

A review of my 2022

Lo Min Choong Julian @ Lahyte

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I wrote this before I got 2023-serious about content production. The original document is not public-facing. This is a PDF stand-in. Original document: private-facing. Original public-facing document: html format. Standardised public-facing document: html converted to PDF. Converted 20230301.

A review of my 2022

Today is 28 December 2022; It is the end of the year. I write this with a single, clear intention: to whine about the year.

Before I begin, I must acknowledge the elephant in the room (the demon in my head) — I am privileged. Despite the numerous roadblocks present in my life, despite the difficulty of the path I walk and desire, I am privileged. By all accounts, by all interpretations, the standard of living of my life far exceeds that of the present average, and the historical average. The discomforts I experience are not of poverty, hardship, and circumstantial misery. It is within the context of materialism, a limited amount of excess, and a limited amount of luxury.

And yet, I whine about my personal problems. Despite my rational self sorting, interpreting, and grounding my thoughts, my emotions demand its equal (it wants its fair) share of attention and care, a place within the thought process. No one is fully rational, devoid of emotions, and no one is fully emotional, devoid of rationality. It is perfectly valid to want more despite having it good, despite what other people's lives are like.

But you have to admit, whining sucks. It's awful to do, it's awful to hear, and it is unproductive.

I am not content with my progress. I am not content with the life I have. Somehow, I am still miserable. While therapy and mental health progress is a massive undertaking, and a current work in progress, I grow tired, impatient. I want certain aspects of my life to be better within the ballpark of soon, rather than within my lifetime (the harrowing thought and extension of that line of thinking is being unable to attain what my heart desires within my lifetime). I recently caught myself caring about what other people think. It was (is) bad. There are 3 parts to this.

26 December 2022, Nanyang Technological University released the degree audit for every student. It means we (PHIL/1) got our grades back for our first semester. The Singaporean toxic urge to be competitive and compare results definitely crossed my mind, not because I want to, but because some people would. One cannot control others' actions. Even after all these years, from my O Levels period in 2017 to now, I have yet to rise above it. I am toxic because I run away from grades. I cannot bear it. It triggers a fight-or-flight response within me. I know some people do it out of genuine curiosity, others are trying to find out who is good at what in order to ask them for future help. These are the non-toxic cases. But I run away from all cases because any exposure will make me crumble. In 2017, I thought that simply not participating, removing oneself from such an environment, was sufficient in terms of maturity, a sufficient action that resulted in one rising above it. I was (am) wrong. While this satisfies the external component, one cannot escape one's inner desires through this method. One cannot escape one's intrusive thoughts. One must face it head-on, to its full extent, for as long as it is necessary to finally, truly rise above it.

Now was the perfect chance to confront myself, and yet I did not, because I caught myself spiralling immediately when the grades came out, nevermind anyone asking me. All the what-ifs jumped with barely any prompts. What if everyone else did well? Does that nullify my merits? No. And yet, the clash between what I think rationally and what I feel emotionally did not settle. So what if everyone else did equally well, if not better? Everyone has their paths to take. Yours is the only one that you can and ought to take. And yet I can't help but feel jealous of others' paths, and how rosy it looks from where I am. Rationally, I know that I am being biased about how I see their paths, and yet I still want it. Anything is better than my path, right? Thus, my inferiority complex took hold. It went in multiple trains. The above was one. The following is another.

"This is as far as I will go", I typed as I sent my friends my grades. I only shared it with one group of friends, because they have yet to enter University, and thus will find this devoid of personal meaning. Plus, they are supportive friends, they hardly care about grades (they conduct themselves positively by placing the right emphasis and attitude on grades) and would treat the news as if it were another day in the world. Normalcy and stability is what I like about them. I can tell them anything, and the reactions they would give would be in line with all of their green flags.

While that stabilised me on the surface, it changed nothing at the core, because another way I cope with my grades is by telling myself, "This is as far as I will go, and that is okay". Doing one's best, being positive, focusing on making the most of the future, and focusing on personal progress are all well and good, but I do it toxically. I use these sentiments to reassure myself on the surface. While it has gone beyond superficial reassurance into sentiments I hold, it barely dug deep. I can cling to these words for as much as I want, but the fact remains, it has not changed how I feel deep down. My insecurities run far deeper than any words can change. For me to rise above grades, I must undergo an extensive attitude change.

While grades are not an accurate reflection and representation of oneself, it is a tool that others use to create an impression of oneself. The third, final, and overlapping train regarding my toxicity towards grades is caring about what others think about me. People place expectations on me, and that is okay. I place expectations on myself, and that is okay.

There are three components regarding one's interaction with expectations: recognition, personal opinions, and fulfilment.

