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Chosen Topic: 1. "He who learns but does not think is lost; he who thinks but does not learn is in danger." Confucius

Intro

Learning versus thinking – this dichotomy has been intriguing the humanity for ages. In the east, Confucius, the most famous representative of Oriental philosophy, emphasizes that one cannot survive without the other. Indeed, one concept sums up the teaching of Confucius – the idea of balance. Yet, false would be claims that balance is a matter of great significance only for the Oriental people. As early as Aristotle, Western way of thought has also quested for the Golden mean - reconciling the extremes. In this essay, I will pay attention to the historical influence on philosophical thought, analyze the extremes and why they should be reconciled, as well as present my ideas on how is it possible to balance the scales, when thinking and learning is at stake and how does it apply to the public decision making. In addition, I will employ a concept of Three Dons, as the stakeholders, due to the fact that these are individuals both affected by and affecting the society. **An open society is the only type of society reconciling the extremes and thus developing.**

Part 1: Societal Learning versus Individual Thinking

The issue in the thinking versus learning debate is the issue of an individual versus society one, as learning is a process of accumulating information, produced by others and more associated with following, while thinking refers to an independent and critical adaptation of previously accumulated information as well as production of own substantial material, critique and suggestions for development, associated with leading the field for oneself. In one extreme, the society is valued over an individual. In terms of Karl Popper, an Austrian philosopher and sociologist, in a closed society (totalitarian regimes mainly), it is in the interest of the state (or the ruling elite, to be more precise) to ensure the stability and continuity of their reign, which could be most effectively done by promoting pure scholasticism, or propaganda in modern words. By doing so (usually by employing censorship), the elite establishes a moral high ground, which creates every opportunity to stop an individual from thinking. Less independent thought means less critique and probably less opposition, and therefore – fewer chances for the government to be overthrown or changed. Sometimes, it could be perceived as a positive outcome – a lesser variety of opinions means less debating, which results in a more efficient decision making, because the truth presented by the rulers is seen as unquestionable one and therefore implemented quickly. On the other hand, the societies that are open to different opinions can develop more efficiently, because they do not halt in the process and constantly challenge the old truths, either verifying them once again or rejecting and creating new ones. According to Popper, the society cannot reach the one and only truth, as it is impossible, but it could come closer to this truth. Open society is the one to reconcile learning from the past with new thinking and accepting all characters equally. Please welcome – Don Quixote, Don Juan and Don Corleone.

Part 2: Don Quixote Lost in Conjunction

A background of censorship was established by the Church during the Middle Ages, who interpreted Bible directly, presenting the theocentric theory as seeing God as the foundations for public and private lives. Society was everything. Such a pressure, censorship and even inquisition trials to deal with heretics – independent thinkers, resulted in a complete backlash of the society forming Humanism. In the juncture of these epochs Don Quixote is born. Being a dualistic character – defender of the ideals, yet perceived as crazy, he is an idealistic student simply following the old ideals he was taught by the society – ideals of chivalry and knighthood. Yet, idealistically striving for a utopian society by fighting evil he fails to realize, that the evil he targets (more commonly known as the windmills) is irrelevant to the development of the society. Due to the lack of his independent analysis of status quo and his loyalty to old truths he seems peculiar and therefore is – in terms of Confucius - lost. Lost in the conjunction of epochs.

The problem presented by Confucius is a problem encountered by the individuals who cease to think and follow the thought of others. Yet, Don Quixote is a character who is in action – his deeds might be justified by the notion, that he at least puts effort to change the society. More commonly, people simply become a herd of sheep, in terms of Friedrich Nietzsche, the infamous philosopher of life. Their personal life is depersonalized and dehumanized, only romanticizing the identity of a good nationalist, forgetting his personality to benefit the national cause, identical to all other nationalists in the country. The herd mentality is once again beneficial for the totalitarian and Omni potential state as being easier to control. To take a different approach, philosophers have been talking about creating a Utopia – a paradise on Earth, for ages. Starting with Plato's republic, Augustine's comparison of Earthly and godly cities, going on with Renaissance thinkers – Thomas More "Utopia," Thomaso Campanello's "City of Sun" and Francis Bacon's search for the new Atlantis, the notable one is Karl Marx, the founder of Socialism, who believed that so far the philosophy has only tried to explain the world, but the mission is to change it. He has been promoting the value of egalitarian justice and equality, striving for the Socialist society. He took on an idealistically revolutionary cause and tried implementing his ideas practically. Even though he did not succeed himself, the others – mainly Bolsheviks in Russia and Maoists in China took on. The government there was following almost every step of their citizens. Emphasizing the role of the proletariat, the government has been encouraging to learn the general truths of Marxism but do not think for themselves. And when everyone is thinking alike, someone is definitely not thinking at all.

