

Section 1

Copy of Original Proposal

LONG BEACH CITY COLLEGE

Sabbatical Leave Proposal

Matt Lawrence, Ph.D.

Professor of Philosophy

1. Purpose of Sabbatical Leave

I am requesting a sabbatical leave of one semester in order to begin writing a philosophy book for publication and use in Introduction to Philosophy and Introduction to Ethics courses. I plan to use the book in my Phil 7: Introduction to Ethics courses.

The book is tentatively titled:

Philosophical Ideas to Bend Your Mind and Change Your Life

The fact that philosophy deals with all sorts of bizarre (if not downright crazy) theories and concepts has always served to attract many college students to its study. However, for many students, it is this very feature that turns them off to philosophy. They end up feeling that much of what they learn, while perhaps interesting, is not really relevant to their daily lives. This has led me to focus my courses and my research on those ideas that are deeply important and personally relevant. The inspiration behind this book proposal is to acquaint people with the ideas in philosophy that I have found to be the most relevant and valuable for daily living. The “twist” of the book is that I want to simultaneously utilize the attraction of the bizarre nature of so many of the great philosophical ideas. Hence my plan is to focus on the bizarre, anti-intuitive, or “mind-bending” ideas of philosophy that I believe can transform a person’s life for the better.

2. Details of My Proposed Sabbatical Plan

In order to give you a better sense of the book, here are a few sample chapter themes:

The Buddha: The Doctrine of Annatta

The Buddha’s Mind-Bending Idea: The “self” is a fiction. There is no thing that is “you.”

Jean-Paul Sartre: Bad Faith

Sartre’s Mind-Bending Idea: You are responsible for everything you do. There are no excuses.

Pierre Simone Laplace: Causal Determinism

Laplace's Mind-Bending Idea: Everything happens exactly as it must.

Immanuel Kant: The Categorical Imperative

Kant's Mind-Bending Idea: There is a universal moral order.

John Hick: Religious Pluralism

Hick's Mind-Bending Idea: Conflicting conceptions can each be simultaneously true.

John Rawls: The Veil of Ignorance

Rawls' Mind-Bending Idea: The best political principles are chosen by fictional people.

John Fire Lane Deer: The Circle and the Square

Lane Deer's Mind-Bending Idea: Symbols are everywhere.

Thich Nhat Hanh: Life is a Practice

Hanh's Mind-Bending Idea: Not only sports, but life itself, takes practice.

James Cone: Liberation Theology

Cone's Mind-Bending Idea: God is black.

W.K. Clifford: The Ethics of Belief

Clifford's Mind-Bending Idea: Faith is a sin against humanity.

Henry David Thoreau: Walden

Thoreau's Mind-Bending Idea:: More is less and less is more.

John Stuart Mill: Socrates and the Pig

Mill's Mind-Bending Idea: Ignorance isn't bliss.

The structure for each chapter will run roughly along the following lines:

- (1) Explain the idea and how it fits into the philosopher's larger project.
- (2) Illustrate the idea through original, creative examples that contemporary readers can easily appreciate.
- (3) Show why the idea is important, and how it can be put into practice in one's own life.

Each chapter will be very succinct (approximately 8 pages). I expect to cover approximately 25 topics, so the total length of the book will most likely be approximately 200 pages.

3. Timeline

I wish to apply for a Fall 2013 sabbatical. However, if necessary, it could be deferred until Spring. My strategy for a book such as this is to pick a topic and start researching and writing it (as opposed to researching all topics before actually writing anything). This is the way that I prefer to work, and it will allow me to have a larger tangible product at the end of the semester. I am confident that I can have substantive drafts of at least five chapters during the sabbatical period. Since I have already written and published two philosophy books since 2004, I feel that I have a fairly good understanding of what I can accomplish in the given time.

4. How the project will contribute to my professional development and current assignment

Researching the ideas for the book will deepen my subject knowledge on topics relevant to the three courses that I regularly teach: Intro Philosophy, Intro Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion. All of the topics covered are relevant to both Intro Philosophy and Intro Ethics, and about one fifth will be relevant to the Philosophy of Religion.

Writing the book with my LBCC students in mind will allow me a unique opportunity to develop innovative ways to present these ideas in a clear and engaging manner that is relevant to the lives of our students.

5. How the project will benefit the college and students.

There are a number of ways that this project will benefit the students of Long Beach City College. First, it will develop and improve my own understanding of a number of philosophical topics relevant to my courses. I believe that students always benefit from a professor's depth and breadth of knowledge. Second, through writing, one develops new and innovative ways to convey complex ideas. I have seen this firsthand with my other two books; *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind the Matrix Trilogy*, and *Philosophy on Tap: Pint-Sized Puzzles for the Pub Philosopher*. My work on these books has greatly improved my teaching on a number of topics that I cover regularly in my courses. Plus, they have provided me with the competence and ability to teach various topics that I had never taught before. The same should be true of this book.

