

White Puzzle

Max Keynes

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“Doctor B, what do you think is the most reliable thing?” Doctor A asked.

Doctor B rubbed his chin, deep in thought.

“In myself, of course, Doctor A.”

“And where do you think your thoughts come from?”

“I believe because I’m confident,” Doctor B replied.

“You’re not wrong, but I think there’re something more than that,”

Doctor A smiled.

“And what’s that thing?”

“Just guess. Come on.”

Doctor B rocked his chair backward, crossing his arms tightly.

“I’m confident because I believe in what I know.”

“And...”

“I know because of the data inputted in my memory.”

“Exactly,” Doctor A snapped his fingers. “But do you think our memory is that reliable?”

“Why are you saying that?” Doctor B raised his brows. “If we don’t believe in our memories, what should we believe in then?”

“Well, you’re not wrong,” Doctor A smiled. “In fact, there’s so many information for us to choose to believe. To believe something, that data must be reliable enough for us. That information must be reasonable for our senses and must be repeated often enough too, or we have to be emotional enough. We have to have enough faith in that data.”

“I agree with that.”

“To put your life into someone else’s hands isn’t a good idea, so memory is our most trusted backup. However, I’m asking myself, is that really true? Is our memory that reliable for us?”

“What do you think?” Doctor B’s brows rose.

“Human is a complicated being, but in that complication, something simple is hidden.” Doctor A tapped his fingers rhythmically. “We believe we’re the most intelligent being on earth. A logical being with complicated thinking system, but, sometimes, we’re surprisingly stupid.”

“What do you mean?”

“Let’s go back to the memory. We all know human prefers emotion than logic when making decisions. Reasons come later. In some cases, reasons are just mere pretenses.” Doctor A tapped his fingers faster. “We choose to believe first, then, find some reasons to support our beliefs and make them trustworthy. When time goes by, the seed will grow into a big tree, and the

beliefs that have been repeated both through information and emotion will give us faith.”

Doctor B nodded in acceptance, invited him to continue.

“When you were young, you would feel that your classroom was so big! However, when you grew up and saw the bigger world and came back to stand in the same old place again, you would feel something had changed. The room that was so big became so small. If I’m not clear enough, I’ll give you another example. You already unplugged the microwave before you leave the house. After a short while, you started to wonder whether you had unplugged it or not. You go back to check and see that you’ve already unplugged it.”

Doctor A opened his hands. “Memory is something that can be twisted all the times. You’d never known if the thing you now believe in is truth or a lie.”

“That’s reasonable.” Doctor B nodded. “But what you just said are of your memory and your beliefs as well. We can go on because of them.”

“Exactly.” Doctor A snapped his fingers again. “Like I said earlier, they’re the most reliable things we have. But for myself, I won’t absolutely believe in them.”

“Then, what do you believe in?”

“I believe in myself. We all are.” Doctor A smiled.

“I started to get confused.”

“Well, let me ask a question then.” Doctor A said. “Do you believe in God?”

“God? I don’t think so.”

“Why?”

“Who can prove that God exists?” Doctor B shook his head. “I only believe in things that can be proved.”

“I’ll ask you another question. If you look up at the sky at night and can’t see even a single star, will you insist that the sky is empty?”

“No.”

“That’s it! It’s just like the God thing. It’s unprovable. The answer is unprovable fact. You can’t guarantee whether it’s true or false.” Doctor A smiled. “Now, let’s go back to my theory about belief. Like I said, I believe in myself. Most people do because nothing is more reliable than our own memory. However, I want to point out one thing. Human is a fragile being. We can be led rather easily.”

“You’re right.”

“We used to believe that we own everything in our life. However, that’s not the way it is. Not completely. There’re so many factors we can’t control.” Doctor A leaned forward to Doctor B. “We call these uncontrollable factors ‘fate’. Something occurs from so many events in this world lay on one another without any structure, without control. We, human, have our own

thoughts, more or less. Our decisions affect everything around us. When the actions of someone, or the change in the world itself, comes to meet, that's the time of fate."

Doctor B raised his brows. Doctor A paused then continued.

"Have you heard about the following theory?"

Doctor B shook his head. Doctor A's smile broadened.

"I heard about a research which the participants needed to answer questions without telling them that, within the same sample group, some of the participants were prepared by the researcher earlier. The researcher gave the same questions to all participants. The prepared participants would give the wrong answers. After that, the researcher would call the real participants to answer those questions. The sample group would be divided into 2 groups. In the first group, the researcher would ask questions without telling what other participants answered. The second group, the researcher would tell them what most participants' answers were."

"And then?"

"I want you to guess the research's finding."

"The research's finding... The first group would give the answers that they really think while the participants from the second group tended to follow others' answers."