In trying to explain the mechanism by which life is depersonalized and institutionalized, a modern philosopher Michael Foucault employs the concept of panopticon – a prison in a shape of a circle, where every prisoner can be spectated from the center. The prisoner knows that he can always be spectated and is always watched by the state of the Big Brother. Having mentioned that, it's time to turn to the literature and see where an overvaluation of simple education without thinking might lead – let us examine the examples of dystopias by the Russian writer Zametyan in his book "We" or his more known contemporaries - George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley "One Brave World". All of these writers present a critique of modernity and go on to draw the world, where every aspect of private life is watched, majority of the daily pleasures are forbidden and even love is considered as negative. The purpose of the state here is continuity of power, and power alone, backed up by the brainwashing and "correct" education. Thus, a radical conclusion - the

characters of these books are lost in between the institutions and in the cruel socio-engineering, paying no attention to the private lives. In idea, the purpose of these authors was indeed cruelly satirical mockery of modernity and attention to technical science and trust for previously discovered truths by others, as opposed to the humanities, which encourage an individual to think independently. The characters of Zametyan, Orwell and Huxley are lost only due to their ancestors, who at some point have let others think, signed up to follow and learn the teachings of others, but not to think for themselves. Luckily, besides identifying the problem of herd mentality, Nietzsche in "Thus Spake Zarathustra" offers a solution – *das Übermensch*.

Part 3: Don Juan in Danger

Das Übermensch represents the other extreme in the debate – individual over the society. This concept of a superman empowers the will to power – individual's ability to step beyond "good and evil," break the moral chains enforced by the society and be the teacher for oneself. This individual is encouraged to think for oneself and be cynical – in doing so, one would realize, that "Gott ist tot" and the morality does not function as it should. The author goes on to claim, that the society cannot satisfy the needs of individual, but only limits his potential. Therefore, the prescription to the diseased morality is simple one – rise above the herd mentality and become *das Übermensch* – the superman. A perfect example of a superman breaking away from the moral rules of the society is the archetypical character of Don Juan. He is a materialist, who only pursues his bodily needs and pleasures. Following his will to power, he seeks to dominate the women – be in the position of power, because he enjoys power, satisfy them and seek satisfaction himself. Albert Camus, a famous existentialist, presents an analysis of this character. In the analysis it is emphasized that Don Juan is a traveller and an adventure seeker, as well as Sisyphus – he will never succeed to complete his quest to be happy. He can get a short term bodily satisfaction, but the long term happiness is impossible for him. Don Juan, however, has done a lot of thinking analyzing his experiences and is perfectly aware of the fact that happiness is impossible, thus, he ceases to falsely hope that women will satisfy him. Due to the lowered expectations, he can be in the position of power and happy. As Nietzsche notes further on, the society hates such a lawbreaker, yet – he is the creator. Such a character, however egoistic, might be beneficial for the society. Politically, being a liberal, a character like Don Juan questions the status quo and current values. If the values pass the test, they are verified once again and become even truer. If values fail – they are replaced by a new conception for the society. It is beneficial both ways. According to Nietzsche, a character like this "is incorrigible – if he is thrown out of his paradise, he will make an ideal of his hell." Yet, thinking without learning is dangerous. As a materialistic superman, but rather egoistic one, Don Juan thinks, but does not learn. It seems that countless duals and schemes which were plotted against him for his involvement with someone's sisters, daughters or wives have not taught Don Juan anything. He is in constant danger, but he trusts his luck. Talking about *das Übermensch* in general, the opposition from the institutions which were challenged by this lawbreaker and even jealousy from the masses put the individual character in danger. In opposition to Camus interpretation, Soren Kierkegaard's steps of moral development should be inspected. Kierkegaard claims, that Don Juan the Entertainer is only a mask shown to the people. Deeply inside, Don Juan is not a cynic, but rather a curious character caring about the world. Yet, he is depressed, because he feels suffering of his inability to reach happiness. Even though he suffers, he only rationalizes about his pain, without seeking explanation from the outside world. In this notion, thinking without learning is also dangerous as it might destroy one from the inside. A

