

The Devil's Work

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Unacknowledgements

For Anal Retentive Types – yes there are typos, grammatical errors, and maybe more. If you had paid a single cent for this you would have room for complaint. But since you didn't, please do not bother me with the details. For everyone else – I hope you enjoy this attempt to destroy your inner calm.

Preface

If you listen carefully you can sometimes hear God's laughter. It's a faint 'ho ho ho' echoing around the universe. He just cannot believe his luck; a species of sentient beings, situated in the direst of circumstances, that pretends it's having a good time. I am of course speaking of Homo Sapiens and our endless capacity for fooling ourselves. Here is a secret. If you dare look reality straight in the face you too will be able to join God, and laugh at the cosmic joke. You will become happy – not that happiness is a goal worth pursuing in its own right. Denial is the source of nearly all misery. While our imagination desperately conjures up happy ever after stories, life ruthlessly rips them down. If you do the ripping down yourself, you will derive pleasure from a sense of your own inner honesty and power.

This series of short essays will do some of the ripping down for you, but the main task is yours. Read Ligotti, Ernest Becker, Schopenhauer, Emil Cioran and others if you develop a taste for the destruction of your most dearly held beliefs. And remember - the most powerful person on Earth is the one who has nothing to lose.

Is Life OK?

In his book *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, Thomas Ligotti asks whether life is OK. His answer is a resounding no. A variety of others agree with him including Emil Cioran and Schopenhauer. In the opposite corner, we have the people who not only think it is OK but believe it is something to be celebrated. Leibniz and Spinoza come to prominence here. Leibniz is famous for saying that this is the best of all possible worlds and Spinoza harps on about the perfection of the world and its creator. So which group is correct?

The realists such as Schopenhauer only see futility. In Schopenhauer's case, he saw a single unconscionable and unconscious force called the will-to-life manifesting through all things. It is rapacious and seems to place no value on individual beings since it sentences them to death the minute they are born. It does, however, seem to appreciate the continuation of the species very highly, as the sex drive is indeed tyrannical. It would be hard to argue against Schopenhauer since he is merely stating the facts - everything dies, but the sex drive ensures a species continues.

The optimists on the other hand call upon a supernatural being and Spinoza was quite clear that he saw mundane life as vain and futile. So he just diverted his attention to a being that was infinite and eternal, namely God. Leibniz was also infatuated with God and didn't give much attention to life itself. All of this makes sense since it would be challenging for someone to conclude that life was OK without actually turning a blind eye and focusing on

the supernatural. And if we wanted to be particularly unkind we could accuse the likes of Spinoza and Leibniz of living in their imagination.

This does raise an interesting question, however. I think we all know that life is not OK. The Buddhists probably nail it best. We are born, suffer, grow old and die. We are aware this. It is not a point up for debate. So can we just accept this and then create our fantasy world to our liking. In Ecclesiastes. Solomon expresses his despair at not being able to find anything that is satisfying. He states that the fate of the wise man and the beast is the same - death. In the end, he only advises that people find something they enjoy and just get on with it. Well, this is a nice theory, but once a person has seen the emptiness of life they can't pretend that playing the guitar, praying to a God, or even hedonism will fill the gap. But there is a twist.

For a person who has enough self-honesty to see the futility of life, the study of this futility becomes a pleasure - or rather I should say, it can become a joy. Such activity reminds me of a slightly subversive statement Spinoza made in his Ethics. He said 'insofar as we understand God to be the cause of pain, we to that extent feel pleasure.' I've listed Spinoza with the optimists, but he was a strange kind of optimist. He knew that life involved pain, but found a way to make understanding pain give him pleasure. That quote from Spinoza is profound. For him, God was not a benign, caring force. God was Nature, and Nature was ruthless.

So here is a way out of the conundrum. Life is vain and futile, to quote Spinoza, but by understanding its vanities and futility, we can derive pleasure. Something quite heretical is implied here, and not least the fact that human understanding can trump the suffering caused by God.

This is where the realist comes out victorious. By staring the brutality and futility of reality in the face, and by understanding it and how it affects us, we can transcend it and derive a sort of pleasure from the understanding. The optimist will always be in denial and as such will always suffer, simply because they will always be disappointed.

Apparently, it requires a certain inner strength to walk the path of the realist, and the help of those who have been there. Fortunately, we have Schopenhauer, Cioran and even Nietzsche to assist us on our way. And oddly enough I would put Spinoza in this camp. He's a dodgy character, and the real message he is giving takes some digging out.

The realists hold the keys to heaven - our heaven. But to reach heaven, we have to walk through Hell. Many get stuck in Hell, but the knowledge that even Hell can be understood, and as such be a source of pleasure, can serve as the escape door.

The Perpetual Graveyard

The Stoics would say that every cup of earth contained some part of a dead human being - some matter that once was part of a body. Not only do we find ourselves in a graveyard, but we see all the creatures that will soon become part of it. This graveyard recycles itself over and over again, with a smooth, ruthless efficiency most of us would rather not contemplate.

Hungry ghosts, demons, zombies and vampires haunt this graveyard world. The hungry ghosts forever in search of something that will fill the void within them, and demons bringing cruelty and suffering to fellow creatures, with humans being the most demonic of them all. Zombies are the walking dead, running entirely on automatic, and incapable of joy. Vampires are people who suck the life out of others with their narcissistic demands and psychopathic behavior.

Most people make the graveyard tolerable by denying its existence. They focus entirely on their ambitions - fame, money, power, sexual conquest, luxury and endless forms of competitive behavior - no matter how subtle. To pursue these aims, human society manifests as one large competitive game, and to hell with the losers. This game is all-consuming, ensuring that the eye never sees the ultimate futility of it all. And meanwhile, the graveyard is recycled - the real outcome of all sentient activity. It doesn't matter how rarified or esoteric human activity becomes, the result is always the same - as Solomon expressed in his despair in Ecclesiastes.

The central issue is this. The second a creature is conceived it is sentenced to death. This sentence is the value nature puts upon each life. We are almost worthless as far as life is concerned, with one exception. Procreation ensures the continuance of the species, and to this end, the sex drive is all powerful. The graveyard must keep recycling, for reasons that are not at all clear. And maybe it is best that we do not know, and that nature has blinkered humanity so that it pursues its futile ambitions.

Life has quite openly given its opinion of your worth - you will breed and then you will die. This honesty that nature has expressed is a gift. It tells us how to form an attitude toward our life. Ultimately we are not important as individual creatures, and that is our liberation. While the survival instinct drives us remorselessly onward, tying us up with endless concerns and worries, we need to step back and realize that the will-to-life serves itself and not us as individual creatures.

That we are not important, means we can, as best as possible, arrange our lives, so it is not all about serving the great beast - the graveyard that recycles. We can rest peacefully in the cemetery when we shed all sense of self-importance, all feeling of ambition, all illusions of gain, and sit back and watch the circus that is both within and outside us. Life has passed its verdict on us as individuals - we are almost worthless. We, in turn, can give our opinion on life - apart from the primary effort to maintain our existence; we should make efforts to reduce our pains and increase our pleasures - Epicurus would approve of this. While we all ultimately serve the great beast, a few can to some extent make the sentence more or less pleasurable.

The Human Zoo

The desire motivating all creatures is the desire to persist in their existence - or the survival instinct. The ferocity of this ability is the result of millions of years of natural selection, where those creatures with the most aggressive survival behavior are the ones that win the battle. Homo Sapiens isn't the dominant form of humanoid because it is the most intelligent, it demolished the competition because it has the most aggressive survival instinct. So it would be fair to conclude that the population of the planet consists of those species that are particularly nasty, and man, as the most successful species, takes first prize. The flaw in the survival dynamic is that it must ultimately destroy the species it promotes to number one position. Members of this species must inevitably start destroying each other, their environment and other species - as is indeed the case. Is there any hope that man can tame his aggression? No. Nature hasn't fine-tuned this destroyer species for millions of years just to have it modify its behavior on a whim.