“Correct.” Doctor A snapped his fingers. “The result is exactly like you said, but that’s not what interests me.”

Doctor B’s brows rose. Doctor A smiled broadly then continued.

“My question is... if we insist on the wrong information often enough along with an environment to support it, for people who have the right pattern thought, will they follow the lead?”

“That’s an interesting question.” Doctor B nodded. Doctor A laughed openly before keep continuing.

“There’s also something else I want to say. Human is a social being. We thought that we own of our life, but like I said, that’s not exactly right. Social has a strong effect on us, so strong that it can command us. It indicates how we should live our life through something called fear. We do things according to what we’re expected to do by those around us. People who won’t adapt to the globalization will be hated by the world. No matter which way we choose, a part of our life will be taken away by the social.” Doctor A paused. “Belief. Fate. Love. Preference. Memory. Everything is contaminated. We are shaped by what surround us until we become who we are now. The person we believe we really are.”

“Your theory is indeed interesting. “ Doctor B took note on paper. “But what do you want to tell me today?”

“From all I’d said, I want to tell you about a case I took care of.”

“Go ahead.”

“Do you know why I chose to be a psychiatrist?” Doctor A tilted head a bit. “It’s because I’m interested in human’s mind. The twisted mind is what frightens normal people, but it’s strangely alluring. I wanted to know about it. I want to understand it, and, of course, I want to cure it.”

“That’s a good notion.” Doctor B nodded while took note on paper.

“What I’d learned to make me believe that everything starts from here.” Doctor A pointed at a side of his head. “Brain controls everything: taste, touch, smell, sight. It’s also the source of our feelings. If our brain is twisted, we, too, will be twisted. I think I don’t have to keep repeating this. You should be familiar with patients with twisted perceptions, right?”

“Yes.” Doctor B answered. “But I’m ready to share my information with you.”

“I used to work with a patient who lost sight even when both of his eyes function normally. However, his brain was damaged so he couldn’t tell what’s in front of him. There was also a patient who had the wrong perception of his surroundings. He believes that the world has only the right side. His left arm was perfectly fine, but he hasn’t aware of it. These things are fact in their eyes. We can never actually understand them, yet we’re responsible for taking care of them.” Doctor A said. “Even these symptoms are frightening, but they

were incomparable with the case I've recently met. Human's mind and memory are truly mysterious."

"What kind of patient had you met?"

"That was one unforgettable patient." Doctor A smile. "But for the sake of a psychiatrist's ethic, I'll use a pseudo name. I'd already asked to use his case as a study case. I met a lot of patients, but he was truly one of a kind."

Doctor A sat properly. He moved closer to Doctor B. His face was decorated with a smile of happiness.

"Come closer, and I'll tell you about it."

2

White jigsaws were moved to join the other pieces. The secret of emptiness was about to reveal.

Ton used his finger to move a jigsaw to the middle of the board. He looked at the spaces thoughtfully before filled it one by one.

“How can you know?” I asked.

“It’s not that difficult. If you look carefully, you can see its pattern.”

He answered.

I took a piece from a box beside us, trying to find the place to put it. Secret always challenged me.

“If you can’t find it, you can let me do that.” Ton smiled mockingly while reached out his hand.

“Stop that. If I have enough time, I can do this too.”

I stared at the board for a while before raised my hands in resignation. Ton laughed lightly and took the piece from my hand. He found its place quickly.

“Milk Jigsaw is probably not my thing.” I signed.

“That’s not strange. It’s a blank jigsaw anyway.”

“But you can do it.”

“I played this since I was young. I play it so often that I’m very familiar with its pattern. If you are familiar with it, you’ll know it’s not that hard.”

I signed again while looking at the white pieces in front of me. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t understand them. Well, but that was a charm of this game, too.

Milk Jigsaw is a blank puzzle. Every piece was completely white. To make it a whole image, you needed more time and brain than other types of the jigsaw. When people plays jigsaw, they typically anticipated a beautiful picture hidden in the small puzzle pieces. For me, putting blank pieces together was a challenge. The final result might not be a beautiful image. However, if you looked carefully, these blank pieces were filled with the effort and time we spent on them. It was pure happiness.

Ton paused to think for a minute before putting a piece into its place. Every time he used his brain, it was as if the air around him stopped and became a wall that kept him away from the outside world.

“It’s strange that someone likes this game like me.” He said without looking up.

“Yeah. I’m surprised, too.”

Ton's words reminded me of Bill. I dated him four years ago. Bill had never liked this game. He said that puzzle was nonsense. I mocked him every time he said that.

"Bill, the secret is for people with a brain. It's normal that you don't like it." I said.

"You're saying I'm stupid!?" Bill shouted.

