

# MASTERY – An Ideological Treasure of Thoughts

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**Abstract - Philosophy is not new to this world. Many philosophers had lost their lives as people were unable to understand their thoughts and contemplative observations, treated them as iniquitous and objected their theories. Their wisdom, their genius deliberations and sometimes their eccentric thoughts made common people confused about their suppositions. People always think that they have normal wisdom and they don't have any special knowledge or genius. But, at some point in our lives, we all have experienced glimpses of our own genius activity, usually, when we are facing a deadline. Typically, we live in a passive manner reacting to whatever life throws at us, but during these times we somehow feel that we can resolve actions and create the possibilities. This supremacy or intellect is neglected as an issue of triviality or ignored due to the myths that surround it. Very few philosophers can notice this special state of mind and consider it a boon given by God. But Robert Greene calls this state of mind as "mastery" and helps us in demystifying it. Even though we might have glimpses of this type of intelligence that rarely stays with us, it disappears into thin air whenever our deadline has been met.**

**This paper elucidates the ideological base of this book Mastery which is laid out on the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. It also asserts the comprehensive idea of this book that there is no such thing as giftedness or inborn talents and that people acquire greatness and become "geniuses".**

**Index Terms - Genius, mysticism, philosophical ideas, consciousness, material things, myths, ignorance.**

## I.INTRODUCTION

Having the philosophical bent or flair is really a boon according to some intellectuals. On the contrary, some intelligential feel that every person has some genius internally and they don't permit their glimpses genius come out from their mind openly. During these times of urgency, it seems like we've tapped into an

unknown realm of consciousness, completely attentive and focussed with the task at hand. In this mood, we seemingly pose a deaf ear to distractions.

Robert Greene, author of the book Mastery thinks that when people are in a dire need to brighten up their philosophical flamboyance, they certainly show their genius. However, they simply forget or avoid their glimpses of philosophical thoughts or genius whenever they reach their desired target. But for people like Albert Einstein, Napoleon Bonaparte, Charles Darwin, etc., it's just, their way of life. In every chapter he initiates with the stories of these mental giants which gives us an overall image of a particular concept. Furthermore, he views and analyses the concepts through lenses of psychology, philosophy, neuroscience and evolution "The genius, too, does nothing other than first learn to place stones, then to build, always seeking material, always forming and reforming it".-Friedrich Nietzsche.

Robert Greene sold his first international best seller the 48 Laws of Power when he was 36 in the year 1998. Before that, he worked for a total of 50 jobs starting from his adolescence including working in Hollywood. Though bestselling, this book is one of the most controversial books till date. It is banned in the prisons of Utah as people consider it to be "mind bending". Some people even consider him to be evil and gave the name "psychopath's bible" to this book and gave him the name "Modern Machiavelli". All he did was giving a more realistic view of things that happened around him, the thing he experienced by doing all these kinds of jobs. After this he went on to publish two more books The Art of Seduction and The 33 Strategies of War. These books also gained acclaim that's similar to his first book on power. He published The 33 Strategies of War in 2006. By that point he had done a lot of research with respect to power in biographies and history. After the 48 Laws of Power,

he acted as a consultant for contemporary individuals who held power.

Robert Greene said in an interview that these people regardless of whatever the time they belonged to, have certain traits that are astonishingly similar. By diving further deep in his research he observed that these all pointed to certain functions of the brain and the things these “masters” did to tune their brain that way. With this idea in 2006 he researched for 6 years tirelessly reading around 300-400 books and gave his readers a roadmap to become a master at any particular skill. Briefly put Mastery is a state of mind that even we experience at some points in our lives where we have glimpses of our own genius activity under some pressure such as a deadline, but unable to sustain this after the deadline has been met and go back to our passive style of living, reacting to whatever life throws at us.

To delve deeply into this book called Mastery lets divide this into 3 parts starting with its philosophical base which is constructed using the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, next his method of writing and later on to the core ideas of his book.

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

“I’m able to break a book down that can be chaotic. So, for instance, for this new book, I have loved Nietzsche a lot (this is a book about the Ubermensch, my next book) and there’s a book that I’ve read from him, an early book called Human all too Human, that’s just the most amazing book, but it is chaotic, it’s all over the place. He’s got all this aphorisms and these thoughts; it’s just like entering a rat’s maze. I, with my cards, can organize all of his ideas and all of these thoughts bring some order and show you the amazing pros of wisdom this guy has gleaned out of his mad, syphilitic brain.”-Robert Greene

Without delving into the metaphysical aspects in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, let’s understand the overall idea of his philosophy by asking the question why we do, what we do? At every moment of our time we have to actively take decisions consciously even for things like what to eat, and at every decision making point, there are 10,000 streams of possibilities fanning out like a river delta before you. Now there are several answers to this question, if someone is altruistic he says that he does things that allow him to sacrifice himself for the sake of others. To which

Aristotelians argue that even sacrificing oneself gives us a sense of pleasure and hence we do things that give us maximum pleasure. However, this can also be easily refuted, if we do things that give us greatest pleasure why do people instead of moving on which is pleasurable whine about things that haven’t gone their way which further degrades their mood?