Another benefit is a significant cost savings to my students. I used to use a \$90.00 textbook for my Introduction to Philosophy students. Since writing *Like a Splinter in Your Mind* in 2004, I have used it as my primary text (along with some classic articles that are available free on the internet) and the total cost to students is only \$20.00 – and with better results. Similarly this book will also be a \$20.00 trade paperback which I will supplement with free classic works on the internet. This will save my ethics students quite a bit of money each semester.

One of the main reasons why professors write course-books is their dissatisfaction with other texts. When you write your own text, the material is covered in the way you like to cover it, addressing the issues that you feel need to be addressed, etc. I have experienced this sort of dissatisfaction with most of the intro ethics textbooks, and look forward to using my own text that addresses the issues in just the manner that I want to address them. And, I believe that the students will benefit from this harmony between the lectures and reading.

There are also ways that this project will benefit the college apart from its effects on my students. One of these ways is by bringing additional notoriety to the college. Through my readers, my public lectures (see section 7 for more on this), newspaper and magazine interviews, etc., the name of Long Beach City College is advertised and shown to be a place of innovation.

6. Description of Tangible Products

At the end of my semester sabbatical I will submit the partially completed manuscript. It will consist of drafts of at least five chapters and will comprise at least fifty pages.

7. How I will share the outcomes of the product with other interested parties

Since I intend to publish the work (most likely with my current publisher Wiley-Blackwell) it will eventually be available to everyone who wants it. In addition, since I plan to use it in my Introduction to Ethics courses, many of my students will hopefully get much use and benefit from it. I will also have the publisher send complimentary copies to the philosophy faculty at LBCC who teach Introduction to Philosophy or Introduction to Ethics.

Also, after the release of my other books I did several public talks and book signing and plan to do the same with this book. For example, after the release of *Like a Splinter in Your Mind*, I gave public lectures on the Philosophy within the Matrix films at LBCC, CSULB, UC Irvine, and Rancho Santiago College, as well as at several Southern California Borders and Barnes and Noble bookstores. Since the release of *Philosophy on Tap*, I have done special events for the LBCC Alumni Association, the UC Irvine Humanities Alumni Association, the UC Irvine Business School, The Osher School of Life Long Learning, and have done interviews for The Huffington Post, Zotzine Magazine, and The Beer Sessions Radio.

8. Disclosure of additional sources of employment earnings during the leave.

None.

Letter to the Sabbatical Committee

October 11, 2013

I wanted to inform you that my sabbatical project has shape-shifted slightly. As you may recall my proposal was to write a book for publication and use in my ethics courses, tentatively titled: *Philosophical Ideas to Bend Your Mind and Change Your Life*. After getting into the writing mode, I've found that my creative energies have led me in a slightly different direction. What I have underway is still a book for my ethics courses, but the new tentative title is: *How to Live Like a Philosopher*. I envision it as a text with readings and exercises. My plan is to cover about twenty different philosophers, offer a brief biography, followed by a short reading from the philosopher, followed by my own explanation and analysis. But the key to the book is that this will be followed up with a series of exercises or assignments that guide the student in living like that philosopher for a day, a week, or perhaps a lifetime.

Looking over my sabbatical proposal, most everything about the project is the same except for the specific content of the book. I expect that this will not be a problem, but thought that I should run it past you. I actually had the same sort of thing happen on my last sabbatical nine years ago. I was working on a book project then, and it changed its shape in a similar way. Frank Gaspar was chairing the sabbatical committee at that time, and he said that such changes were not unusual and not a problem.

Let me know if this all sounds fine to you.

Best,

Matt Lawrence

Reply from the Sabbatical Committee

October 26, 2013

Hi Matt,

The committee met this afternoon and it was agreed by all that the changes in your project are fine.

Please proceed accordingly and have a great sabbatical.

Best,
Coleen

Coleen Sterritt
Professor of Art, Sculpture
Visual and Media Arts Dept.

www.coleensterritt.com

Section 2

Brief Summary of the Sabbatical Project

The purpose of my Fall semester sabbatical leave was to begin writing a philosophy book for publication and use in Introduction to Philosophy and Introduction to Ethics courses, and which I plan to use in my own Phil 7: Introduction to Ethics courses. The book is tentatively titled: *How to Live Like a Philosopher*. The concept of the book is to cover 15-20 philosophers and to focus on their thoughts on the question of how we should live. After the exposition and analysis of their philosophies, the book includes exercises that will enable students to live for a day or a week according to the philosophy of Lao Tzu, or Immanuel Kant, or Bertrand Russell. according to the philosophies of life of many of the great philosophers.

My established objective or goal for the project was to do much of the initial research and to have drafts of at least five chapters and a minimum of fifty pages of the manuscript. I exceeded this goal by doing considerable research and completing drafts of six chapters, along with many partial drafts of additional chapters, for a total of 123 pages of manuscript.