character like Don Juan is both dangerous and in danger – dangerous to the moral norms, but in danger due to the backlash from the society.

Part 4: Don Corleone Learns to Think and Thinks to Learn

As noted previously, pursuing the extremes brings both benefits and harms. An idealist who learns and a materialist who thinks are doomed on their own. Why should they be reconciled? Either employing an Aristotelian notion of the golden mean in between two extremes, or an utilitarian comparison of costs versus benefits, only a direct contest in between the two can show the benefits. Comparing Don Quixote and Don Juan at a first glance, neither of them could seem more righteous than the other. Their living together could be ensured by making them sign the social contract – a concept developed by Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jack Rousseau. According to Hobbes, an individual natural state is war, due to the limited resources but unlimited needs. Hobbes steps in to state, that individuals have private interest to ensure the period of peace, as it is more productive and sustainable. Therefore, people come to societies and sign a social contract, giving up some of their natural rights to the body of Sovereign, to ensure private security. The social contract could encourage different characters living together. Their cooperation that could bring the scales to the balance, however, can only be ensured by putting those ideas to constant test in an open society. An open society, which ensures the equality of opportunity to express one's ideas. As Thomas Hobbes was combining the aggressive power represented by the sword and the legitimate smart power represented by the scepter in his Leviathan, let me combine Don Juan and Don Quixote into another dualistic character – Don Corleone, representing the modern world's trend of compromise, whatever the case.

Don Corleone's personality could be summed up by the quote of Mario Puzzo, who created this character. "I will make him an offer he cannot refuse" – is an idealistic but aggressive promise to achieve material benefits. Nicollo Machiavelli's, a political thinker and a diplomat from the Renaissance, analyzes cardinal and general Cesario Borgia, who could be seen as Don's pre-ancestor. Machiavelli is the first one to distinct morality from politics, and claim, that the purpose justifies the means. Same applies to the Godfather - having learned, that a cozy place in the society does not exist for him, a poor Italian immigrant, Don starts to think and improvise. His thinking leads him to motivation and a protest against the general society to create his own, private Utopia – a Family in a larger sense. Even though Don Corleone breaks social norms as the superman, he tries creating a utopia, like an idealist. Now if we allow him to rule, an open society would change to a totalitarian regime. The Godfather understands it himself and throughout his life makes steps to legalize "the business" or la cosa nostra. Neither respecting individual needs too much on one hand, nor cherishing the needs of the society as a whole on the other, would bring happiness. Therefore, a balance in between individual needs and societal needs should be reached to. Luckily, open society completes this idea through the verification of truth in a broad sense – by respecting variety of opinions and intellectual competence, the society can develop by discussing vital issues and coming closer to general truth and agreement. Different opinions test the public opinion either verify it, or replace it with the new one – that's where individual independent thinking is beneficial,. At the same time, learning from the mistakes of the past or from the information accumulated by others is also of great importance. The combination of both cval lead to harmony and it is impossible in the open society.

Conclusions:

Summa summarum, the value Confucius' quote reveals, is a value of balance and harmony in between learning and thinking, society and individual. Independent thinking without learning might lead to a huge backlash or anarchy, yet learning without thinking might be used as an opportunity of a totalitarian regime to cherish. In a quest for the golden mean in the western thought, such a balance can only be achieved in an open society, which can lead to the private happiness of any character, however the differences. Don Quixote, a symbol of conservative imagination and idealism, Don Juan, a symbol of liberal imagination and materialism, and Don Corleone, a dualistic beast to complete the trio, can all exist in an open society.