So having established that man, like all creatures, is driven primarily by the desire to exist, we can start to expose the myriad emotions that are in turn powered by this desire. The principle that determines whether an emotion is pleasurable or painful is whether survival is enhanced or diminished respectively. This mechanism does not account for every emotion, but we will come to those later.

Pleasurable feelings will greet enhanced survival prospects. Receiving a significant amount of money, overcoming an illness, finding an attractive and fit mate, getting a promotion, or any one of a vast number of life-enhancing events will generate pleasurable feelings. There is, however, a twist in all of this. Survival is a competitive sport. If your competition becomes stronger, it means you become weaker, and if you become weaker, your competition becomes stronger. So, you will not only experience pleasurable emotions if you become stronger, but you will also experience them if the competition (almost everyone else) becomes weaker.

Painful emotions will accompany diminished survival prospects. Illness, getting fired, divorce, a car accident and many other events will create a sense of diminished wellbeing, and with it a painful emotion. However, we can also experience painful emotions if our competition (most of the people around us) becomes stronger. This strength will make us feel weaker. So, your situation at work may remain unchanged, but one of your peers gets a significant promotion. As a result, you will feel diminished just because someone around you has become more powerful.

These issues can be clarified by the following five laws of the Human Zoo:

1. Every person is driven to survive and will do almost anything to ensure their ongoing existence.
2. An enhanced sense of survival will create pleasurable emotions.
3. A diminished sense of survival will create painful emotions.
4. When those around a person become weaker, that person will feel stronger and experience pleasurable emotions.

5. When those around a person become stronger, that person will feel weaker and experience painful emotions.

The analysis that drops out of these dynamics is quite amazing. Let's look at envy, a painful emotion that is felt when someone else is on the receiving end of good fortune. If your neighbor suddenly comes into a large inheritance and moves to a more prestigious neighborhood, it would be quite natural to experience envy. In fact, envy is not only feeling pain at someone's good fortune but also feeling pleasure at their ill fortune. This latter is often called *schadenfreude* - pleasure at another's misfortune. Naturally, we are keen to see this sort of behavior in others and more reluctant to see it in ourselves. But the five laws are just that - laws. We are all subject to them, and they work like clockwork. They are just as much a part of the natural world as the law of gravity.

If someone makes a person feel more powerful and sense an enhanced state of existence, then that person will love the other person. If someone makes a person feel less powerful and diminishes their existence, then that person will hate the other person. It's clockwork and nothing more.

These dynamics create the human zoo - people continually sizing up their survival prospects and making comparisons with the competition. Much of the processing is unconscious, but sometimes it is conscious. Social intercourse is often nothing more than people sizing up to each other, which is why some find it so exhausting. And because human beings group behind abstractions such as political party, religion, football team, corporation and so on, they will indulge in the same dynamics at the group level. Hence wars, religious persecution, industrial sabotage and other niceties are inevitable.

So how do we step out of this zoo, and the inevitable suffering it creates. The first step is gaining a thorough understanding of the dynamics, and then we can watch it like we might watch chimps in a zoo. The battles for mating rights, group leadership, feeding priorities and all the rest of it. It is possible to reach a state where human behavior can be observed objectively without any associated judgment or emotions, but such a person will have studiously watched the same dynamics taking place within them and applied the same non-judgment and understanding.

Some emotions are not directly associated with the survival power play. Gaining an understanding of the emotions and the underlying dynamics is pleasurable in its own right. And any activity that is not directly serving survival can bring pleasures that are in no way related to the usual comparative power struggles. Playing a musical instrument, art and many other aesthetic pursuits can generate such pleasure.

Stepping out of the zoo is not a physical movement, but a psychological one. Participation becomes one of watching the power plays, which are sometimes amusing, and other times tragic. Either way, once the dynamics are understood the resulting behavior loses its sting and we can move on to other things.

The Lie

Lying and deceit are essential activities for most living creatures. The all-powerful desire to exist means every sentient being will attempt to maximize its survival prospects through the lie. A lie may be as simple as the spider's web, which is so subtle that it goes unnoticed by the fly until it collides with it. Or the moth that takes on the color and shape of a leaf to avoid being seen by birds. Very explicit deceit is displayed by the anglerfish, dangling a protuberance from the top of its head that looks like food to other fish. When a fish attempts to swallow this bait, it is then eaten in turn by the angler fish. The whole of nature exploits the lie to perfection, and best of all in man. In fact, nature is built on the lie.

Some psychologists claim that human language became sophisticated so we could lie more efficiently. Lying manifests in every aspect of life. To protect ourselves against it to some extent we have created a large set of laws, and an equally significant legal profession to go with it. Lying is de rigueur for most business activities. In fact, we have created a unique function so that companies can lie more efficiently to customers. It is called sales and marketing. And another function was created at the beginning of the twentieth century so that organizations of all kinds could lie to the world as a whole. A whole new industry was created called public relations. Such is the power and effectiveness of the lie that many businesses spend more on sales, marketing, and PR than they do on developing their products. And of course, it is not just businesses that lie. Governments lie much all the time, and lying is quite common in academia, medical professions and every area of human activity. The lie is the stuff of life.

Lying also manifests in close personal relationships. In the human mating ritual, both male and female will employ charm to seduce the other. As Nassim Taleb pointed out, charm is just an inoffensive way of causing someone harm. People use charm to fool someone into giving when that person would not give under normal circumstances - and so it is a form of lying. A significant proportion (typically around 35%) of people who are married will cheat on their partners. The raw biology looks something like this. Males want to distribute their sperm as widely as possible and feel constrained in a monogamous relationship. Females typically want the best quality sperm from the fittest most virile male. With these drivers, it is hardly surprising that fidelity in marriage is difficult to achieve. This does point to a broader issue. Human beings are essentially animals with a self-conscious, rational bit added. It's a formula for inner conflict and much lying. In our natural state, without a conditioned consciousness telling us what is right and wrong, we would rape, murder and steal without a second thought. This happens in the animal kingdom all the time. But, since we have created societies with laws and codes of conduct, we have to push our natural instincts into the background. The natural result is that we lie to ourselves about how we feel. When our natural urge is to be violent, we instead display politeness, and might even feign affection or amusement. Society is a lie, but a vital lie if we are not to degenerate into barbaric behavior. The brutish within society may find barbarism attractive, but they wouldn't feel that way when there is no one to fix their car, or remove a tooth, or rid them of a flea infestation.

Society as lie bridges the gap between lying to others and lying to oneself; the latter of these being the most destructive form of lying. So dominating is our social conditioning that

we have lost contact with our real emotional state, and it is worth pointing out that our emotional response to a situation is always our authentic response. In a situation where someone has said something that hurt us we may pretend to ourselves that we are OK and everything is fine. Or when someone angers us we pretend that we are calm and collected. Childhood conditioning will determine to a large extent how close we are to our real feelings. If a child is disciplined every time it displays some form of anger, it will inevitably learn to suppress that anger and lose contact with it. This is all a recipe for significant internal suffering. The solution, of course, is to regain contact with the emotions via some form of therapy. The problem here is that those who are in most denial about their real feelings are those least likely to seek help. It is entirely possible for an adult to have emotional authenticity without laying waste to the social environment around them, and so the inner lie is not necessary.

A healthy attitude toward the lie would be to accept that most of one's interaction with the world will be based on lies. From the fake smile through to serious fraud, the lie is the currency of life. However, when it comes to our internal state, we need to avoid the lie as much as possible. Being unauthentic with ourselves results in various neuroses and sub-optimal behavior. A person who tells herself that her business is turning a corner when in reality it is flat on its back is merely indulging in unfounded hope and will squander resources on something that cannot be brought back to life. Emotional authenticity with oneself requires a good deal of courage, but we either suffer from the inevitable neuroses caused by the inner lie, or we suffer the discomfort often felt when being honest with ourselves. One is unconscious and the other conscious. As for the world out there, give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.

Against God

Driving the universe is a small number of natural forces - gravity, electrical and magnetic forces, and nuclear forces mainly. Where life is concerned, there is one dominant force, and it is called the survival instinct. This ability ensures that each creature makes every effort it can to persist in its existence and that only those species which measure highest on the survival scale thrive. The characteristics that ensure survival is primarily physical strength and cunning. Lions excel in the first of these and human beings in the latter. We, Homo Sapiens, are the most cunning and deceitful of all species - this is how we eliminated other human species (Neanderthal for example) and rose to dominance.