Then Arthur Schopenhauer entered and said that we do things to ensure survival. Sure feelings like guilt may not be immediately pleasurable but is essential to our hunter gatherer ancestors who should be able to feel guilt when they inattentively walked and pierced a bunch of thorns during hunt, which compels them to be more attentive. Hence Schopenhauer said that we do things through “the will of survival”. Then came Nietzsche who was able to point out the apparent contradictions in his theory by telling why are people constantly putting themselves in danger by doing skydiving or deep sea scuba diving? Which were gaining reputation during 1900s so for Nietzsche it seemed survival is unable to explain such activities and he said that we do things due to the “will of power”? And this concept of “will of power” is heavily misunderstood (even by his sister who modified his teachings so that they align with her Nazi sensibilities) by most and hence he too was controversial.

Power according to Nietzsche is not electric power or wind power, etc., it is also not militant power or the power of gang leaders leading mobs, and it is also not physical power that one gains through fitness or excellent genes. To Nietzsche power is “the way of expressing oneself”, or even simply put becoming your highest possible self. And before these point philosophies like stoicism, Epicureanism etc., taught everyone that we cannot control our external environment. All we can do is to control our inner emotions and become detached so that the things that make us sad won’t have control over us anymore and these philosophies employed certain techniques such as mindfulness, meditation and pessimistic dispositions to help us get detached. These philosophies encourage us to develop the kind of mental detachment that we remain unaffected even if our dear ones were being gruesomely killed in front of us. This is because we don’t have control over universe too, we don’t know when an asteroid hits and kills our loved ones.

Nietzsche on the other hand argues that, if you become detached in this way then you won’t even feel the

warmth when our loved ones smile at us. He asked everyone of his time why is being detached considered that much of a virtue? As stated earlier everyone has a will of power and sometimes our will of power may directly contradict with someone else's power of will and we don't always get what we want due to this contradiction. Let's assume two persons who work in a company and due to the bad economic situation of this pandemic the company decided to downsize between these two people in the upcoming month. Now the person who comes in everyday gives 110% effort and maintains a strong work ethic may have greater chances of staying in the company compared to the person who goes home and meditates to become detached and not feel anything even when fired.

Ultimately Friedrich Nietzsche says that yes we cannot control the universe or most of the things around us, but we must at least try to control some variables such as working hard in the above example. And through this perspective he says, "The genius, too, does nothing other than first learn to place stones, then to build, always seeking material, always forming and reforming it." This is the main underlying principle of the book *Mastery* and all the chapters are concepts that deal with how to learn placing stones, how to build etc., and from time to time he gives lessons from history that there is no such thing as inborn talent or giftedness and anyone can become masters, he describes about a girl named Temple who despite being autistic goes on to become a leading master in her field.

### III. WRITING STYLE

As stated earlier Greene reads 300-400 whole books in order to completely understand a particular idea and a lot of this is just 1/3 rd of the total work he does before writing a book. "I'm not usually writing, because my books require so much research. So, right now, I'm in a research period, when I'm reading voraciously books about human nature, psychology, etc. And then, in about a year, I'm gonna start writing and then I go on to a kind of a different routine when I'm more crazy and hard to be around." - Robert Greene

From these words of Robert Greene we can infer that even though his books are extensively based on research, the writing part is also important. As he states that "it's hard to be around" at times when he is writing which can infer that he puts in a huge amount of time in his writing and it is also a very painful

process. Once he gets the idea or theme around which a book should be written, he develops the mind of a beginner and gives life to his work. He says that our work is a direct reflection of our emotional commitment of completing a certain task. If we are only half involved in this work, it reflects completely on our work and the people examining (reading) our work can easily spot the difference. To give his complete attention and focus he develops the mindset of a beginner as the beginner's mind is full of possibilities.