The tangible product that the sabbatical offers to the college is the partial manuscript. I plan to continue to work on the book this summer, and hope to finish the book by the end of next summer. In the mean-time, the book is already providing a benefit to my students. This semester I used one chapter in my Introduction to Ethics class with much success, and in the Fall I plan to start using several more. I will make these chapters available through my course website, so students can use them without additional course costs.

The project has benefitted me professionally. It has given me time to study new areas of philosophy, and to enhance my understanding of others. For example, this project has helped to enhance my understanding of the ancient stoics, and to learn about, for the first time, the philosophies of life held by Bertrand Russell and Michel de Montaigne. The book has also helped me to enhance my methods of instruction. A pedagogical goal for me has to been to derive assignments that enable students to “do” philosophy – as opposed to just learning about philosophy. Each chapter of the book provides exercises to enable students to live like the philosopher they are studying. This provides an exciting “hands on” approach that my students have loved in the past, and I am looking forward to using the book to make this method more pervasive in my teaching.

On the whole the sabbatical was a great experience. It greatly enhanced my scholarship and has invigorated my teaching. I thank the sabbatical committee and the board for this amazing opportunity.

Section 3

Results of the Project

The result of my project is the 123 page manuscript which is included in Section 7 as the tangible product of my sabbatical.

Section 4

Professional Benefits

The project has benefitted me professionally. It has given me time to study new areas of philosophy, and to enhance my understanding of others. For example, this project has helped to enhance my understanding of the ancient stoics, the Buddha, and Lao Tzu, and to learn about, for the first time, the philosophies of life held by Bertrand Russell and Michel de Montaigne. While conducting my research, I read parts or all of the following books.

Reading List:

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu Translated by Mitchell

Hua Hu Ching: The Unknown Teachings of Lao Tzu by Lao Tzu Translated by Walker

Buddhism and Philosophy: An Introduction by Mark Siderits

What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Rahula

Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius

Lame Deer Seeker of Visions by John Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erodes

Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt

How to Live, Or, A Life of Montaigne by Sarah Bakewell

Jean-Paul Sartre Key Concepts by Steven Churchill and Jack Reynolds

Unpopular Essays by Bertrand Russell

The Conquest of Happiness by Bertrand Russell

The Path of Emancipation by Thich Nhat Hanh

Chanting from the Heart by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Life You Can Save by Peter Singer

The Happiness Hypothesis by Jonathan Haidt

A Guide to the Good Life by William Irvine

A Little History of Philosophy by Nigel Warburton

The Good Life: Readings in Philosophy, Edited by Charles Guignon

The Consolation of Philosophy by Alain de Botton

Astonish Yourself: 101 Experiments in the Philosophy of Everyday Life by Roger Pol Droit

The Meaning of Life: Perspectives from the World's Great Traditions by Jay Garfield (Audio)

Section 5

Benefit to Students

The book will help to enhance my methods of instruction. A pedagogical goal for me has to been to derive assignments that enable students to “do” philosophy – as opposed to just learning about philosophy. One of the best assignments that I have used over the years is to have my Introduction to Philosophy students spend a day “walking the Buddha’s Eightfold Path.” This requires students to do a number of things such as give up some of their attachments (they often choose things like Facebook, their phone, etc.), it requires them to only eat nourishing foods, to perform a random act of kindness, to meditate, and more. I have found that although it is extremely demanding, students really enjoy the assignment, and it gives them an experiential taste of the Buddha’s philosophy. This book was born out of the success of that assignment. It has led me to want to develop this kind of teaching method for a variety of philosophers – and that is precisely what this book will do. Every chapter has a number of “exercises” for the student to live life using the approach of that particular philosopher. I believe that students are really going to love this approach to philosophy, and that they will learn more in the process – hopefully in a way that will be memorable for years to come.

Section 6

Benefits to the College

There are a number of ways that this project will benefit the students of Long Beach City College. First, it will develop and improve my own understanding of a number of philosophical topics relevant to my courses. I believe that students always benefit from a professor's depth and breadth of knowledge. Second, through writing, one develops new and innovative ways to convey complex ideas. I have seen this firsthand with my other two books; *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind the Matrix Trilogy*, and *Philosophy on Tap: Pint-Sized Puzzles for the Pub Philosopher*. My work on these books has greatly improved my teaching on a number of topics that I cover regularly in my courses. Plus, they have provided me with the competence and ability to teach various topics that I had never taught before. The same should be true of this book.