Something like that happened a lot. Bill used to be a good boyfriend but then everything changed...

I caught him doing some illegal stuff. That was the end of our relationship.

However, that was not the only reason I broke up with him. We argued a lot. Bill was a jealous and violent man. He thought that every man came talking to me wanted to steal me away from him. He fought with men got close to me several times. His violent caused him to be repelled from school not long before his graduation.

Moreover, our attitudes didn't get along. Differences might not be a problem for others, but it was for him. Bill looked at everything as black and white. Nothing was in between for him. He had never accepted different opinions. Whatever he believed was the only right thing for. Bill usually hit me when we fought. He was the reason I was afraid of men up until now.

At the last moment, before our relationship broke, he wanted to take our relationship a step further. I refused him every time. The different needs made everything worse. Bill tried to break into my house to get what he wanted. My father and I called the police when he tried to break in, but the laws couldn't stop him. What he wanted, no matter how to get it, he would get it.

Not long after that, Bill just disappeared from my life. I didn't know what happened to him, but his absent was a good thing for me. My life went back to normal after that.

I closed my eyes, trying to forget what happened at that time. It was the past. There was no reason to think about it now.

"You're like that again, Dream." Ton said.

"I'm like what?" I raised my eyebrows.

"You space out a lot." He rubbed his chin. "You know? Sometimes I think you're like these Milk Jigsaw."

"Don't make a weird comparison." I adjusted my glasses.

"It's not weird. When I play this game, I'm often thinking of you." Ton said and laughed at the same time.

I lowered my head slightly before asked in a small voice. "How I like this game?"

"Remember the first day we met?"

I looked up and rolled my eyes. The first time I met Ton was two years ago. I usually went to sit at the university library. It was hard for me to fit in with the new surroundings. I came to study here knowing nobody and making new friends was so just not my thing.

When I was in high school, before my father and I moved to this place, I used to fight with my Dad. I wanted the freedom to make my own decision like other kids, but my Dad always refused my opinions. He didn't believe that I can make a plan for my own life. Every second, every thought, my Dad planned everything for me. He tried to build a new me according to his own wish. Not what I wished and wanted to be.

My father chose who my friends should be and blocked out people who he thought unworthy. I endured his control painfully. Danced with the songs he composed. I often felt that I wasn't his child, but a puppet that must do as he ordered and moved by the thread controlled from above.

Our relationship became worse each day. Our fights became more severe gradually. I started to rebel. I mingled with the back room kids, dressed brightly, dyed my hair, and neglected my study. I did everything I could. I did everything to mock my father. I even ruin my life so that I could be free.

Our war was dragging long, but it ended well. It ended with nothing broken.

Finally, Dad understood my pain. He lessened his control and tried to change himself. He paid more attention to my opinions. We still had some disagreement, but now it was the way it should be.

A large wound would leave a scar behind, however. The result from those conflicts caused me unable to fit in the social. I hated change. I lived my life alone. No friend. No companion. Nobody understood me. I heard screams every time I closed my eyes, and when I opened them, there was only the sound of the lonely wind. It didn't matter how much I wanted to pour my feelings. Only emptiness was there to console me.

At that time when the dark covered my life, I met Ton. He always came to play jigsaw at the library. At first, I only looked at him from far away. However, not long after that, I gathered up my courage and went to greet him.

Ton was a psychology student. I used to think that students from this faculty would be hard to understand, but Ton wasn't the case. He was an ordinary young man living his simple life. He looked for freedom and happiness others.

We shared many traits and interests. Our relationship grew so fast. Every day after classes, I would meet him here. We would play a few games before heading home. It was such simple activities, but it made me happy.

"Umm. I remembered." I nodded.

“The first time I saw you. I felt that you’re different.” He said. “You looked so lifeless as if you had no emotion at all.”

“It was that bad? I think I was rather lively.”

“Probably, but you now isn’t the same as the you at that time. The first times I saw you I thought of snow, something white. You looked so... empty, but quite mysterious at the same time.”

I smiled before leaned closer to him. “And now? How am I now?”

“You seem...” Ton said. “More silly than I thought. I don’t understand myself why I’d thought of you like that earlier.”

“Scum.” I hit his shoulder lightly and laughed.

“Well, what should we do now? I really don’t know the next move.” Ton said and pointed at the jigsaw on the table.

“Yeah.” I rubbed my chin while looking around. Suddenly, my eyes fell on a young man sat not far away from us. I called him in a small voice.

“Max. Max, come help us.”

A short, thin man slowly rose from his seat and walked to us. He looked tired.

“W- what’s the matter, Dream?” Max said while adjusting his black vest.

“Ton and I can’t finish this game. Can you help us?”

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