

<b>Title:</b>	Fluidity between Existential Lightness and Weight: Kierkegaard in Milan Kundera's <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i>
<b>Name:</b>	LEE Tsz Yan Grace
<b>Supervisor:</b>	Professor Eli Park SORENSEN

## Abstract

This project is an exploration of how Milan Kundera addresses, responds to and extends on Kierkegaard's 'Stages of Life' philosophical framework in his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, attempting to dissect the novel from an existential perspective.

With similarities between the 'lightness' and 'weight' dichotomy in Kundera and the 'aesthetic' and 'ethical stages' in Kierkegaard, this project compares how the two responds to men's search for the meaning of their lives. While Kierkegaard proposes a mono-directional development aiming at an ultimate religious epiphany when men seek their 'authentic self,' Kundera sees existence in a more fluid sense, and attempts to illustrate such fluidity in the four main characters of the novel alongside with a 'spiralling butterfly' imagery. Denying an 'either/or' choice of 'absolute existential lightness' and 'absolute existential weight' in Sabina and Franz with their tragic ending, Kundera, through Tomas and Tereza, depicts men being trapped in the liminal space between existential lightness and weight which men's preference seems ambiguous. In order to take hold of one's unique meaning of existence, the search of an equilibrium between the two extremes becomes the life-long task of men. Through Tomas and Teresa's gaining of existential weight and lightness respectively, Kundera showcases the multi-directionality and fluidity of the course of one's search, highlighting men's liminal existence on the spectrum as limited and uncertain yet full of possibilities on how one responds to the grand existential question of 'one's life meaning and purpose.'

## Reflection

I decided on doing a philosophy related thesis for the wish to challenge myself, and in the end, I gained much more than I have expected. Not only did I get to expand my scope of learning by dissecting literature from a new perspective, but I am also hugely impressed by how philosophers, especially existentialists, on how they deal with constant uncertainty, and such reflection has brought me much reassurance. Just as uncertainties are frightening, it is at the same time a display of limitless possibilities which led me to reflecting on my decisions so far and gave me the courage to venture on without definite directions and plans. Quoting Kundera, in a world without Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence of the same,' how do we know if what we are doing bears meaning or not? I guess now I have enough courage to claim I do not regret choices I have made and am making.

I would also like to show my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor professor Sorensen for his help on my essay. His resourcefulness and patience gave me much guidance and reassurance during my journey in this completely alien field of philosophy I delved into, and his humour has pulled me out from my loaded coursework and fuelled me to write one more line instead of going for something easier and less challenging.