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Section 7 : Tangible Product

HOW TO LIVE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

Confucius: Life as Relationship

Buddha: Liberation from Suffering

Lao Tzu: The Life of Natural Harmony

Epictetus: The Stoic Way

Epicurus: The Pursuit of Pleasure

Socrates: The Examined Life

Plato: The Rule of Reason

Aristotle: The Highest Good

St. Augustine: The Life of Devotion

Michel de Montaigne: The Life of Introspection

John Stuart Mill: The Good of the Many

Immanuel Kant: Creating a Kingdom of Ends

Friedrich Nietzsche: Rising Above the Herd

Mohandas K. Gandhi: Experiments with Truth

John Fire Lane Deer: Seeing Through Symbols

Jean Paul Sartre: How to be an Existentialist

Ayn Rand: The Virtue of Selfishness

Bertrand Russell: Getting Beyond the Self

Thich Nhat Hanh: Life as a Practice

Nel Noddings: Care and Connection

Peter Singer: The Life You Could Save

Introduction

“He who studies with a philosopher should take away with him some one good thing every day: he should daily return home a sounder man, or on the way to become sounder.” -- Seneca

Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately. All other things, ruling, hoarding, building are only little appendages and props, at most.
(Michel de Montaigne See The Good Life p. 192)

Confucius: Life as Relationship

“The superior man does what is proper to the station in which he is.”

Historical Background:

In Confucius' Words:

Zigong asked: Is there any single word that could guide one's entire life? The Master said: “Should it not be reciprocity? What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.” (Analects of Confucius 15.24. Also in Leys: Happiness Hypothesis pg. 45)

Analysis:

Exercises:

1. Keep a Reciprocity Account Book

Throughout the day, week, or month, keep track of the things other people do for you. Whenever possible, write them down. The idea behind this is to do a better job of noticing the beneficial actions of others that help you throughout the day. But don't stop there. Once you recognize all that others do for you, strive to treat them with reciprocity. If someone opens the door for you, find a simple courtesy that you can do for them, whether it is getting the next door, carrying some of their items, or complimenting their thoughtfulness. Even more important is the large things. Is someone putting a roof over your head, or doing your

laundry, or helping your relationships, etc.? Make sure that you are giving back in return. Since often you won't be able to return the favor in kind (e.g., put a roof over their head), coming up with a way to repay them may take a bit of thoughtfulness and creativity. But often just *showing* your appreciation to those who we often take for granted can take you part of the way.

Remember, the idea behind the account book is *not* to become a penny-pinching Scrooge, who only does benefits others when it is *owed*. Rather, the idea is to do a better job of noticing all the little (and big) things that others do for you and to make sure that you are doing *at least* as much in return. You are also encouraged to be the instigator of beneficial actions and to "do unto others" even when they haven't done anything for you.

When you've finished with the exercise, do a "final accounting" of your life. Are you giving to others more than you receive? Or, are you receiving more than you give? Take measures to ensure that give more than you receive and you just may find that you become both a happy and better person because of it. And without a doubt, the world will become a better place to live in.

Buddha: Liberation from Suffering

“The mind is everything. What you think you become.”

Historical Background:

Siddhartha Gautama AKA the Buddha (563-483) was born a prince, son of a minor King in the region that is now called Nepal. “Buddha” is a title rather than a proper name. It means “the enlightened one” or “the awakened one.” While arguably there have been many “Buddhas” throughout history, when people speak of “The Buddha,” they typically mean Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha’s early life was one of luxury. He was intelligent and good-looking, and his family pampered him with their extravagant wealth. Nevertheless, by adulthood Siddhartha was deeply disturbed by what might be called “the problem of suffering.” He saw that every aspect of life was conjoined with physical or psychological pain or dissatisfaction. We suffer from injury, from disease, from death, from being separated from those people and things that we love, and from being stuck with those people and things we despise. It was clear to him that all the power and riches in the world could not liberate him or those he cared about from suffering.

At age twenty nine, Siddhartha left his wife and young son to go in search of an answer to this problem of suffering. He spent six years as a wandering seeker, first learning everything he could from the Hindu masters of his day, then as an ascetic practicing self-denial, fasting, etc., then in deep meditation. Ultimately his meditation led to a profound enlightenment, and a solution to the suffering of human life. He spent the

next forty five years teaching. He would take on any pupil who had an earnest desire to learn. He taught both men and women, and people from all social castes including kings and beggars. He died of (accidental) food poisoning at the age of 80, but his teachings eventually spread all across the globe. Today there are over 500 million Buddhists worldwide.

The short reading that follows describes the Buddha's account of two of the most fundamental aspects of his philosophy: The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path.

In the Buddha's Words:

The Four Noble Truths

17. 'Again, monks, a monk abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects¹ in respect of the Four Noble Truths. How does he do so? Here, a monk knows as it really is: "This is suffering"; he knows as it really is: "This is the origin of suffering"; he knows as it really is: "This is the cessation of suffering"; he knows as it really is: "This is the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering."

18. And what, monks, is the *Noble Truth of Suffering*? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness and distress are suffering. Being attached to the unloved is suffering, being separated from the loved is suffering, not getting what one wants is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering...

'And how, monks, in short, are the five aggregates of grasping suffering? They are as follows: the aggregate of grasping that is form, the aggregate of grasping that is feeling, the aggregate of grasping that is perception, the aggregate of grasping that is the mental formations, the aggregate of grasping that is consciousness. These are, in short, the five aggregates of grasping that are suffering. And that, monks, is called the Noble Truth of Suffering.

