I first want to thank all the members for these past three years and also that of Macs Backs Books for being such a gracious host every month. I want to especially thank Jeremy for the opportunity to help organize the group and brainstorm with him at Stone Oven or Tommy's for future events. He has been a mentor and good friend. Thank you everyone. It's been a wonderful process.

There are three things that I want to talk about tonight and then I want to hear more about how certain truths in your life have influenced your own inertia. So I will say a few things and then we will break out into a discussion as a collective group.

1) My thoughts about the Moral Inquiries and what I've learned over the years

2) What I focused on during the MA program in psychology work for the past two years

3) Where my thoughts will direct and guide me into the future

**1) What I've thought about the Meetups and Learned**

**The Good Life**

It was April 22, 2015 when Jeremy first held the discussion called, "the good life?". And I remember it was right after I just got fired from a local steel manufacturing company. I had never in my life thought I would be fired. As up until that point I thought I was on the path to a good life.

Trained academically in material science engineering, I worked as a process engineer at the steel manufacturing company in Lorain, OH climbing to a managerial position looking over a department of nearly 40 people with a monthly budget of $30 million. I even remember sitting one day looking out my corner office on the top floor and thinking about, "this is it, I think I've made it." (Whatever that even meant)

This American culture often places such great emphasis on what we consider "work". The question of "what do you do?" is more common and more appropriate than maybe, "what makes you happy?" in casual conversation. And goes even a step further differentiating between work and play with comments such as, "take time off and enjoy yourself". As if being unemployed was a time to sit back and enjoy myself. A vacation of sorts.

And I was left pressured to answer to my friends and family their questions of, "Tony what are you going to now do with your life? What job are going to look for next?"

Now up until that point I was working on a book called the "Impression of a Good Life: Philosophical Engineering". For almost 6 years prior to, I never knew what I was actually writing. The book was really a place for me to simply express my frustrations and fantasies about life. Reflecting on the mountains where I grew up in New England and the memories I had during the process of climbing them, I felt a desire to embark on a pathway that would allow me to finish the book. Maybe this would give me better as to what  good life really meant since I had now found myself unemployed. It was the Moral Inquiries' first meetup "the good life?" that re-inspired me to finish the book.

It was that night at the Bottlehouse Brewing Company back in April 2015, where we sat on the long benches trying to engage in what constituted a good life, that I realized there were other people that wanted to be engaged in such a thought. People outside of college, and not simply discussing the homework assignment for the week, but rather their own "homes" and work towards life. I wasn't the only one questioning my existence.

It was a gateway at the time that allowed me to see what other people were doing with their lives in a different context that wasn't "the news", "sports", "the weather" or how much they hated their job as they drank their beer at the bar. The conversation was lively.

The room was big, not very well lit as I can remember sitting close to the windows. And after moving from one part of the room to another so that the crowd gathering could all sit down, I noticed a drum set on a stage towards the back of the bar. As many of you know, I do enjoy playing the drums and have been working, playing, and practicing to get better. It felt right at home for me.

But the questions of "what do you do?" and now "the good life?" still needed to be answered. And not just answered in the context of my interviews to find that "next job", but also more the question of what do I do NOW with my life.

**Finding a Rhythm: Inspirations from Drum Circle**

That same year I got involved with another Meetup. A local drum circle that met at a Church on the west side of Cleveland during the winter and at Edgewater park during the summer. I remember my first time. I wasn't the only one who was new to a drum circle who had showed up that day. And even though I had been playing drums since I was about 10, I always keep an open mind when playing instruments with other people.

The organizer that day was Chris. I came to find that there were multiple organizers that would show up when their schedules permitted. Chris was a retired man who played and organized drum circles and is the man who drives the train around at the zoo. Chris said to the new drum circle drummers that day, "whatever you play, intend to make the group sound better". I really resonated with this one rule for the group.

My interpretation was that, regardless of your skill level in drumming, you could contribute if your sole intention was to simply make the group sound better. And I always tried to carry this as members of the Moral Inquiries would share their own thoughts and ideas each night. Trying to weave and orchestrate as in a drum circle the rhythms of the group's thoughts

during the Moral Inquiries meetups. Harmonizing at times, and even finding beauty in the dissonance of our discussions about conversing with enemies, duty, or compassion. But always keeping in the back of my mind, what and how can the group sound better with each note that gets shared in this space.