If we understand the idea of God to mean 'all there is,' then God seems mostly unconscious and mechanical - as far as we can tell. Of course, we could postulate a God that manifests other, more esoteric forms of consciousness, but we have no knowledge of this, and so it would just be speculation. We will keep away from speculation. Those who have experienced cosmic consciousness will not need this book. Sticking out like a sore thumb is the fact that human beings have a reflective consciousness. We can create ideas and concepts, play around with them and use them for our ends. Even the smartest of animals sit near to zero on this scale compared with man. So man is something of an anomaly.

This force called the survival instinct is wholly blind - as blind as gravity or magnetism. Since creatures need to eat each other to survive, nature as a whole is red in tooth and claw. Man is no longer prey for lions and other flesh eaters, but being the most aggressive and cunning of all creatures the survival instinct still operates at full throttle. And so man turns this blind instinct against himself. One individual will seek to dominate and exploit other people, and if we assume for the moment that man has not restrained this instinct through creating a State with laws, then men will murder each other for the slightest offense. When the law has broken down in various cities and countries, it is common to see rape, looting, killings and even cannibalism. Invading armies, when there are no restraints, will murder, rape and pillage.

So let's go back to the idea of God for a moment. This massive machine called the Universe, or Nature drives life on Earth through the survival instinct. The effort to survive is the force of God on Earth. While we can look on at the carnival of carnage called life with some degree of detachment, it becomes harder to do that when the impact of the survival drive is much closer to home. Most people would not wish to live in a lawless State. The idea that those who are stronger can, on a whim, simply murder, rape, or steal from those who are weaker, is not very appealing. And so man creates laws and a State to protect himself from the natural instincts associated with the survival instinct. The State is against God. It tames the drive that is foremost in all men and obliges each to give a minimum of consideration to others. There is, of course, a price to be paid - frustration, anger, resentment and other emotions cannot be avoided when our core driver is inhibited. Yes, of course, you would like to ram that car in front that has just cut in, and you will feel frustrated because you cannot. The penalty for doing such a thing would be greater than the pleasure that is gained, and so most of us would just suck it up.

An unrestrained survival drive would result in daily carnage on a massive scale in every town and city. While we can inhibit this behavior by laws, penalties, and societal pressure, there are no such laws that apply to the devastation the survival drive creates every day within each person. Because man can imagine the future, he is capable of imagining his death. Obviously, this is at odds with the survival instinct, and so it creates a neurosis. Most people repress thoughts about their mortality, and as a result, the neurosis intensifies and sometimes leads to severe mental illness - not least depression and heightened states of anxiety. Our survival instinct is also the origin of many desires - for sex, food, power, fame, wealth - and so on. In human beings, this drive seeks expression in whatever way it can, and since it is no longer acceptable to murder a couple of people every day, the survival drive finds expression in displays of power - money and fame primarily. All of this is the inevitable result of the survival drive manifesting in millions of human beings who have given up their natural right to murder, rape, and theft. So envy, hatred, jealousy, contempt, lust and a thousand other emotions remain impotent and repressed.

We can work against the survival instinct, this power of God manifesting in life, by getting to understand it. Unfortunately, many drivers would inhibit a person from being honest about their desires and emotions - religion and accepted social norms being the most obvious. But with enough self-honesty, a person can admit that she would like to punch that person who has just sneaked in front of her in a queue. Once we have self-honesty, we can then learn to observe how we feel, just as we might watch some external event. Eventually, we might be able to sit with an emotional state such as envy, hatred, lust, derision, and just enjoy the energy. This sounds simple but is very difficult. Such work is work against God, in a sense, since we are using this prime driver called the survival instinct for our purposes - to understand and to use the energy. Nature or God, does ensure however that the majority of humanity will simply be slaves to the emotions that are generated by the survival drive. It does, after all, want the fittest, most cunning and least conscionable members of our species to be successful, and only the gladiatorial trial of life will establish this.

An Anomaly

Dog eat dog - this is nature's modus operandi. Life is not shy and reveals its brutal reality for anyone who has eyes to see. The will-to-life, manifesting in every creature, means that each will put its own needs first. Every being will kill to satisfy hunger, fight to the death for mating rights, or seek to dominate others for its advantage. It's a straightforward and efficient mechanism for ensuring the strong become stronger and the weak are eliminated. Since action reveals intent, it would be fair to conclude that nature strives toward for diversity and strength at any cost. The individual is not important, only the never-ending refinement of power through a process of natural selection.

In most respects, man obeys the ruthless dynamics of the strong dominating the weak - but not altogether. While all abstractions such as nation, religion, corporation, political ideology and so on, provide mechanisms for one group to dominate another, there are a few people who find such herd behavior abhorrent. They also find a great deal of personal interaction distasteful - the bragging, one-upmanship, disguised aggression, envy and so on. How can this be if nature rules supreme? Why would someone avoid the competitive scrum with the real possibility of disadvantaging themselves? What sentiment within some people finds the brutality of the will-to-life repugnant?

It would seem that the mind of man does not entirely belong to nature. As far as life is concerned, domination of the weak, theft, trickery, brutality and survival at all costs are the only forms of behavior we need consider. There is no evidence that the dynamics which drive life on Earth are anything other than a local phenomenon - a local insanity. The solution to this anomaly is not evident. However, if we look solely at the facts, we find some members of the most highly evolved species on planet Earth are turning their backs on the very dynamics which brought them into being. Is this the inevitable outcome of an unopposed force reaching the zenith of its powers? Every extreme implies its opposite, and it seems quite likely that this unconscionable will-to-life is exhausting its brutality through man. Of course, this unthinking, unconscious force may bring about its destruction through nuclear war or environmental disaster - although the word 'destruction' is perhaps too strong since primitive life would once again commence the struggle to realize more sophisticated and aggressive species.

This new phenomenon, of a mind that rejects the forces that brought it into being, is truly an anomaly. Whether it has any future remains to be seen.

The Five Fools

We are all fools, and fools come in five flavors. The foolish fool believes in life and is wholly driven by it. The emotional, intellectual and physical fools don't believe in life, but they do think they can build a superstructure on top of life using their most potent power. The zero fool doesn't believe in life, and she doesn't believe in herself either. Let's look at the fools in detail:

The Foolish Fool

Life is OK. The foolish fool (FF) gets a job, a partner, family, drives a nice car, and takes a two-week vacation every year. If the FF lives an average sort of life, then she may get worn down by job pressures, the mortgage, and the kids, but overall it's all worth it. But as the FF gets older and health issues start to rear their ugly head, so she might reflect now and then and wonder what it is all about. Then as the FF gets older still, so she gets glimpses of the grim reaper, and thoughts about what could have been, the missed opportunities, the way it all passed so quickly, and people she knows start dropping like flies. Having invested everything she had in life she has nothing left for herself, and as Gurdjieff points out, those who do not plant seeds when they are young having nothing to reap when they get older. She gets older, but not wiser, and as the compelling fascinations drop away, so there is nothing left, only a hollowed out shell desperately seeking meaning. The time that could have been spent acquiring wisdom was dedicated to life - because she believed in life.

The Emotional Fool

Having figured out at a relatively young age that investing everything in life is a fool's game, the emotional fool (EF) seeks some higher meaning. Such effort is driven by the taste for more rarefied emotional states and the pleasures associated with them. The whole of life can become centered on practices that result in these states, and like a junkie, the EF can feel deprived if they are not accessible. Accompanying this quest for pleasant emotions, the EF is easily conned by people uttering comforting, reassuring words. There is a distinct lack of intellectual discrimination, and the EF can be easily carried away by group hysteria and wishful thinking. As the end of life approaches the EF realizes he has nothing substantial within him - no real understanding, just emotional states that hold so much promise, but never deliver anything real. Even though the EF did not believe in life, he made the critical mistake of believing in the emotions.