19. 'And what, monks, is the *Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering*? It is that craving which gives rise to rebirth, bound up with pleasure and lust, finding fresh delight now here, now there: that is to say sensual craving, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.

'And where does this craving arise and establish itself? Wherever in the world there is anything agreeable and pleasurable, there this craving arises and establishes itself...

‘The perception of sights, of sounds, of smells, of tastes, of tangibles, of mind-objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself.

‘Volition in regard to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, mind-objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself.

‘The craving for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, mind-objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself.

‘Thinking of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, mind-objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself.

‘Pondering on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and mind-objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself. And that, monks, is called the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering.

20. ‘And what, monks, is the *Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering*? It is the complete fading-away and extinction of this craving, its forsaking and abandonment, liberation from it, detachment from it.

21. ‘And what, monks, is the *Noble Truth of the Way of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Suffering*? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path, namely: — Right View, Right Thought; Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood; Right Effort Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.#

The Noble Eightfold Path

‘And what, monks, is Right View? It is, monks, the knowledge of suffering, the knowledge of the origin of suffering, the knowledge of the cessation of suffering, and the knowledge of the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering. This is called Right View.

‘And what, monks, is Right Thought? The thought of renunciation, the thought of non-ill-will, the thought of harmlessness. This, monks, is called Right Thought.

‘And what, monks, is Right Speech? Refraining from lying, refraining from slander, refraining from harsh speech, refraining from frivolous speech. This is called Right Speech.

‘And what, monks, is Right Action? Refraining from taking life, refraining from taking what is not given, refraining from sexual misconduct. This is called Right Action.

‘And what, monks, is Right Livelihood? Here, monks, the Ariyan disciple, having given up wrong livelihood, keeps himself by right livelihood.

‘And what, monks, is Right Effort? Here, monks, a monk rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind and strives to prevent the arising of unarisen evil

unwholesome mental states. He rouses his will... and strives to overcome evil unwholesome mental states that have arisen. He rouses his will... and strives to produce unarisen wholesome mental states. He rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind and strives to maintain wholesome mental states that have arisen, not to let them fade away, to bring them to greater growth, to the full perfection of development. This is called Right Effort.

‘And what, monks, is Right Mindfulness? Here, monks, a monk abides contemplating body as body, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world; he abides contemplating feelings as feelings...; he abides contemplating mind as mind...; he abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world. This is called Right Mindfulness.

‘And what, monks, is Right Concentration? Here, a monk, detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome mental states, enters and remains in the first jhāna, which is with thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy. And with the subsiding of thinking and pondering, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he enters and remains in the second jhāna, which is without thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and joy. And with the fading away of delight, remaining imperturbable, mindful and clearly aware, he experiences in himself the joy of which the Noble Ones say: “Happy is he who dwells with equanimity and mindfulness”, he enters the third jhāna. And, having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former gladness and sadness, he enters and remains in the fourth jhāna, which is beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness. This is called Right Concentration. And that, monks, is called the way of practice leading to the cessation of suffering.’³

Analysis:

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths describe the Buddha’s answer to the problem of suffering.

We can put them succinctly as follows:

1. Suffering exists.
2. Suffering is caused by attachment or craving.
3. It is possible to bring an end to suffering – to liberate oneself from it.
4. There are specific practices one can follow in order to liberate oneself from suffering. (The Noble Eightfold Path)

At times the Buddha would go so far as to say that these four things comprise *all* of his teaching. He taught about suffering and about the cause of suffering. He taught that suffering could be overcome, and he taught the practices that would enable one to do it.¹

The first noble truth is undeniably true. Suffering exists. In the original Pali texts, the word “*dukkha*” was used to signify this suffering. It is a broad term which includes not only extreme pain and sorrow, but also disappointment, unease, irritation, and the feeling of dissatisfaction. The Buddha asserts there is suffering involved in birth, in aging, in death, in being separated from what we love and in being stuck with those things we despise. In other words, our lives are intertwined with suffering. This is, by no means, to say that it is all bad, or that life is not worth living. Rather, it is simply to point out that suffering exists. It is to acknowledge a central aspect of human existence.

The second noble truth is more controversial. The Buddha asserts that suffering is caused by attachment or craving. What is meant here is psychological attachment, but we can understand it by considering its physical counterpart. Take hold of an object, a pencil, for example. Squeeze it tightly and don't let anything or anyone separate that pencil from your grasp. You are now physically attached. Psychological attachment is similar. It is to cling to something mentally – to hold it with the intention of never letting it go. For instance, we become attached to people. We want to keep them with us and never let them go. So when they die, we suffer. We become attached to ideas, and when others question or attack our ideas, we become irritated. We attach ourselves to youth, to beauty, to anything that we find pleasurable.