Within the Moral Inquiries I was beginning to find notes in my life that I had never thought of playing. Voting for the first time. Becoming more engaged with bigger issues than simply being a spectator to the TV and feeling helpless. Topics such as presentism and even what American values to teach our children.

Brainstorming ways to engage with community through thought experiments of "trade school" where not only knowledge was traded, but other skills and services each individual of this group could potentially share with others. Being introduced to civic engagement through a political perspective with Civic Now! and even through a more artistic perspective with "A Color Removed". I was finding ways to get involved with community and felt that I was part of a community here in Cleveland because of this group.

## MA in Psychology

### The Shallowing Hypothesis

These meetups were about reflection for me. A collective reflection of joining human minds together face-to-face. And instead of searching on Google to read the Wikipedia version of a good life or viewing Pinterest for what should appear in a good life, these meetups were of substance.

Being a Millennial, I have been fascinated with social technologies continually becoming more integrated with our daily lives as we are the first generation to have such technologies in our entire lives. How with my friends similar in age, there is more fluidity with utilizing such

platforms such as Facebook, than calling them on the phone to catch up or even meeting up for dinner or a beer. That a message on the phone seems to be a better sort of gift than the opportunity to physically see one another face-to-face. That there is a preference for the likes on posts, instead of liking the idea of again, seeing someone in person face-to-face.

Back in 2010, Nicholas Carr suggested what he called the Shallowing Hypothesis in his book called The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains. Carr simply states that the more people use social media, the less likely they are to engage in reflective and critical thinking.  In essence he associates the frequent use of the fast paced communication style of social media which engages primarily fast thinking skills, to the diminishment of critical thinking skills, the slower types of thinking if you will. That because online users are frequently using social media, they are less likely to engage in slower forms of thinking, more daily reflective thought. A form of conditioning.

Carr seemed to be onto something then, as it could be later seen in the Facebook post from Lindsay Stone's trip to Arlington Cemetery in October of 2012, two years later from the claim postulated by the Shallowing Hypothesis. Lindsay was attempting to be funny with her social media post by posing next to a sign for the cemetery rules that read, "silence and respect". She was in the photo giving the middle finger and appeared to be shouting loudly.

Justine Sacco in December of 2013 tweeted, " Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!"

In a matter of hours as the result of cyber-shaming, the internet brought about what looked to be swift justice to these unethical posts. Through thousands of retweets and reposts, the lives of these two seemingly normal human beings were shattered. Both lost their respective jobs despite the irrelevant correlation of their profession and such a post.

What is crazy to think about though, is how the Internet saw themselves as helping bring about justice by simply re-posting these unethical posts with their angry reasons why. As if this will really help…

And this thought led me to speculating the motivation as to why people would even feel compelled to repost or retweet something with growing interest. Today there is a strong perception that the more likes and reposts on social media, the more popular someone is. This can be seen with celebrities posting selfies of themselves in a bathtub or on a beach or even drinking a simple Starbucks coffee. People can post things unfiltered, shocking, and in a way entertaining despite it being racist or immoral. Thank you Trump for further popularizing this.

But these are extreme examples of both Lindsay and Justine. Not everyone falls into this category.

But it seems a good majority of people fall into the category of potentially becoming seduced by their own phones.

My commute for the past three years has been through the city of Cleveland traveling from Lakewood to the eastern part of Cleveland. Depending on the traffic, I either take the shoreway or route 90. And regardless of the direction I go, I tend to notice other driver's faces are buried in their phones. Stopping and sitting at restaurants along the way like Latitude 41 or Tommy's, faces are buried in their phones. Running through the metro parks when I got home as I trained for marathons, faces were not actually buried in their phones... but rather they were being used to take selfies with the backdrop of nature. As if it were natural to awkwardly pose smiling to capture that Kodak moment during that nature walk.