Furthermore, he has stated that he follows the age old technique of marginalia. During his research, he goes for more hands on approach and he takes notes through the margins of the book and writes the overall theme or idea of a chapter on flashcards. He said that he would be able to knock down a single book into its fundamentals in about 20-30 flashcards and by the end of his research he would have around 6000-12000 cards which would be further connected in an organised manner. In this book, he initiates with a quote written by himself that tends to introduce us to his idea, continued by the anecdotes of famous personalities like Charles Darwin, Michael Faraday, Thomas Edison, etc. This anecdote helps us to get a grasp of the overall big picture of this particular concept or idea. In the next section of this chapter, he gives "keys to mastery" in which he gives the ways to develop the mindset required to integrate a certain concept into ourselves followed by "strategies of masters" which give us the complete practical approach on what's and how's of a particular concept. In some of the chapters a "reversal" section is given which is like the exceptions to a particular law or idea giving us the fluidity.

### IV. CORE IDEAS

In the introduction of his book Robert Greene gives an example of Charles Darwin who from a very young age was somehow into the idea of collecting carcasses of animals to which his father scolded him. He has a brother who excelled in studies and went on to become a doctor. Though Darwin's father wants him to do medicine, he accepts that he is not intellectually capable of becoming a doctor and pushes him into a career in biology. After a certain period of time he becomes a biologist and he gets an offer in a ship as a marine biologist. His father won't allow him but he

pursues on this idea to go into the sea for a voyage and his father finally agrees with his decision. Then he goes to South America and goes on to collecting all the different variety of species that fascinate him since childhood, and as time passes by he will eventually collect so many species of plants and animals.

In the later phase, he discovers and brings forward the theory of evolution. At that time almost all religions agreed that god created humans and to get this idea out was a herculean task. So in order to get this idea into masses, he has developed social intelligence which is also elaborated. So with the help of this example the first thing Greene tries to explain is that everyone has some primal inclination to certain things, that spark of curiosity that we get when we do some things. Greene says that these are our primal roots and we should be able to discover it soon he calls this inclination “life’s tasks” and first chapter is dedicated entirely to how one must be able to return to their primal instincts and get formal education on subjects that fascinate you.

To explain the reversal of this law Greene gives the example of dr. Ramchandran who is a world-renowned neuroscientist. In his childhood Ramchandran was fascinated by seashells a particular species of snails called “xenophora” caught the attention of Ramchandran which disguises itself with the shells of other species of snails as camouflage. When his parents were deciding his career for him which is a right to all Indian parents, Ramchandran never spoke a word and later analysed himself that his inclination was not towards seashells but anomalies. As his career progressed, he drifted into his fascination to his anomalies and became the leading scientist. With his interest on “phantom limbs” which is an anomaly in our brain itself. In second and third chapters he delves deep into the need of mentor, how an ideal apprenticeship looks like with anecdotes from the lives of Thomas Edison and Michael Faraday.

In fourth chapter he emphasizes on the power of social intelligence through the anecdotes from the life of Benjamin Franklin who was not considerably socially intelligent but developed this trait out of necessity and would become the most socially intelligent person whose life went on smoothly even when he’s the president of America and even his opposition loved him dearly. Along with Benjamin Franklin, Greene has mentioned many of common people who have changed themselves by recognizing their real skills and have become great celebrities and maestros in

their fields. Every example is really motivating and gives good suggestions to the youngsters who are unable to face the difficulties and challenges in their lives.

As a philosopher, Greene has chosen different persons, not very famous people in their efforts and portrayed their life style, their endeavours and their sufferings in a gripping way. The writer Marcel Proust is the best example. Greene has explained how Proust suffered from his ill-health, how his mother sacrificed many things for him to make him a healthy and skilled person, how his father was disappointed with his longing for writing etc. Though his first book couldn’t get much recognition, Marcel Proust has regained his zeal back and worked for another novel. Unfortunately, after the death of his parents, he got recognition. Greene has expounded the philosophical flair in amplifying the story of Marcel Proust.

The next chapter is titled awaken the dimensional mind. According to Greene, dimensional mind is what differentiates between a master and a beginner in any particular field. "The Dimensional Mind has two essential requirements: one, a high level of knowledge about a field and subject; and two, the openness and flexibility to use this knowledge in new and original ways" (Mastery 178). And the last chapter talks about the fusion necessary between rational mind and intuition. In the end of all chapters he tries to give a quote from the lives of these intellectual giants who lived by these concepts and ideas, and the huge amount of correlation among them.

## V. CONCLUSION

In today’s world most of the authors, once they publish an international bestselling book, they are somehow publishing the same books with almost same or similar concepts with different titles in pursuit of acquiring money. And this is the reason why Robert Greene’s books stand out in the genre of self-help, as everything he writes is based on a huge amount of research. The originality of theme is most crucial in all his books, and all of them talk about different subjects. As he himself states the emotional commitment to our work directly translates into our work. We will be able to see Greene’s commitment towards this book through his wide range of anecdotes and his great attention to detail.

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