The Intellectual Fool

The intellectual fool (IF) looks at life and just sees futility and chaos, and for this reason, she does not believe in life. The IF believes in systems, and the more intricate and complicated the better. Alchemy, cosmological systems, ancient knowledge, philosophical systems, and theology are all up for grabs as far as the IF is concerned. Order above everything else is demanded from these systems. They have to bring clarity in a confused world because the IF just cannot tolerate the idea that maybe the world is chaotic and random. The IF will endlessly debate the meaning of every word in a system while missing the fact that the whole structure might be good for nothing but the trash can. Intense divisions can occur

between those who believe a particular word means one thing and those who think it means another. Dogma, persecution, bigotry and other niceties are often the direct children of the IF as he looks to create an intellectual fortress with no weaknesses. Late in life, the IF may become overwhelmed by the futility and emptiness of his sterile intellectual creations. Something aches within him and his systems become too much of an abomination to bare. He has tried to straitjacket life, and life has ripped him apart. The IF never believed in life, but he did believe in the power of thought - and all thought did was build a prison.

The Physical Fool

The physical fool (PF) is not deceived by life for one minute; she is just too aware of the inevitable decay of the body and the march toward death. And so the PF sets out to preserve the body as much as possible - yoga, diet, the gym, supplements, wheat grass, various quack therapies, relaxation - and so on. This awareness of the inevitability of old age and death is usually subconscious. The PF is actually in denial about death and aging, and this creates a deep neurosis. They fool themselves that they are embracing life when in reality they are running away from death. So while the PF is not deceived by life, the realization is unconscious. These people often lack emotional and intellectual intelligence, and so they are game for any scam merchants selling the latest elixir of life. As they grow older, so their denial becomes deeper. This manifests in need for constant activity and an inability to sit quietly in their own company. In the end, they see their life for what it is - a shallow worship of the body and a futile attempt to stop the clock. The PF never believed in life, and in reality was horrified by it. But they did believe in the power of their body, ultimately paying a high price for investing in a rotting bag of flesh.

The Zero Fool

The zero fool (ZF) does not believe in life, and he does not believe in his powers - physical, emotional and intellectual. She sees these abilities as tools for breaking down, instead of building up. Whereas the emotional fool will seek emotional experience, the ZF will attempt to understand the emotions, and through understanding become less influenced by them. The ZF has no tolerance of systems or intellectual baggage. Metaphysical systems, religious dogma, and philosophical speculation are given no room to grow. The ZF hunts down ideas and concepts that are without foundation - ideas such as purpose, morality, meaning, spiritual, and others that might just be nothing more than imagination are seen for what they are - chimera. As far as the body is concerned, the ZF knows he is dying and that the facts show that death will not be cheated by excessive attention to diet, exercise, and other fetishes. The ZF takes delight in becoming less and abhors the expert, the devotee, the fools who think that life is a process of accumulating when it is a matter of shedding. The body does not lie - the whole of life is the slow process of the body becoming less - of dying. The ZF wants his entire being to move to zero and delights in it. For the ZF life has far fewer thorns because he is not interested in picking roses.

Five Freedoms

Freedom is merely the absence of constraint. Of course, constraints are always present in some form, and so freedom is always relative. The most problematical constraints are those which cause an object to clash with its environment in some way. A motor vehicle that is constrained to travel at ten miles per hour will incur the wrath of other drivers, and could quite easily be the cause of an accident. A swimmer that is constrained to swim with a twenty-pound weight attached to their body will almost certainly drown. The less constrained something is, the more quickly it adapts to its environment.

The human mind is not free. It is conditioned by its inherent nature, by the environment and by the belief systems it has adopted. However, a mind that is constrained by useless ideas will lack the fluidity of movement in the same way that an overburdened human body will be slow and clumsy. In fact, an overloaded mind will be the cause of much suffering, causing it to clash with reality and initiate actions that are inept or harmful.

The five freedoms detailed below describe ideas that most of us entertain, even though they tend to be detrimental. All of them represent an attempt by the mind to establish some illusion of control. In a world we do not understand and have very little power to change, such illusions are inevitably damaging. They stop us from seeing life as it truly is and responding to it in the most appropriate and timely manner. The expression of these freedoms is negative, in the sense that we negate the ideas, and hence constraints, that burden us.

The first freedom - No Truth.

All of us tend to harbor the idea that truth exists. As with all of the mental burdens, it is an attempt to put boundaries around life so we can control it. If only we could establish some truth, it would serve as a foundation stone for the construction of an elaborate edifice, which in turn would allow us to operate more efficiently in life, and with less risk. The classic example of this is religion - a set of beliefs that form a ground for us to deal with life. That such a ground may clash with life's realities is never accepted, and so a religion may prohibit the use of contraceptives in a world that is overpopulated.

At a more trivial level, we can claim that a statement in logic is correct or that a fact is true. But this is not what we mean here by the truth. The truth most of us chase after is a set of beliefs that allow us to understand the world and our position in it. It hardly needs to be said how impossible such a quest is. Even with our sciences we still know almost nothing. Such ignorance is inevitable. The universe is almost certainly infinite in its complexity and infinite in the extent to which we do not understand it. What kind of truth can we propose in the face of the infinite?

Religion is nothing more than superstition, science nothing but curve fitting (bending ideas to fit facts) and philosophical systems nothing but fantasies built on unstable footholds. Better to see these things for what they are - human constructs developed to help finite beings exist in an infinite universe. But they are not the truth.

Abandon truth, and we leave bigotry, inappropriate behavior, anxiety and furrowed brows behind.

The Second Freedom - No Purpose.

'Purpose' is a human invention. While we may look at bees collecting pollen or a lion bringing down a deer and infer purpose, we would be wholly mistaken. The bee does not know it is collecting pollen - it just does it according to its programming. In the same way, our liver extracts waste from the blood without any consciousness of its function. When we talk of purpose, we are referring to an idea that is conceived in our mind, and of which we are conscious.

For many people, the notion of a purposeless life is unacceptable. Again, we are not talking about purposes that serve to improve our lives. Studying for a qualification to get a better job is obviously purposeful, but does not carry the same weight as ideas that might be constructed to give our life purpose. Our lives have no purpose because the universe has no purpose - no final cause.

That the universe is without purpose is quite evident. For it to have a purpose, it would have to be conscious in some way. It would also need to be lacking. 'Purpose' is only an expression of lack. If the universe is all, how could it possibly have an idea of something that is lacking and outside itself?

People construct purposes because they feel a lack. This lack usually comes from a sense of inner emptiness. And so, we see the religions attempting to address this lack through promises of immortality, a loving God and attributing significance to human life. New age cults do pretty much the same thing with affirmations that we are love and spirit embedded in the flesh.

To have no purpose is to be free. People who indulge in purpose are restricted in their thinking and behavior. It is an unnecessary burden.

The Third Freedom - No Free Will

The common notion of free will is that we are free to choose when presented with alternatives. So imagine you are walking past an ice cream parlor. Do you buy an ice cream? Well, you like ice cream, but yesterday you were reading a book about the evils of sugar, and so you decide not to buy one. So was the act of not buying a free act? If you had not read the book about sugar, you would probably have bought an ice cream. On that basis, it wasn't an act of free will. It was wholly conditioned by your state at the time, and whether you had or had not read the book. We have the illusion of free will because we are aware of the decisions we make, but not of the reasons we make the decisions.

Modern neuroscience can clarify here. It has found that in many circumstances the brain decides on an action several minutes before the person acts out the decision. It was all in the subconscious before the decision became conscious.

There is a vanity associated with the notion of free will. We act as if we are somehow cut off from the environment and are autonomous beings. Nothing is further from the truth. The environment conditions us on an ongoing basis, and this conditioning is the cause for many of our actions. We would probably not buy an ice cream on a day when it was snowing, just to give a clear example.

While we may simply be automatons in many respects, we can condition the decisions we make by changing our understanding. Reading the book about the evils of sugar will probably influence our decision on whether to buy the ice cream or not. However, we only push the decision back a level. What is it that makes us read the book? Again, this will be wholly determined by other factors. Even so, the principle remains true. As our understanding changes, so will our decisions based on that knowledge.