But I could not help but wonder why individuals were motivated to even be on their phones and post anything. Motivations as found in the psychological literature were possible reasons such as introverts able to now be extroverted in nature. Users can have two lives and

can present themselves more favorably on social media. Maybe this is why depression levels are rising as users can now play on the same playing field as Lebron James' instagram. Maybe their thoughts are if I can post something like Lebron James, maybe I can get an equal amount of fame. And yet, they soon realize that their post is in vain.

From a personal perspective, I viewed these meetups as the exact solution to the phenomena of social media addiction. To combat the urge of comparing ourselves with Lebron James or Donald Trump through the perspective of popularity on social media platforms. That in my work of studying Millennials and their respective social media addictions being associated with increased levels of depression, narcissism, and a decrease in critical thought as related to life long goals, psychologists suggested time and time again that face-to-face interactions must be managed with respect to social media interactions. That a simple reversal of the effects of addictive social media use could be alleviated by simply having genuine face-to-face discussion.

And yet, it seems that the connections we are able to make with our phones from all over the world, is actually pushing us further and further apart from the actual connections we really desire.

I always appreciated how individuals were respectful in this group.


**Observations of the Moral Inquiries from the perspective of Clark Moustakas Phenomenological Research methods**

Typical in qualitative research designs to help reassess what "variables" could be studied in quantitative research designs.

Three steps

1. Epoche

      a. Epoche Greek word for "refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (page 33)

      b. Requires a new way to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe

2. Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction (page 34)

      a. Transcendental moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego as if for the "first time"

      b. Each experience is considered in its singularity, in and for itself

3. Imaginative Variation

      a. Aim is to grasp the "structural essences of experience"

      b. "The pure essence"

My Results

- Community group desiring "face-to-face" conversations

- Had one or two meetings every month

- Members would present, discuss, reflect, draw on topics of interest

- Format: Presentation and then discussion

- Open discussion

- Members sometimes became friends


One great thing about this group was the trust in disclosure of information. It was not intended to be a cathartic sort of meeting as one would expect in a closed private session with a psychiatrist. Jeremy and myself early on, wanted it strictly critical thinking and not based solely on emotions. And it was sometimes challenging to dance along the fence of being to personal, abstract and objective.

Some of you can remember my incident with a previous current employer and the falsification of reports. This group during a reflection session one night encouraged me to think about the matter clearly and without emotional attachment to projected outcomes. To see that my role was to be present and to utilize my own moral compass to guide me to make the best decision given the circumstances.

And what was probably the toughest thing about attending these meetups for me, was being present. Some nights I didn't want to be here as my day was very long and I was behind in my school work. But the fact that it was a community event, I felt accountable as not just being a co-organizer, but wanting to be a good community member. A good neighbor if you will. It's like motivating yourself to go workout. It can be hard, but once you get in that good sweat and come home, the experience was well worth it. And sometimes it takes running with a crowd to keep you motivated.

## Future Thoughts

A) **Two examples**

1) There is a lot of tension today. I was driving through Cleveland during rush hour along the Shoreway the other day. As some of you might know, they have reduced the two lane road to one for construction just at the Cleveland Brown stadium. It's an unspoken common courtesy for drivers to allow one car to merge taking turns. I was letting the one car go in front of me, while another one pulled right up and cut me off. Instead of a wave of her hand thanking me, she put out her left hand and showed me her middle finger. Without me even "responding" I "reacted" and honked my horn. I was so angry by it that I pulled over to the left

lane and put my window down yelling "do you have any fucking patience?" She was stunned to say the least. So was I.

2) A few months ago, I was at a seminar down in Pittsburgh, PA for aerospace heat treating training and we were on a quick 10 minute break. It was a small classroom size with about 15 people attending. Something had come up during the training where the person behind me made a comment during the session. I wanted to learn more about the gentleman's experience in the area and tried starting a conversation. The man was on his phone as I didn't quite realize it when I turned around to face him. I apologized for interrupting him as he seemed very focused on doing some sort of work on his phone. He looked up and said, "not a problem. This thing is a distraction really and I wasn't doing any sort of work."

**A mindset**

"Anger is a gift". A lyric from the band Rage Against the Machine. A controversial band with a powerful message of "rage against the machine". The machine in their case was large seemingly powerful organizations including our government. Their rage, funneled through their instruments and music against the unbalanced power.

