

Now it started to rain. It was a beautiful afternoon in the French Pyrenees; a light breeze was coming off the Mediterranean Sea to the east, and here I was stranded somewhere in the south of France running out of time and getting drenched. My plan was to make it to the Perpignan airport to catch the infrequent UK flight that would get me back to the University of Edinburgh where I was studying for the semester. At the last train station, I befriended an adventurous New Zealander in a similar predicament, and with the clock ticking, we decided that it would be faster to use our outstretched thumbs to travel the last 45 km than to wait indefinitely for the long-overdue train connection. We sat on the roadside clutching our backpacks hoping a car would drive by that was willing to pick up a pair of wishful hitchhikers. Just when the situation seemed utterly bleak, a Frenchman in his fifties driving a black coupe pulled up, smiled, and offered to take us to the next major town. During the drive, he cheerfully engaged us in conversation, and we soon discovered that he was a physician on his way to the local hospital. He then dropped us off, bid us *bon voyage*, and we eagerly awaited our next ride. A half-hour later, the good French doctor drove by yet again. Rolling down his window, he announced that he had been called in for an emergency at the Perpignan Hospital and that he would gladly take us the rest of the way! With his help, I still managed to catch my flight.

I wonder, what passed through the good doctor's mind when he saw two sopping-wet strangers sitting on the roadside? I will never know for sure, but I imagine that he felt a connection to us—one so powerful that he interrupted his daily commute to extend a helping hand. I have witnessed this phenomenon countless times in the hospital rooms of doctors I have shadowed and on the crowded floors of free clinics I have worked in. What amazes me is the meaningful connection that can be created between two people despite everything else that may circumstantially separate them. For me, making that human connection is central to how I work and relate with others. In my three years of tutoring chemistry at UC Berkeley's Student Learning Center, I have found that personal connectivity is crucial to the learning process. Because of it, I am able to share in the exhilaration of the student that finally "gets it" after being hopelessly mired in confusion. Moreover, I have discovered that when you are sufficiently tuned in, everyone has something to teach you.

The theme of connections also extends into my academic pursuits. I am often asked why I am double majoring in such seemingly unrelated fields: chemistry and philosophy. After all, what link could there be between metaphysics and molecules, or electrons and ethics? For me, the two disciplines flow together in many different ways. Both are borne out of a sense of wonderment about the world around us. Chemistry, or science in general, asks "How?", while philosophy, with equal force, asks "Why?". The two go hand-in-hand.

Becoming a physician-scientist would allow me to join my twin academic pursuits by connecting philosophical speculation with scientific rigor. Through philosophical introspection, I have come to marvel at the powers of the mind and in turn developed a far deeper value for human life. The realization that every human being has access to their own private, inner sanctum is indeed a powerful one. It forms the bedrock of open-mindedness because at its heart is the appreciation of a vast, underlying world of complexity beneath outward biological or material appearance. For me, medicine begins at the point where this inward journey of philosophy turns outward to face the reality of disease and suffering. Armed with the sharp,

analytical scalpel of science, medicine brings together the core natural sciences—physics, chemistry, and biology—and intersects them at the level of the human body.

The MD/PhD course of study would provide the greatest opportunity for continuing to build connections. The MD would allow me to join philosophy and science with humanistic action, and the PhD portion of the program would make possible, through dedicated research work, a deeper understanding of the scientific areas integrated into academic medicine. What excites me about research is that it takes the elegant theories laid out in textbooks and pushes them out into uncharted territories. Beginning with the summer after my junior year in high school, for one year in college, and four consecutive summers thereafter, I have engaged in research projects in areas ranging from bioorganic chemistry and protein phylogeny to medicinal chemistry and polymer science. Each lab I have worked in has exposed me to new and different ways to connect chemistry with unsolved problems in that particular field. For example, in my current work under Dr. Thomas Hemscheidt, I am studying a novel method to elicit and isolate secondary metabolites from marine bacteria that may show highly promising antibiotic activity. Already, with my diverse and extensive research preparation, I have explored a wide spectrum within science; now, I am ready to begin connecting all the dots.