Realizing we have no free will is significant. Most people reject the idea because it challenges their belief that they are in control. But recognizing we are wholly conditioned beings, and that we have no free will is very liberating. Remorse and regret are no longer valid, and neither is praise. The implication of this is a topic in its own right, but the fact remains - we have no free will. So, ditch free will and become free.

The Fourth Freedom - No Importance

Since every creature, and particularly human beings, see themselves as the center of the universe, there is a naturally assumed sense of self-importance. Unfortunately, the rest of the world does not share this sentiment. Most sentient creatures see others almost as inanimate objects. Watch a lion chewing on the organs of a gazelle while it is still alive. There are no visible signs of any empathy whatsoever, and whether the gazelle is dead or alive while being devoured seems to be irrelevant to the consuming lion. And so it is with human beings to some extent. While each suffers their trials and tribulations, deals with their existential angst, and may hurt deeply, to another person any particular individual just assumes the importance of an object to a large extent. Of course, if we have some form of relationship with another person, then their inner state becomes better known to us. Generally speaking, we treat all strangers as objects and reserve the sense of sentience for ourselves and those who are close to us.

We can work outwards when determining how important we are. One's own body, thoughts, and emotions are very, very important. They fill our world. To those who are close to us, we are less important than they are to themselves, but even so, we do assume some importance. Then we move further out to casual friends and acquaintances. In reality, we may not be the least bit important to these people. Moving further out to individuals who live in the same town or city we are virtually invisible. So, we don't have to go very far to lose all significance whatsoever. The same applies to so-called 'famous people.' While the population of the world may know a very famous person, such a person will not be missed if they suddenly disappear. And certainly, and beings living in the Andromeda galaxy will be blissfully unaware of the extinction of all life on planet Earth.

But this is just a consideration of the size of the universe and the number of things in it. How about time? We all have a window of around 70 or 80 years to live our lives, and in that

window, we can be relevant to a small group of people. Now the universe is about 13 billion years old - that's 13 with nine zeroes after it. Within a hundred years of your death, you will be almost entirely forgotten - it will be as if you had not lived. Even the Sun and our galaxy, the Milky Way, are not necessary. In two billion years the Sun will explode, and the Milky Way will collide with the Andromeda galaxy. It will be fireworks on a massive scale, and only God gets a front row seat to see it. I call that selfishness on an infinite scale. So your selfishness can never add up to much. In fact, it's zero to be precise, even if you are a narcissistic psychopath.

This universe is without doubt very very large - some 100 billion stars in each galaxy, and four trillion galaxies. And to make matters worse, it seems as though there is an infinite number of universes - called the multiverse. So for all intents and purposes, existence is infinite in time and space. Divide any finite number by infinity, and you get zero. So you and I are zero. Even our whole galaxy is zero.

We would like our lives to have meaning and purpose. But how can zero have meaning or purpose? This thought will either depress you or free you. That you and I are not necessary components in the infinity of existence means our actions are wholly meaningless, and so within the limits of the law we can think and do what the hell we want. It doesn't matter. We don't matter. Again, this thought either depresses or liberates.

Let us imagine for a moment that we are very, very important. This state implies that we have some crucial role to fulfill, and this, in turn, implies responsibility. I want no responsibility for something I do not understand. Give me zero any day. Zero allows me to be irresponsible - again within the limits of the law and any considerations for others we may wish to entertain.

The more important you are, the less free you are. Choose zero and breathe in that fresh breeze of being insignificant. Your ego may object, but just tell it there is a choice - importance with all the associated responsibilities, or zero with inner freedom. Even our clutching little egos must surely understand it is better to be nothing than something.

The Fifth Freedom - No Moral Code

Most of us have a strong tendency to assume that life comes with a moral code - particularly human life. We don't need to dwell for very long at all on animal behavior to realize that any notion of a moral code is simply ridiculous. Might is right much of the time, and when it isn't then trickery and deceit are usually to be found. Human beings entertain the vanity that they might be governed by a loftier set of laws than animals, but evidence would suggest that if there were any inherent moral code, ours would be laxer.

Religious proclamations such as love your neighbor, and do unto others as you would have them do to you, seem to have been largely ignored, even though most people would approve of such statements. This is where the spirit is willing but the flesh weak, and since we are mostly flesh, so we are governed by the survival instinct to the exclusion of almost everything else. The effort to survive manifests in many ways - from simple physical violence to the most intricate plotting and scheming. The subtler the aggression, the more hypocrisy

will accompany it. Those who claim moral superiority are usually those who exhibit greatest self-interest.

The bottom line is that nature does not come with a moral code built into it. It's every creature for itself, and to hell with everything else. Watch a crowd piling into a store on Black Friday, and such behavior will be evident. In this respect, animals are a lost cause. They will continue to rip each other to bits for eternity. However, man has the possibility of employing reason to make life more tolerable. The creation of a State with laws presents the opportunity for man to live life with freedom from fear and the satisfaction that transgressions will be punished. Such a State introduces the notion that people fare better if they assist each other to some extent. Such laws are the only moral law that exists since left to our own devices we would be tearing each other apart for the least offense or insult. While nature prohibits a man walking through a wall, or a brick falling upwards when it is released, it does not inhibit Stalin, Hitler or any other despot from murdering millions of people. If humanity is going to thrive in a sustainable way he needs to create his laws using reason.

Just as there is no moral law embedded within nature, neither is their justice and punishment and reward. It is often said that the wicked prosper - and sometimes they do. But so do people who are not viewed as wicked. Nature is only concerned with the continuance of the species - morals are a purely human affair.

To Be or Not To Be

Just a cursory look at the dominant 'spiritual,' self-help, philosophical and religious doctrines suggests greed for existence and an abhorrence of non-existence. Most meditation practices are geared toward greater clarity and intensity of consciousness and are in essence, just another form of materialism – if I make some particular effort I can get more of the thing I am striving to gain. Self-help books tend to emphasize a 'happier' life, and through various affirmations, a person can convince themselves they feel differently from how they feel. This sort of thing is very dangerous – neurosis is a given, and worse as the difference between reality and imagination widens.

Without laboring the point, we can summarize various approaches to life in the following way:

- Spiritual work – hopes for more consciousness, a happier life, and possibly immortality.
- Self-help – hopes for more comfortable life, greater affluence and all the life-affirming things.
- Philosophies – with some notable exceptions (Schopenhauer, Cioran, etc.) most theories attempt to convince us that God exists, that there is order in the universe, and that rationalism helps us deal more efficiently with life.
- Religions – bringers of comfort, in the sense that uncertainties are addressed, suffering is given a purpose and promises of life after the death of the body.

It seems we are all desperate to affirm our significance and acquire more of this thing called existence – at just about any price. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your viewpoint, there is another side to the reality coin – and it is called non-existence. Our existence (and life) bias is relatively easy to understand. Since we are a product of nature, we inherit the survival instinct – the desire to persist in our existence. It drives pretty much everything, and so it should not be so surprising to find it driving so-called spiritual, religious and philosophical matters. In reality, there is nothing particularly elevated about activities which are primarily concerned with a longer and more pleasurable life. Dedicating oneself to making money will do this, and will probably be more efficient at delivering the goods.

When we come to consider non-existence, it all becomes more difficult. There have been almost no thinkers who have enlightened us on this topic. Buddhism is perhaps the most useful with its statement that all of our misery comes from the wish to exist. Fortunately, most of us experience some level of non-existence every night, in deep dreamless sleep. And this does highlight the point that non-existence is synonymous with unconsciousness. This, in turn, is a property of the subject. Stuff may still exist, as our bodies do during dreamless sleep, but if the subject is denied objects, then there is no consciousness.

To balance the scales, and to offset our frantic obsession with existence, it is worth recognizing that periods of non-existence (unconsciousness) are also precious. There is a duality, and it seems likely that behind this there is neither existence nor non-existence. However, a life that is just pushed along by the will-to-life, and invests wholly in existence

will be inherently neurotic, avoiding the inconvenient fact that existence (and consciousness) seem to come to an end at some point.