There are many cases in which the causal relation between attachment and suffering is quite easy to see. Suppose, for example, you buy a brand new car. If you are like most people, you become attached not only to *having* the car, but to having the car look the way it did in the showroom. If, in the very first week, you come out to the parking lot to find an nasty dent in the door, your idea of having that “perfect car” is ripped away. You were attached to that idea, but it is suddenly taken from you and is replaced by suffering. In a case like this it is easy to see that your suffering is due to your attachment. You were attached to the idea that the car would remain unchanged (at least for a while), and you were attached to the pleasure that comes from looking at a shiny new flawless automobile. A person with an old beat up car does not have these attachments. Such a person might come out to find a similar dent in the door of their car and notice it without the slightest upset to their well-being.

We are all familiar with many instances in which our attachments have been the root or cause of our suffering. What is so radical about the Buddha’s philosophy is his view that attachment is the cause of *all* suffering. At first view, this may seem implausible. What about the suffering of physical pain? You stub your toe hard on a rock, and you suffer greatly. Isn’t it obvious that it was that damn rock that caused you to suffer -- not some mental attachment. Or, perhaps we should say that it is the intense sensations throbbing in your toe that cause you to suffer. But before we jump to that conclusion, we should consider the attachments at work here. Prior to the unfortunate encounter with the rock, you were having what we might call “neutral” sensations in your toe and you liked it that way. You were attached to those neutral sensations. You wanted to hold on to them forever. But suddenly those neutral

sensations were ripped away and replaced by pain sensations – the kind of sensations that you don't want. So, we might wonder if the suffering you experienced could be rooted in your attachment to neutral sensations. Compare your outlook to that of a professional football player. Football players don't go into the game intent on holding on to their neutral sensations. They know that for the next couple of hours they are in store for a wide variety of pain sensations throughout their body. And while they don't necessarily want pain, they accept it. One time I was watching a game and I saw a wide receiver take a ferocious hit – the kind where everyone holds their breath waiting to see if he'll get up again. Fortunately he got up. In fact, he jumped up with a smile on his face and hustled back to his team. Now, of course, the hit might not have been as horrific as it appeared. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that this guy had just felt more pain than I had felt at any time over the past year – yet he was smiling! Similarly there are reports of advanced Buddhist meditators who can be calm and peaceful while undergoing the sorts of sensations that would make most people scream.

The third noble truth asserts that liberation from suffering is possible. Here again, the Buddha is taking a radical position. He is not saying that some suffering can be overcome, but all of it -- the complete liberation from suffering. This is hard to imagine. You've probably never met anyone who has achieved such a feat. But it stands to reason that if suffering is caused by attachment, then if attachment ceases suffering will cease. Remove the cause and you thereby remove the effect. So if we accept the second truth, the cessation of suffering seems theoretically (and perhaps physically) possible. But would you be willing to give up all your attachments in order to free yourself from suffering? Many would not. They think that, of course, one can free

themselves from suffering by not caring about anything. If you don't care about anyone, you won't suffer when they die. But what kind of life would that be? *No pain no gain* – as the expression goes. But the Buddha's philosophy is not one of apathy or indifference and it does not stand in the way of love and caring. Because love and attachment so often appear together, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that they are really two different things. Love is a kind of appreciation, respect, and concern, while attachment is simply the attempt to hold on to something. Our attempt to hold on to people (just as our attempt to hold onto any other material object) is bound to be thwarted and will always end in suffering. The Buddha's injunction is to stop trying to hold onto things. All formations (people, ideas, material objects, etc.) are impermanent. They cannot be held indefinitely and to try to do so is to put oneself at odds with the nature of reality and to set oneself up to suffer. The Buddha enjoins us to care without attaching ourselves to the objects of our concern. It is to love with “an open hand” – to love without grasping, without clinging. It is to appreciate someone while you can, but to accept that all things are impermanent.

The fourth noble truth lays out the path that leads to the liberation from suffering. It is sometimes referred to as the “middle way,” because prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha had lived out two extremes. He lived a life of luxury and *self-indulgence* as a young prince, and then he lived a life of *self-denial* as a forest aesthetic. Ultimately, he found neither of these to be fruitful. Neither provides an answer to the problem of suffering. The middle way or “Noble Eightfold Path” charts a course that lies between these extremes, and prescribes a specific set of practices for those who seek liberation.

The Noble Eightfold Path

Although the Eightfold Path is not described in any documents prior to the Buddhist sutras, the Buddha did not claim to have developed it himself. Rather, he describes it as an “ancient road traversed by the fully enlightened ones of former times.”⁴ The Noble Eightfold Path is traditionally divided into three sections:

The Wisdom Aspects:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Thought

The Moral Aspects:

3. Right Speech
4. Right Conduct
5. Right Livelihood

The Concentration Aspects:

6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

Although the Buddha expressed the eightfold path as a list, they are not sequential. Rather, one can and should practice and perfect each aspect of the path whenever the opportunity arises.

Right Understanding involves seeing things as they are and ridding oneself of delusion. At minimum it involves recognizing the four noble truths – realizing that suffering exists, that it is caused by attachment, that it can be overcome, and that there are practices that will enable one to do it.

