of them in their journey to get there?

By faith I do not renounce anything: on the contrary, by faith I receive everything exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains. It takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity, but this I do gain and in all eternity can never renounce - it is a self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith (Kierkegaard, 2000a, p. 98)

Again using Kierkegaard in a secular way, his idea of the courage of faith is useful in offering one way the decision is made. Faith can be seen as the idea that even knowing that a minotaur of consciousness awaits someone while they are deciding on taking the call and going out to face it anyway.]

4. [A tool to get there is story and specifically ones that deal with protagonist's that face a similar obstacle during their quest]

## The Story

### The symbols

1. [Why the minotaur - Equivalencies between the monster that lurks within thebes and the despair to what the self wants - all of these stories need an obstacle/antagonist. In Greek myth the minotaur was hidden within a labyrinth in Crete due to the shame of the king and queen and only through a death in how they were dealing with the situation before and a birth in the introduction of an outsider into the royal problem in Theseus was the problem dealt with. Campbell uses the myth to examine what the 'death of the old, birth of the new' concept could look like in an external context and proceeds to explore what that concept could look like in the internal(Campbell 2008). Where the idea of monsters can be shorthand for what lies in the unknown(Battistini 2002) Campbell looks at how confronting our local constraints are a contemporary version of facing monsters. ]
2. [Where does it live? Every story needs a setting: the labyrinth being iconography for self-reflection(Battistini 2002) calls back to Nietzsche's minotaur of consciousness(Nietzsche 1886) and how this is what awaits a potential hero when they decide between the call or refusal to adventure(Campbell 2008).]
3. [redefining [1] and [2] into the monster and its setting, it can also be seen through the lens of the second paradox: where despair is the monster awaiting the protagonist's arrival - giving the protagonist an opportunity to break past their limits]
4. [How having a clue on what lies in the unknown world relates back to the baton analogy and only in deciding to take a gamble on the journey and knowing that a minotaur-like object stands in the way of your success can the setting of self actualization be found. With a Merlin-type

figure guiding the protagonist through trials while also preparing them to take on the greatest trial that lies within.]

5. [What is a journey - Where narratives use journeys as a shorthand to represent discovery and initiation where a hero is expelled from their own land to venture through one that is unknown (Battistini 2002).]
6. [What's an ouroboros - intro to monomyth and cycles -looking at how death and rebirth occurs in the self when the minotaur is defeated resembles the alchemical process of refining substances(Battistini 2002). And establishing that cycle in a circle as an equivalency to storytelling as the monomyth is structured in such a way]

### The breakdown

1. [Specific type of story = Monomyth: Reduction of multiple stories from multiple cultures share a three act script through mythic figures becoming heroes through trials and leaving behind monuments that retell those trials.]
2. [Intro into Campbell: Myth vs Dream, Dream vs Myth, personalized vs not reflecting the difference between the self and the world. The subconscious and its golden seeds, guarded by minotaurs of consciousness.]
3. [Separation: calling to the seeds, that which is concealed by the self/protagonist wants to be discovered by venturing into the unknown world.]
4. [Initiation: escorted by a figure outside the self through the unknown, trials prepare the protagonist for the real difficulty. Birth of the Self-Hero through subjugation of the inner difficulties.]
5. [Return: completing the original quest, what is to be gained by the protagonist for succeeding in the journey? How does the world benefit?]



## The nuance

1. [Tackling the saying “a picture’s worth a thousand words” Foucault’s passage is helpful in having an idea of where those words come from in analyzing the context that went into the elements found with Las Meninas to create the painting and expanding that process into other works of media. But it also raises some concerns in the relationship between the words and the picture: with the paradox of the audience and king Philip IV with his wife, along with Foucault's comments on that paradox leading to the introduction and importance of the saying “show don’t tell” and how it interacts with the third paradox (Foucault 1966/1973).]
2. [Particularly within the relationship between language and painting, it can be expanded to the relationship between language and media. Using his final remarks on how the painting represents representation, the third paradox can be approached via storytelling. Other sections in this document have gone over aspects of the self and storytelling. And by exploring topics about the self and figuring out what it wants through the monomyth, not by stating the protagonist’s problems but by showing the trials that get them to a pivotal point where they confront their respective minotaur and come out the victor can a story offer a person a hint on how to go about their own journey of self-actualization.]
3. [But only as described in the third paradox: where the one exception to take on another’s guideline as one’s own is achieved through the story invoking a representation of representation.]
4. [Exploring phenomenon within reading, within *What we see when we read: A phenomenology with illustration* Mendelsund offers examples of how an audience can interact with a book and its effect on letting that audience experience an experience

When I read, my retirement from the phenomenal world is undertaken too quickly to notice. The world in front of me and the world "inside" me are not merely adjacent, but overlapping; superimposed. A book feels like the intersection of these two domains - or like a conduit; a bridge; a passage between them. (Mendelsund, 2014 p. 58)

Which shares similarities to Foucault's interpretation of how the audience is at the same time viewing and being the subject of the painting of Las Meninas. Being one way how overlapping the audience and the world inside of a work of media can establish an experience that might let the audience develop an exception to the third paradox.]

## The Schoolwork

### The School

1. [A single journey resembles the ouroboros, but what do multiple journeys look like: viewing the road to equilibrium(time) as journeys/experiences building upon themselves.]
2. [The degree being started because of the decision to experience higher education even though it had not been done in my family until my generation - separation]
3. [Being lucky enough to be around people older than me, peers and teachers where we shared stories about how we got to where we were at that time, preparing me for what lied in my future - initiation]
4. [As an end and a beginning, how the rejection at the interview completed the first quest while all the work I had done toward the degree set me up for a quick transition into a different degree path and got me ready for the next journey - return]
5. [conclusion: I'm at the end of my third associates and am in the process of finishing a portfolio that combines all the skills gained from every journey taken since beginning higher education. Am I ready for pursuits in this new direction? I don't know - but what I do know is that by following through, I'll get my answer.]

### The Work

1. [Returning to the initial technician degree and recontextualizing what was gained/experienced.]
2. [The nuance behind the journey is being present for the individual experiences and becoming the self-hero through being able to take on challenges that at one time I believed I would never be able to pull off.]

3. [Starting in public school - got a chance that led to dual enrollment. Once I got to higher education - thought doing the bare minimum was enough, too scared to take on more challenges and was pulled aside to consider doing so(refusal vs call to adventure) leading to being rejected in the interview.]
4. [Already proving I could handle the first set of challenges, I decided to take on the transfer into a university for engineering to keep on pushing and breaking current limits. But still having to deal with despair as I wanted to channel some of that effort into a different career path in a 'world' that was unknown to me.]
5. [With the end of that goal leading me to my accident and reaching a new rock bottom, the only way to go was up. Proving I could break my limits in the engineering 'world' I can at least try to use the lessons learned towards taking a new journey towards the new unknown in the game development world]
6. [And with the work done in this document, I set a new goal in working on creating a product that tells stories that help people learn more about themselves by exploring the third paradox.]

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