Various exercises can help restore the balance between consciousness and unconsciousness (existence and non-existence). A simple breathing meditation that focuses on the out-breath and particularly the pause at the end of the out-breath is useful. The Death or Corpse pose in yoga is also useful if, while letting the body relax, we meditate upon our extinction. Most people would not choose to do these things, but they do create more balance.

Mirror Work

“Well then,” the Cat went on, “you see a dog growls when it’s angry, and wags it’s tail when it’s pleased. Now I growl when I’m pleased, and wag my tail when I’m angry. Therefore I’m mad.” – Cheshire Cat in through the Looking Glass

Gurdjieff famously said that human beings perceive reality topsy-turvy. Well, maybe the way to correct it is to look at the world through a looking glass, or mirror. In this way, what seems wrong when looked at directly, will seem good when looked at through the mirror. What seems painful might be pleasurable, and what seems desirable might seem undesirable. This approach is not dissimilar from Gurdjieff’s claim that every stick has two ends. If something good happens to you, it almost certainly means that something bad has happened to something or someone else. When we walk into a nice air-conditioned mall and buy a new shirt or dress at some discounted price, we can be pretty sure that the price paid was some unbearable sweatshop where kids are paid a dollar a week for working 12 hours a day.

So let’s start looking into the looking glass. Most people want inner peace, and this above all things is what many people crave. The self-help charlatans have concocted all sorts of snake oil to help us in this quest. Imported gurus from the East tell us it is all a matter of quieting the mind, and if you pay a thousand dollars or so to attend a course in mediation, then inner peace may just be a lotus position away. It doesn’t work. Or another charlatan may suggest mindfulness – being aware of what one is doing at any moment of time and attempting to keep the attention on the task at hand. It doesn’t work either. And then there are new age types who might recommend chakra healing, positive thinking, visualization, astral travel, and any other hocus-pocus that suffering humanity is suggestible enough to buy. The problem with all these approaches is that looked at through the looking glass; they go the wrong way. So here is how we might attain inner peace.

First of all, forget about inner peace. Set your focus on the inner demons that are causing all the trouble. Of course, our natural tendency is to want to annihilate them. Not possible. First of all, you need to get to know them. Such knowledge may disturb your inner conviction that you are a very kind caring person and that the demons are simply unwelcome visitors. I’ve got news for you. The demons are more you than your carefully constructed self-image that is used to convince everyone else what a thoroughly good chap or chappess you are. So making friends with your hatred, your envy, your lusts, greed, jealousies and so on might offend your ego and cause some severe distress. The alternative is to go back to the snake oil salesmen. You will find that making friends with your demons causes them to be less problematic, and in turn, you may start to experience greater inner peace. When a demon is troublesome just put your attention on it, and don’t try to dismiss it. So when your friend starts boasting about a new job promotion and the envy demon starts to breathe its fire within you just soak it up, and do not try and change it or deny it. So looked at directly the demons are something we would rather not have, but in the looking glass, they are our best friend.

Maybe the suffering of the world is an issue for you. Looked at directly we might be led to the conclusion that new age love and light is the kind of sentiment we should nurture. Not

so, and by now I guess you might have realized that this is just avoidance. Looked at in the mirror we should head straight for the full horror that is life. Obviously, this requires a certain amount of courage and honesty. The more a person is prepared to lift all the stones and look at the horrors that lie beneath the more we become aware of feelings of compassion and sorrow. And ironically we also become conscious of the awful magnificence of the world. Gurdjieff said the world is a struggle between joy and sorrow, and so it is. You will only reconcile yourself with the nature of existence when you have dared to look it straight in the face.

There are many more examples. People who want to feel secure build a fortress around themselves, and the more brittle the fortress, the more easily it is destroyed. If you want security, become random. Become toughened to the chaotic and random nature of existence, and then your strength will be your power to deal with situations as they arise. If you want to be loved, don't try to be lovable. Just be yourself – be authentic with warts and all. People love authenticity. If you don't want to feel fear, then don't indulge in hope. If you want happiness, abandon happiness and look at what is making you unhappy.

There is one central theme here. Looking through the looking glass means giving up on hopes of gratification. The dumb way to live life is to have some idea of what will satisfy and then go chasing after it. The smart way is through the looking glass. If a new luxury car is your idea of what will make you happy then go the other way. Look at that feeling of want and its cause. Joy, happiness, contentment, inner calm and so on, come on their own. All you can do is prepare the ground. Happiness that you acquire directly through your efforts will always be short lived and will invoke the opposite over time. So that new luxury car will deliver some form of gratification until the novelty wears off and the next object of pleasure comes into view. Don't do it. Always look in the looking glass.

Be Zero

Zero emotional identification and zero intellectual attachment. It sounds like it should be easy, but it isn't. Life has its hooks into your emotions and has shaped your ideas, and we all walk around with a massive amount of intellectual and emotional baggage. Zero is not concerned with trying to stop emotions, but with not buying into them. For the intellect, however, zero is all about weeding out our ideas and throwing them on a bonfire. Unlike the emotions, which are not under our control, but are a reaction to our environment, ideas are almost wholly under our control, and we can test their worth and throw them onto the bonfire of the vanities if desired.

In many religious traditions, the creation of the World is seen as an error - a move away from zero. Before manifestation, there was zero, but a tiny, almost imperceptible something disturbed zero, and matter was born. So it is with our nature. If we can rest at zero life becomes simpler, more peaceful and we experience contentment. Just a small positive or negative movement away from zero and we might find ourselves lost in the world of manifestation for years - maybe a whole lifetime.

The first step in the move back to zero (because we were once zero) is to acknowledge that plus or minus is not a desirable state. Plus might be some emotional excitement or the adoption of a new system of belief. Minus might be sadness at the death of a friend, or the realization that our positive thinking and visualizations are not delivering the goods. This is the nature of life - for every up there will be a down, and vice versa. The ups create pleasure, and the downs generate pain. Each life is zero, just as the total energy in the universe is zero. At any moment we may be full of hubris because something significant has happened on the plus side of life. But you can be assured that at a later point we will be despairing because it all looks hopeless. Such is the roller coaster of life once we have invested in it at an emotional level. Those who think they can just pick roses without being hurt by thorns are utterly delusional - and it is worth remembering that the self-help industry was created to perpetuate that delusion.

Intellectual zero is far easier to achieve than emotional zero, although it is still quite a challenge. We can examine our inventory of ideas, decide whether they serve any useful purpose, and discard them if they do not. There will be resistance since many ideas have been adopted simply to reinforce our world view. So someone may hold the idea that we will all be judged by a judgmental God after the death of the body. This approach serves absolutely no useful purpose, and can in no way be verified. It is imagination - pure and simple. It does, however, illustrate an important point. The ideas we hold in our minds are very often tied to emotions, and so intellectual cleansing cannot take place without parallel work on the emotions. The person who believes in a judgmental God may do so because they see so much injustice (or what they consider is an injustice), and can only deal with this by assuming some form of punishment for the offenders after death. And here we see another thing. Ideas are linked together, as are emotions. Notions of injustice will, in turn, generate concepts of right, wrong, punishment, and morality. Maybe you start to see how deep this labyrinth goes, and it is advisable that a person seeks the help of someone who has trodden this path of clearing out emotional attachments and intellectual baggage.

What is striking about most spiritual, religious and self-help doctrines is that they aim to heap more emotional and intellectual garbage on top of that a person already possesses. Any efforts toward freedom and joy should always be a stripping away process. Metaphysical systems, moral systems, rituals and the like, are exactly the opposite way to the one that brings about some form of liberation. In fact, the only thing any of us can do is clear out. And the clearing out should not be done with the aim of achieving something. This would be just another item of baggage.

It is strange that achieving zero should be the most difficult thing of all. But in a way zero is against God, against the creative power that pushes everything into motion, and so it is going to be difficult. But behind the phenomenal aspect of God (or Nature) is the un-manifest - substance as the ancients would call it, the potential for existence out of which reality emerges. Be zero, be potential.

