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Working with my advisor-mentor Dr. Sergey Dolgopolski was the most formative and enjoyable experience during my MA study at University at Buffalo. Over the course of five semesters I formally enrolled in two of his courses, audited all his other graduate courses, and for three of those semesters worked under him on my MA thesis. He is smart, humorous, really caring and respectful towards his students. His courses and advice are insightful, intellectual, and specific for me, influential.

His seminars are the combination of close readings of a wide range of texts (from classic philosophy texts, e.g., Kant, to postmodernist authors, e.g., Derrida, Deleuze, Agamben; from rabbinic canons, e.g., excerpt of Talmud, to the tension between traditional and innovative interpretations), open discussions (from creative arguments such as “Is Deleuze, the paradigmatic thinker of immanence of philosophy, a Christian thinker?” to the latest events of today such as the relationship between law and justice and the problem of globalization), as well as a dozen of illustrative jokes. Thus the seminars are always challenging, exciting, fun, and impressive. To this day I can still recollect clearly his explanation of Kant’s critical distinction between “transcendent” and “transcendental” at the opening session of the seminar that discussed Kant’s *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. For Parmenides’s notion of “the One,” perhaps the most important yet difficult notion in the history of philosophy, he clarified it by using a metaphor of eating a burger. When talking about the Messiah’s “to-come” yet to “never come” feature, he resorted to the following joke: A person’s new job is to wait for the Messiah. Though the salary is low, it remains a good job because at least the position is permanent. There were many other examples like these and I will stop listing here, otherwise it would be endless. His class is never a plain recitation of what he has written in scripts; his class is more like a workshop, ready to be interrupted at any time and always welcoming of debates. He makes a point of how, etymologically speaking, a seminar is a place where we cast seeds to cultivate together. In his class, theory is evocatively alive and made memorable through sharp and concrete examples and contextualizations.

Besides sparkling moments, his seminars are well structured. The main question is put on the table at the outset to direct the whole seminar, then different opinions concerning this question are provided by different texts. In order to keep the seminar organized as a whole picture, before we moved onto a new text, he usually spent 20 minutes to orient, or in his words “GPS” where we were now. This strategy is easy for students to follow his thinking, especially when the texts themselves stand for various perspectives or when they are connected to other texts internally from different directions. The main question is like a palace’s main hall, which connects to all other texts as if they were other rooms. Every time before wandering through different rooms, we would begin our journey from the main hall to refresh ourselves with the original question, and finally return here to be ready for another venture. Sometimes rooms were connected to one another by themselves. When this happens, his strategy is to let the different texts speak and argue with each other. For example, after discussing Martin Buber’s I-You binary relationship, he immediately introduced Emmanuel Levinas’s third person relationship as a reflection and criticism of Buber’s theory. By doing so, texts were no longer isolated; they

suddenly became vivid, speaking in their own voices and taking their positions on the stage of the history of ideas.

As an advisor, Dr. Sergey Dolgopolski is strict, responsible, and careful. I finished my thesis under his help; yet more than just finishing the thesis, I formed my own mode of thinking like a real scholar under his guidance. He expected my thesis to be “excellent” with extremely a clear and innovative argument, explicit expression, and a comprehensive literature review. At the very beginning, I only had a vague idea about the topic of my thesis. Throughout almost two semesters, we met weekly to discuss the text I would read for my thesis and refine my argument. I remember it was one afternoon we had a three-hour meeting, talking intensively about my argument and research method, and about how to deal with difficult texts in a truly scholarly way, despite that he was very busy because it was towards the end of the semester, which is usually the busiest time. More essentially, he urged me think independently: “Keep a distance from texts. I want to hear your own voice, otherwise you are just shopping other people’s ideas and then selling them like a vending machine.” I, then, started to build my original argument, and furthermore, to have “conversations” with Heidegger, Derrida, and other “big thinkers,” and to question their theories. After my thesis was completed, with his encouragement, I managed to publish my first peer-reviewed article based on my thesis.

In addition to academic advice, he strives to create opportunities for widening students’ future prospects. At an interdepartmental meeting he held, I was invited to present and was introduced to scholars from other universities. When I applied for PhD programs, he strengthened my application with a strong supportive reference letter and submitted to more than twenty PhD programs on behalf of me. As a result, I was offered TA-ship and tuition scholarships by several universities. Besides this calculable outcome, there is invaluable intellectual impact that still exerts its influence on me today, including an independent and scholarly mode of thinking, the sharpness of my thinking, and research methodology, as well as an open horizon.

I also want to attribute my successful and fruitful MA study to the strong support that University at Buffalo provided. The first and also the most important one I would like to mention is the university libraries and their services that includes delivery+, interlibrary loan services, hundreds of online databases, research workshops, digital scholarship and publishing, Endnote, as well as 7/24 online librarian and subject librarians. These services helped me with all questions from material searching, personal library database software, to publishing guides. There are the Center for Excellence in Writing and Graduate Student Association (GSA) writing services for academic and formal writing suggestions; the latter, specifically, is more professional and advanced with regards to publishing standards. There are other services such as UBIT, Student Response Center, The Graduate School Office, ISSS for international students, Shuttle, and so on. In addition to those resources and services, I also enjoyed countless lectures and conferences, free concerts and performances, and many other events. I forever hold in high regard my experiences at University at Buffalo.