The machine in this case for me, are the social technologies that are giving rise to addiction tendencies. Resulting in increased levels of depression, narcissism and decrease in critical thinking.

The "rage" isn't a sort of angry war cry against this. Rather, this anger is potential energy to be channeled. Look at the rage of drivers and people glued to their machines today. Imagine

instead of flipping middle fingers, we could be bringing back simple manners again. Please and Thank you or even apologizing when appropriate.

My thoughts are being steered in the direction of why there is so much tension today. Has it always been there? Or is it the result of social technologies producing "click savvy" users desiring instant gratification? Counting likes? Stalking friends? Is the TV really having us wait for the next story after the commercial break?

In my masters work I was asked in an assignment to develop an intervention program for social media addiction. Since social technologies are relatively new, there are no developed intervention practices.

And to come up with an intervention program for this addiction, it made me think about alcohol addiction. How a little bit of alcohol in moderation is acceptable by not only social standards, but even government law. That sure, it is socially acceptable to have a drink. So yes, it seems appropriate that in moderation we can be engaged on social media platforms.

And that was my question I came to realize. Does the government have to one day step in to really make an impact as to how we manage and consume our social media? How one day there might be a legal age for social media users that is actually controlled. And not simply clicking the answer "yes I am over the age of 18". Or are their other things that we can be building and thinking about until the government has to step in? Some states already have laws against cell phone use while driving, but how well do you think that is monitored?

But really the message to takeaway is the mindset that is eventually developed in alcoholic recovery. A self-realization must be made. There is no set rule for someone realizing they are an alcoholic. There is no black and white definition for someone to realize the road to recovery after admitting addiction. It can also be a very emotional and challenging road.

I learned this from a friend who went to AA meetings to turn her life around. That a certain "truth" made her realize the severity of her addiction. Since then, her life pivoted on that experience. Her rock bottom realization of her addiction caused her to act in such a way as to keeping moving forward. Her motto in life is now, "relentless forward movement". She successfully now runs marathons all across the country and competes in triathlons. A different sort of addiction.

**B)  Music - The Nowhere Kids: The Days of Wheels and Waves**

I want to explore the avenue of music. One of the motivations I'm moving back to NH is that my brother and I just bought a house in the middle of the woods and intend to rebuild the studio to play music again. We recently recorded a full album in my garage here in Lakewood, OH this past winter called the Days of Wheels and Waves. We even submitted one of our songs to an NPR contest.

My friends, the other band members, flew out for a weekend to get 8 tracks recorded. In the two days, we created the songs that were wanting to be sung. We created the notes that wanted to be played with all the angst and joys of our lives up until that point.

I can channel my anger into a gift.

**C) Calculating Mindfulness**

In process engineering there is a paradigm that materials engineers follow. That the processing is related to the microstructure formation (the way the atoms come together), which yields the overall properties and performance (a turbine blade withstanding the high heat and fatigue life in an airplane).

There are what we consider "successive" and "supporting" steps that go into a given process. That successive steps are the A to B. Parts get put into a furnace and heat treated from state A to state B. Cooking a steak from raw to well done. Supporting steps are to allow A to get to B. The heat treat furnace needs preventive maintenance and operators to run the process to take the parts from state A to state B. The cook adds some seasoning or a touch of extra heat to cook the steak while the owner pays the electrical bill to power the oven.

This group has been both forms of supporting and successive steps in various aspects of my life helping me get from points A to B. Convincing me to register to vote. Helping me determine and make better informed ethical decisions. Helping me continually the practice of "experience" and "reflection". Helping me engage face-to-face with other people to curb even my own sometimes addictive tendencies on social media.

Every month for the past three years, the group has moved from week to week, topic to topic. And that is what is beautiful about this group, The Moral Inquiries. The dialectic nature of our discussions, asking for the directions to answer our questions without a pre-programmed GPS. Allowing the trust in the group to steer and guide our moral compasses. The thought experiments that resonate with the notes of our daily routines and the songs of our lives.