Right Thought (sometimes translated as right intention) involves keeping one's thoughts in line with one's commitment to the path. It is to steer one's mind away from the trappings of attachment. It is to maintain good will toward oneself and others and to commit oneself to one's mental and moral improvement.

Right Speech pertains to speaking mindfully. It is to be aware of one's words and the good and harm that words are capable of. One's speech should be wise and compassionate. Practicing right speech entails speaking the truth, refraining from all lies and slander, and from harsh or hurtful speech and idle gossip. The emphasis, however, is not on what should or should not be said. Rather, it is to be mindful of what you are saying. When you engage in hurtful speech or lies, you should examine the causes and effects of this behavior. If one is truly committed to the path, such speech will fall away naturally when one becomes mindful.

Right Action involves being mindful of one's actions. This means that one will refrain from murder, theft, and sexual misconduct. It entails being helpful and treating others with compassion. Again the emphasis is on being mindful with regard to one's actions rather than on rules regarding what must and must not be done. When uncompassionate or unskillful action arises, one should contemplate its causes and effects and work to alleviate the negative effects whenever possible.

Right Livelihood refers to one's work or career. Certain jobs are inconsistent with the Eightfold Path. To become a mercenary, assassin, drug dealer, prostitute, etc. contradicts the values of the path and such work should be avoided or abandoned. However, many jobs that are not wrongful by their very nature might cause one to lie, to

steal, or to hurt other people, animals, or the environment. Therefore, no matter what your job is, you should consider whether it is causing you to violate the principles of the Eightfold Path. If so, you should consider whether it can be remedied within the job, or whether it is simply a job that you should give up?

Right Effort is described by the Buddha as “rousing the will” or “exerting the mind.” As anyone who has ever been on a diet knows, it is one thing to choose a plan but quite another to stick to it. One must make a constant and steady effort against the pull of desire. Similarly, if one has decided to follow the Buddha’s teachings, one must make a concerted effort to adhere to the precepts of the eightfold path. In particular, one should exert themselves toward preventing unwholesome mental states like greed, avarice, lust and laziness. Simultaneously one should strive to produce wholesome mental states, like compassion, empathy, and awareness. The idea is that we can take control of our thoughts and feelings rather than being passive victims of desires, fears, and anger. Once we have aroused these wholesome mental states we should make an effort to sustain and perfect them and not let them simply fade away.

Right Mindfulness pertains to developing an awareness of what is going on at the present moment. It is to maintain a constant awareness of (1) the activities of the body, (2) feelings or sensations, (3) the activities of the mind, and (4) ideas, thoughts, and other mental constructs. So often we are oblivious to what is going on in and around us. For example, we may be obsessing about some worry without really realizing it, or our breathing might be shallow (a sign of tension) without our being aware of it. To practice right mindfulness is to practice deep awareness. This is a primary reason why Buddhists meditate. The most common practice is to simply sit and focus on one’s

breath. By focusing on the breath one becomes more in tune with one's body (notice that our bodies are breathing constantly yet we are rarely aware of it). Similarly by focusing on the breath, one also notices the business of the mind and its constant distractions as they try to pull one away from the focus on breath.

Right Concentration is the further development of mindfulness, with the aim of unifying the mind. The Buddha describes it in terms of the four advanced states of meditation called jhānas. In the first, thinking occurs without its usual sense of attachment; unwholesome states such as craving, ill-will, worry, and restlessness are abandoned and feelings of joy increase. In the second, thought itself subsides and “one-pointed mind” is achieved leading to delight and joy. The third is marked by the fading way of delight for the joy of equanimity. The culmination is the fourth jhāna, which is beyond pleasure and pain. Only pure equanimity and awareness remain. The Buddha maintains that a person who is concentrated in this manner comes to know the impermanence of the body, of feelings, of perceptions, mental activities and sense consciousness. The result is the complete liberation from suffering.

Exercises: How to Live Like the Buddha

Exercise 1: Chocolate Meditation

Part 1: The Meditation

Acquire a very small piece of chocolate. A Hershey's m&m works nicely. Put it in your mouth and simply savor the flavors and texture of the chocolate. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings as it melts in your mouth and notice how those sensations

begin to dissipate as the chocolate gets smaller and smaller until it is gone.

Part 2: Reflecting on the Exercise

Hopefully you enjoyed the chocolate. But did it cause you to suffer? Did you feel the chocolate dissolving in your mouth and start to panic? Did you cry out: “No chocolate, don’t leave me chocolate!!” Of course not. That would be silly. Rather, you enjoyed the chocolate while it was here, and you let it go. You knew that it was small and that it wouldn’t last long and you accepted that fact. You did not cling to the chocolate, and hence you didn’t suffer when it was gone. Your approach to the chocolate was *realistic*. But notice that with so many other things (people, money, our youth or beauty, etc.) we do not hold such a realistic attitude. Instead we cling to them and try to keep them forever. This is at odds with reality and ends in suffering. Perhaps that we should approach all things more like we do the chocolate – as temporary. We should enjoy them while they are here, but acknowledge their impermanence and not cling to them.