My flow of personal expectations is as such: I discover what I expect of myself, I form an opinion of it (rationally, emotionally), and then I either fulfil it or not. Sometimes, I get upset when I don't fulfil it because believing that anything is within reach is a problematic

coping mechanism of mine. I also get upset because it just sucks to fail. Sometimes, I still get upset when I fulfil it because I'm either not satisfied, and/or I don't think I'm good enough. My flow of non-personal expectations is as such: I discover it, and then get upset, laugh about it, or have no reaction. Rationally, I know I have no obligation towards these expectations. I also know that I do not own nor control them. It is the opinion of someone else. Who cares? The toxicity enters when I get upset, because internalising others' thoughts, impressions, and expectations of oneself is what I do, unfortunately.

I just can't shake off two trains of thought: (1) No matter what I do, it seems like people will no longer be surprised; (2) I want people to have a certain cluster of opinions of me because it more accurately represents what I am.

Both of these trains are dumb and stupid, and should crash and burn, never to be repaired again. And yet, I have emotional weight with it. Sometimes, I want recognition. Sometimes, I crave recognition. Sometimes, I care about other people because I want to be understood.

Regarding being understood, this one phrase condenses a lot of problematic desires and behaviours. In short, I don't feel understood, thus have problematic behaviours and desires regarding other people's opinions of myself. The full story is complicated and long, which will be for another time, in another work.

This bleeds into the third and final whine of 2022: men. I genuinely want a boyfriend. I genuinely want romance. I genuinely want a relationship. Part of me believes I am nowhere near ready, nor have the capacity to sustain a healthy relationship. Part of me agrees. But, the heart desires what it desires, regardless of anything else. Thus, I am sat here waiting, longing, whining about how difficult it is to find love.

Falling in love, I suspect, would be far more difficult for me, compared to the baseline average. I have never had a crush before. I have never dated. Technically, I do simp for

people, but given that those people are digital characters who will never be like you or I, it does not count (or at least, does not count when we limit our scope to human beings).

I am happy for those around me who are in active, healthy relationships. I hope they prosper romantically and otherwise. Observing them on a day-to-day basis brings me joy. The problematic tendencies only present themselves when I am alone, reflecting on my life, or during moments of calm in terms of brain activity.

There is a tinge of jealousy, but overwhelmingly, the dominant feeling is of bitter longing, accurately characterised as whining. Plain, old, simple, immature whining.

Often, one would catch me being childish, childlike, immature. I have no qualms with that. I find it exhausting to act as an adult, perhaps because my impression of being an adult is problematic and underdeveloped. Perhaps it is because my baseline personality has characteristics of child-like behaviour (primarily) and adult-like behaviour (secondarily).

It sounds terrible on paper, and it makes for terrible first impressions. But I want to believe that the full, accurate, external impression of me is far more complex than that of "Oh, he is a child". Surely, the work I have done, both academic and otherwise, have shown that I am more than this impression. Quite frankly, my stream of consciousness has key, core, non-fungible characteristics unchanged from when I became self-aware. My core rational self has always been there. What has changed is how effective it has been. It has merely developed, progressed positively, not changed or swapped into an entirely different one. This goes for every key, core, deep, characteristic that I personally care about. Using Socrates-Plato terminology: my character and virtue have largely remained unchanged.

Except that is a lie, Socrates and Plato would hate me for using their terminology this way, and my friends at Nanyang Technological University, Philosophy, would have some words to say with me regarding my problematic usage of Socratic character and virtue. Yeah,

I've changed, but have I really? I still am me from my personal dark ages (first, second and third editions), which leaves me questioning: why am I still single?

The wise would say, "Your time will come. Love cannot be rushed. It is beyond our control. And if love does not come, do not fret, there are things in life that equal its weight in gold." Essentially, the wise would float above it all. Easy to say, easier to do so if one has attained true love, and difficult to practise when one is single and does not want to be.

It says a lot about my maturity when it comes to romance given that I think and feel all this. I can whine about men all I want. I can whine about the Singaporean gay romance culture. I can whine about true love. I can whine about my immaturity. I can whine all I want. It changes nothing.

What I can do is continue to work on the problematic parts of myself productively, and in due time, the things I want (personal progress, true love) will come. I am working on it. I am whining about it. Just because I'm doing something that is good for me, doesn't mean I have to like it, even though I ought to. Part of me thinks I should work on improving myself and making myself a better partner material (in plain English: be more attractive, make myself more attractive; In gamer speak: git gud). But that's the wrong motivation for personal progress.

There is no satisfying ending, because life is in progress. I can only be optimistic about the future, and continue to work on myself.