And as my brother says, we must always keep jamming in the cosmic universe.

| What kind of information do you need to…. | 5.10.18 |
|---|---|
| Reflection | 4.26.18 |
| Where do capitalism and democracy cohere, and where don't they? | 4.12.18 |
| Reflection | 3.29.18 |
| How do you react to an accident that has happened to you? | 3.15.18 |

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| Reflection | 3.1.18 |
| How does one action affect your entire life? | 2.15.18 |
| Reflection and organization meeting | 1.23.18 |
| The moral and the weird | 1.9.18 |
| Monogamy, polyamory, and the future of relationships | 12.12.17 |
| Ways to improve our (moral) relationships | 11.28.17 |
| How to engage in tough conversations | 11.14.17 |
| How do you positively use social media? | 11.1.17 |
| Can our legal system be ethical? | 10.19.17 |
| Cultural Appropriation | 10.5.17 |
| Technology and Communication | 9.7.17 |
| "On Exile" the psychological condition of being a refugee | 8.24.17 |
| Cultural Appropriation | 8.10.17 |
| Living in the back loop | 7.27.17 |
| Major societal issues: do we have individual moral obligations to address them? | 7.13.17 |
| Further specifics on the idea of a bartering knowledge economy | 6.29.17 |
| Should we start a Cleveland hub of knowledge solidarity? | 6.13.17 |
| What's on your mind? | 6.1.17 |
| The meaning of meaning (round 2) | 5.18.17 |
| The meaning of meaning | 5.4.17 |
| Workshop and reading of Solar Calendar, and other markings of time | 4.20.17 |
| Solidarity economies | 4.4.17 |

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| Public service | 3.23.17 |
| Will there be consequences of the shallowing hypothesis | 3.9.17 |
| Writing workshop: What should it take to be convinced that I could be wrong? | 2.23.17 |
| Conversing with enemies | 2.9.17 |
| Equal respect | 1.26.17 |
| Post-truth and polarization | 1.12.17 |
| Year-end debrief & topics collect for 2017 | 12.29.16 |
| Cancelled due to weather (post truth and arctic polarization) | 12.15.16 |
| "Consideration" Writing Workshop | 12.1.16 |
| Debrief on the results of the general election | 11.17.16 |
| Covering voting | 11.3.16 |
| What gives you the Bill of Rights its "power"? | 10.19.16 |
| What are the "rules" to follow in being a citizen today? | 10.5.16 |
| Mothers speak: What are American values to teach our kids? | 9.22.16 |
| Follow through: the pragmatic focus to civics | 9.8.16 |
| Continued workshop on civic focusing: Interpersonal or Pragmatic focusing | 8.25.16 |
| The Impression of a Good Life: Philosophical Engineering | 8.16.16 |
| Workshop in CIVIC Focusing | 8.9.16 |
| National Politics in Cleveland: What Happened? | 7.26.16 |
| The "Res Publica" & the idea of Citizenship | 7.12.16 |
| The Ethics of the American Dream | 6.28.16 |

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| Constructive Politics | 6.14.16 |
| Reflection Discussion | 5.31.16 |
| If not duty, then what? | 5.17.16 |
| Reflection: what are the duties that most define who you are, and why? | 5.3.16 |
| Being decent people: the role of duty vs. "going above and beyond" | 4.12.16 |
| Presentation on Duty | 3.24.16 |
| Group Reflection on Presentism | 3.8.16 |
| Presentation on Presentism and What to Teach a 6th Grader | 2.25.16 |
| Selfishness as an obstacle to addressing climate change | 1.28.16 |
| End of month group reflection | 12.29.15 |
| Respect future generations: a constitutional convention against climate change | 12.16.15 |
| Refusal to cooperate? | 10.29.15 |
| Mid-month listening/processing: collective topic formation | 10.13.15 |
| The beautiful soul: compassion as hang-up, virtue & feeling (monthly topical) | 9.29.15 |
| Mid-month listening/processing: collective topic formation | 9.15.15 |
| Monthly Meeting: Compassion & Vocation | 8.26.15 |
| Listening/Processing: second open organizational meeting | 8.13.15 |
| Monthly meeting: Responsibility | 7.29.15 |
| Listening/processing: first open organizing meeting | 7.9.15 |
| What is spirit in ethics? | 6.23.15 |

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| Why are some people good? | 5.20.15 |
| The good life? | 4.22.15 |