Order is Death

The universe would appear to be born out of chaos, and eventually, establishes some form of order. Chaos accompanies the creative event, and this is inevitable since the creation of something new implies there can be no predetermined plan. Order, on the other hand, emerges as the energy of nature exhausts itself. In the physical universe, order manifests as galaxies, planetary systems and the like. But here is the reality of this process - as these structures are established, so the universe dies. There is less creative chaos and a slow drift toward zero activity. Physicists predict that the universe will become a massive ocean of sameness, and when everything is the same, there can be no energy exchange (since everything has the same energy). And when there is no energy exchange we have death. The universe will suffocate to death from sameness.

While the universe is fascinating, the way we live life is much more interesting. Sameness is the death of society and death of the individual. In a society where people all have the same interests and do pretty much the same things, there can be very little energy exchange. And so life becomes boring, dull and repetitive. At an individual level, each person is a unique creation. If a person can maintain this uniqueness and resist the forces that would homogenize, then such a person experiences a dynamic energy exchange with the environment, and particularly other people. This does not mean that people will find someone who has resisted external influences to be pleasant company. They may find such a person challenging and annoying - but at least there is an energy exchange.

The primary task ahead of someone who wants to be what they truly are, instead of how the environment would mould them, is to learn to sense and dismiss external pressures. Such a person remains alive, within the meaning that there is a unique interaction with the rest of the world. The all too common alternative is a slow living death, with sadness, depression, lethargy and boredom.

Maintaining uniqueness means rejecting all forms of inner ordering - since order is death. A person should deliberately entertain conflicting ideas, ask difficult questions, create internal confrontations which involve different drivers and ideas - in other words; they should create inner chaos. The person that has accepted dogma as a means of quieting their inner life has simply accepted death. And what is more, they will find all differences disturbing - different people, different cultures, foods, clothes, habits, beliefs - and so on. The person that has accepted the death resulting from inner order will try as far as possible to impose sameness on everyone and everything else. Think religious and ideological bigotry and persecution. However, society at large is driven in the same way. A person who does not accept that family, a job, superficial socializing, and passive acceptance of society's values, is the way to live life, will be ostracized. The sameness, the inner death that has occurred to all those around her, will seek to invade the psyche of a person to bring about completed order.

The death instinct is the instinct for order, and of course, the most ordered state for a person is physical death - no energy, no movement, and sameness with the primarily inorganic universe of matter. The ultimate end state is not just inert matter, but matter that is wholly uniform.

The idea that order is death forms a sharp contrast with the accepted idea of a spiritual life, where people seek calmness, peace and serenity. In reality, much of what passes for spiritual life is just the death instinct at play - the acceptance of order and a capitulation to the forces of sameness.

Nothing is more important for a person who seeks life than the rejection of order. Those forces that would impose order include education, religion, societal norms, family and peer groups. For a human being, life is primarily life of the mind. It is this we must protect from sameness and order if we want to experience living fully.

A note on entropy:

The concept of entropy is one of the central ideas in theoretical physics. It can be seen as a measure of order in a system, and the idea has wide applicability in many areas of life. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that disorder, as defined by entropy, would be called order by most people. Imagine a room full of people, all with the same opinions, dress code, habits, behavior and so on. Some would see this as orderly, in much the same way we might look at a regiment of soldiers all marching together. Not so in entropic terms. This is a very low energy situation. What conversation might these people have? It would be pretty tedious, low energy drivel. Nothing much is going to happen with such a group of individuals, and entropy would say that this is a state of high disorder, with high entropy. So entropy is a measure of disorder, and sameness characterizes disorder. The opposite situation would be a room of people from diverse cultures, different mindsets, opinions and so on. A melting pot like this might produce something interesting, and there would certainly be more energy than with the group of drones we mentioned earlier. In fact, the amount of useful energy in a system is inversely proportional to its entropy. Low entropy systems have lots of useful energy. A high entropy, highly disordered system, would have almost no energy.

The natural tendency for any system is to increase in entropy - to become more uniform, more disordered in entropic terms, but more ordered in everyday language. Increasing entropy applies to civilizations, societies, families and of course individuals. At an individual level, increasing entropy means decreasing energy. There is lack of motivation because the internal mental state has been made uniform. There are no conflicting ideas, dominant ideas, drivers, resistances - and so on. Just a quiet background hum caused by inner capitulation.

Families are classic examples of increasing entropy and decreasing energy, and as everyone knows, incest is likely to produce children with physical or mental abnormalities. More generally, however, families often seek to homogenize their members - to impose fixed belief systems, biases and behaviors. The same applies to societies and civilizations - which is why they inevitably degenerate, and new civilizations are born out of chaos.

The important thing for the individual is to realize that low energy means high entropy, which in turn means an internal disorder in real terms, but a superficial order in society's terms. Resisting entropy increase requires conscious work, and an awareness of how societal norms are conditioning mindset. The barometer is activity - not running around like

a headless chicken, but the ability to execute useful directed work. It would not be an exaggeration to say that maintaining a low level of entropy and a high level of internal chaos is our primary task.

Imagination – Good and Bad

The starting point is to define imagination. For Spinoza, imagination consists of mental images – pictures of things with associated emotions. I can imagine that I am a spiritual savant with extraordinary powers that lend me a superiority over all other mere mortals. In fact, this is the essence of much imagination – the assumption of power that lifts me out of my reality. Ouspensky states that imagination can make a sparrow think it is an eagle soaring high in the sky. But there is a problem. We cannot mock reality – it will always bite back. So the sparrow that tries to soar like an eagle will only fall out of the sky. The spiritual savant will become more irritated by having to hold on a phone when dealing with a busy call center. After all, spiritual savants should be dispensing wisdom on blogs, videos and to their loyal followers.

There are legitimate uses for imagination, but we'll come to those later. The illegitimate use of imagination is always the assumption of power through an act of fantasy. Sometimes this happens through a whim, and at other times it is necessary. As Ernest Becker points out in his book *The Denial of Death*, most children are so traumatized by life that by the age of four or five they will live primarily in an imaginary world. So when we see a small child speaking with an imaginary friend, acting out some imaginary scenario, it is not something to be amused at – something cute. In reality, it is a tragedy. This behavior continues through life, and many people will continue to imagine their life is entirely different from what it is in reality. Teenagers will believe they are set to become celebrities, movie stars, great musicians, or whatever lends them the most power. Again this is a recipe for suffering. The dissonance between imagination and reality will cause disappointment, unfulfilled ambition and anxiety. Of course, someone has to become a famous movie star, but it's going to happen anyway – there is no need to indulge a fantasy. The stark reality is that most of us will jump into the hamster wheel and stay there for forty or more years. We will then be freed from it for a decade or so, often with declining health, and then die. This scenario is simply not acceptable to someone in their late teens or early twenties and as such the fantasy is necessary.

This behavior manifests in all walks of life. People who pursue 'spiritual' ambitions may imagine they converse with angels, that they are on a meaningful journey, that by imagining things they can make them happen. It all depends on the power a person wishes to assume, and what makes them feel most in control and powerful. Again if someone is living in dire circumstances, this act of imagination may be necessary for emotional survival, but it will inevitably lead to disappointment and suffering. Reality is not mocked.

The alternative to imaginative fantasy is the development of real internal power. Such power is the result of a long and challenging work, and so it is not particularly attractive. Not only this, but it will be painful; stripping away the delusions that have supported the ego in its quest for power. The main work is a vigilant observation of the desire that seeks satisfaction through imagination. These desires need to be understood and felt – not dismissed. In this way, we use the very force that would cause us to indulge fantasy for fictitious power, to build up real power within us.

The legitimate use of imagination is far less glamorous than its illegitimate use. When vision combines with active mentation, such as an architect designing a structure, then it serves a useful purpose. Albert Einstein famously said that he considered imagination to be more important than knowledge. He used imagination in his thought experiments – part of a purposeful, directed mental activity, and not the false assumption of powers he did not possess.

Gurdjieff gives a more esoteric interpretation of the role of imagination. The situation of humanity is so dire that we need imaginative fantasy to make life tolerable. The price we pay is that we continually suffer. The fantasy is always bumping up against reality. And we also lose the opportunity to experience the awful magnificence of the universe. To quote from Pink Floyd – we've substituted a walk on part in a war with a lead role in a cage.

Something and Nothing

I'm hoping that you will not disagree with the fact that you exist. There's something going on at least, instead of nothing. Don't you find that the fact there is something rather than nothing intriguing? By-the-way, we all experience nothing during deep dreamless sleep. That is strange too. So we could say that for some period while we are asleep, and experiencing dreamless sleep, we are nothing. We flip-flop between being something and being nothing every day. Looking at our life as a whole, it would seem we were nothing before we were born, something while we live, and then nothing again after death – although this last statement isn't something we know for definite.

To make things clearer I'm going to get a bit more technical. For any experience to take place we need a subject and an object. The subject is the thing that observes and the object is the thing observed. So when you look at a tree, it is you doing the observing, and the tree that is observed. Remove either of these and there is no experience – no sense of existence. Removing the subject is exactly the same as removing all objects, and I should add that thoughts and bodily sensations are objects too. This gets deep very quickly, but it is very important. If there are no objects there is nothing for you to experience and hence there is no experience – as in deep dreamless sleep or during anesthesia. If this sounds a little dry, just stick with it, because there are many implications. So when your nervous system shuts down at night, the world of physical objects ceases to exist for you during sleep. When the system shuts down even further, there are no longer any images presenting themselves in dreams, and all objects, physical and mental, disappear. Because there are no objects there is no experience, and there is no subject. Subject and object are just two sides of the same thing – experience. You cannot get rid of one side without getting rid of the other.

Let's peel this many layered onion slowly. You are subject – the thing that experiences. You are not your thoughts, because they can be seen, and as such are objects. You are not your body, because that too can be experienced – it is an object, albeit one that you know very intimately. So what are you? You are the eye that sees. Not the physical eye of course, but the eye of consciousness for want of a better word. This tells you something very important. You cannot know what you are, because you are not an object. The eye cannot see itself. Here is a mystery, and mystery and paradox are the stuff of real understanding. Annoying isn't it. The ego really doesn't like this, but we'll have more to say about the ego later. But then another awkward question raises its head. Where do you go when in dreamless sleep or made unconscious by other means? You no longer exist – at least as the observer that sees. Of course your body exists, but a closed down nervous system means you are not aware of it. It may also be that thoughts and images are still being produced by the brain – but again you are not aware of them. There are no objects for you, and when there is no object there is no subject. Schopenhauer states this very succinctly "That which knows all things and is known by none is the subject."

Take five. No more subjects and objects for a while. Your life is given continuity by your memory, a non-volatile data store that presents your history every time you wake up in the morning. But it isn't just memory that gives us this feeling of continuity. When conscious I definitely have the feeling 'this is me'. Antonio Damasio is a Portuguese-American neuroscientist and university professor, who takes Spinoza's notions of mind and body very

seriously. He claims that the brain effectively creates a map of the body, and it is this map that tells me every morning when I wake that this is me and not someone else that has awoken. The parts of the brain that perform this mapping can be damaged. In such situations a person has no sense of being someone. So our sense of continuity and identity comes from memory and a map in the brain respectively. When we become unconscious of these things, we once again do not exist, if existence is taken to be synonymous with experience.

On Not Caring

What matters to you right now? The answer to this question will reveal what is important to you and what you care about. I should add that by the word care; I do not mean assistance and emotional empathy for other people - that is something wholly different. By care, I mean, what has got its hooks into you?

Let's look at some basics. If you are starving, this will cause you real, unavoidable pain. So will a severe disease, exposure to the elements, lack of water, and possibly lack of human company. And so it would be true to say that the fundamental dynamics of survival - food, water, shelter, community, good health - are things we care about, and we do all we can to satisfy these needs. Everything else is optional.

If someone comes to you and insults you, will you care? Say they call you a liar. Will this upset your equilibrium (if you had any in the first place)? For most people, the answer is probably going to be yes, and yet looked at superficially such an accusation does not affect a person's survival prospects. So why should they care? Well, typically they will care because being branded a liar reduces their credibility in the community they live in, and as such it does affect their survival prospects. If being called a liar enhanced a person's status, they would feel emboldened and be very happy with the label. Caring about things is always about survival, and those who are in denial about their mortality and the fact they have absolutely no significance in the vast scheme of things, will care the most - they will care about everything.

Our psychological structure does not help here. The superego is the part of us that is programmed with notions of should and shouldn't. These mainly originate from societal conditioning, and much of this programming concerns accepted modes of behaviour, and what generates approval or disapproval. Since we have to live in a society we are quite keen to obey the dictates that determine what we should and what we shouldn't do in any situation. As such we care what other people think, and modify our behaviour accordingly. This is, of course, a prison, and something that is wholly alien to our natural state. Again it reduces to behaving in a way that optimises survival prospects.

So what is needed to reach a state of not caring? Well, it's obvious really. We need to realise, deep within us, that we will die and that our life has no significance whatsoever. While this can be quite distressing for someone with a sense of self-importance, and who has repressed notions of mortality, ultimately it is liberating. If this realisation becomes firmly embedded within a person, there will be a ripple effect throughout the whole of their mindset. Will it matter if someone calls you a liar? No, you don't care what other people think because ultimately you don't hang on to the notion that you are important, and you know that death is inevitable in any case.

On the surface, this may seem like a suboptimal survival strategy, but paradoxically it enhances survival. If you do not care what people think, or what might happen to you, it is much easier to forge ahead with what is important. This may be a simpler style of living, or it might be the accumulation of wealth. It doesn't matter what the aim is; it will be much

easier to achieve, and more pleasing when we don't give a damn about other people's opinions, certain risks, and whether we succeed or fail.

To reach such a state of not caring entails in-depth work on one's self. Understanding one's mortality and utter insignificance at the core of one's being is the result of painful, intense work requiring considerable inner strength. And again there is a paradox. Through the realization of the futility and vanity of life, we achieve an inner strength that is a source of considerable pleasure. This is very nicely summarized by Jesus Christ - "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

Action Reveals Character

It is Schopenhauer's assertion that we are manifestations of will. Spinoza said the same thing in different words – the essence of man is desire. The will-to-life that manifests in all living creatures is a force in the same way that gravity is a force. It is impersonal, absolute and unconscious. So the massive suffering it causes through the generation of billions of competing creatures is of no concern to it whatsoever.

Having said this Schopenhauer then goes on to say that the will manifests differently in every creature, and this is also true of man. The character of a person is primarily the character of the will that manifests through him or her. This is not something we choose, it is something that is determined through genetics and possibly other factors we are less aware of. And so, it is very easy to determine the character of a person – we simply observe what they do. Of course, we like to embellish our self-image, but for someone who has understood that action reveals character, there is no hiding. Obviously, it is easier to observe others than it is to observe oneself, and that very charming person who always seems to take from people is easily spotted. I say easily spotted, but most people are fooled by charm, and the flattery grabs their attention while the thief steals the goods. It reminds me of the tale of the fox and the crow (the bird that makes the most unpleasant sound of all birds). The fox saw a crow in a tree with a dead mouse in its beak. The fox said he had missed the lovely, sweet sound of the crow's song. Flattered by this the crow began to squawk, dropped the mouse, and the fox ran off with lunch.

To return to the main point – action reveals character. Ignore words, gestures, promises and anything else that is used as a decoy. Only observe action. Applying this to oneself requires unusual honesty, but it is a fountain of self-knowledge. The results can be surprising. So one who sees them-self as selfish, may find they spend a good deal of their time accommodating other people's needs and desires (not a good thing, by the way). Equally, a person who believes they are industrious may be lazy, upon examination. So, it is possible to know what you are – in great detail. Maybe too much detail.

Schopenhauer then goes on to give a brutal assessment of our value in life. We all live for a brief time and then die. Our destruction is life's verdict on our worth. Again – action reveals character. Life destroys its creatures, so we must assume it does not place any value on individual lives. It does however ensure, through the sex drive, that the species continues. The individual is worthless – nature invests in numbers. As such one can only assume that biological weight and diversity is all that matters