Exercise 2: Contemplate your attachments

Make a list of your strongest attachments in three columns.

Things that I am attached to getting or achieving	Things I’m attached to keeping or preserving	Things I’m attached to removing or avoiding

Contemplate the connection between these attachments and suffering. Is the attachment making your life better? If so, how? If not, why do you keep clinging to it?

Exercise 3: Walk the Buddha's Eightfold Path

Commit yourself to spending a certain length of time walking the Buddha's Eightfold Path. You might choose to follow it for a day, a week, a month, etc. See if you can stick to your commitment, and see what you can learn about yourself and the Buddha's philosophy in the process.

1. Right View

Throughout the day strive to see how your attachments give rise to suffering. Be specific: recognize each attachment as it manifests itself and consider how it will give rise to suffering. To enhance this experience, give up two of your attachments for the day. E.g., your cell phone, your coffee, video games, etc.

2. Right Thought

Strive to maintain your commitment to the path and to your mental and moral self-improvement in general. Stay focused upon seeing the pointlessness of attaching yourself to temporary things. Stay focused upon your desire to help others and to avoid harm. In addition, choose two areas in your life that you would like to improve. Take specific actions for change in those areas.

3. Right Speech

Abstain from lying, harsh language, and gossip. If you catch yourself in these, contemplate their causes (why are you doing this?) and contemplate their effects. When

someone speaks to you with anger try not to react back in anger. Instead, listen patiently and show concern for the fact that they are (apparently) distressed. Look for positive solutions to the problem instead of getting pulled into their negativity.

4. Right Conduct

Refrain from stealing, cheating, violence, etc. When you are tempted to engage in such actions, contemplate their causes and effects. Cultivate good actions, e.g., acts of kindness, honesty, etc. Intentionally choose to perform at least one “random act of kindness.”

5. Right Livelihood

If you have a job, reflect on what you are doing while you are at work. Ask yourself whether your job requires you to violate the precepts above. Does it lead you toward violating principles that you care about? Think about whether you can do your job without sacrificing your principles, or whether it is a job that you must refuse to perform.

6. Right Effort

Making fundamental changes in your life takes effort. Use this effort to develop wholesome states of mind. Generate happiness by reflecting upon all those people and things that have benefited you. Generate compassion for others, including those who treat others poorly, by recognizing that such actions are merely the result of ignorance and unskillful states of mind.

7. Right Mindfulness

Be mindful of mind and body. Eat only those foods that will nourish body and mind. Consume only those ideas (books, movies, television shows, etc.) that will nourish your

mind. Be mindful of all your thoughts and desires as they arise. Do not feed those desires that will hinder your progress along the path.

8. Right Concentration

Spend ten minutes of the day in seated meditation. Focus on your breathing. Relax your body and your mind. Don't try to "accomplish" anything. Just be present in the moment. Be attentive to your mind and body – especially your breathing, which should become naturally slow and relaxed.

Follow up in writing:

Write an account of your experience on the Eightfold Path. Consider each aspect of the path. Which ones were easy for you? Which ones were the most difficult or challenging? What did you learn about yourself? How did the experience affect your understanding of the Eightfold path?

Exercise 4: Reciting the Five Remembrances

The Five Remembrances are the five aspects of human existence that the Buddha advised his followers to reflect on regularly. For the next week, recite these twice a day; once in the morning and once in the evening.

I am sure to grow old; I cannot avoid aging.

I am sure to become ill; I cannot avoid illness.

I am sure to die, I cannot avoid death.

I must be separated and parted from all that is dear and beloved to me.

I am the owner of my actions, heir of my actions, actions are the womb from which I have sprung, actions are my relations, actions are my protection.

Whatever actions I perform, good or bad, of these I shall become their heir.³

Notice that the point of these remembrances is to overcome attachment by realizing the truth about reality. When you see clearly that you cannot avoid aging, you will not attach yourself to youth, beauty and strength. To try to hold onto these is as futile as trying to jump over the moon. When you see clearly that you cannot avoid illness, you will not attach yourself to health. This is not to say that one should disregard one's health and eat donuts every day. To the contrary, health is a wonderful thing, and the wise person will take measures to maintain their body. Nevertheless, sickness is unavoidable, so it is foolish psychologically cling to health. When sickness arises, it should be accepted without mental resistance as part of the nature of reality. The same goes for death. It cannot be avoided, so why not accept it rather than resist it? The fifth remembrance reminds us to act responsibly by reminding us that our actions (not only our deeds but also our thoughts, desires, and feelings) make us who we are. We must therefore be diligent in our efforts to think and behave wisely.

Notes:

1. Sometimes he would simplify this even further and say that there were only two things of which he taught: suffering and the liberation from suffering.
2. Mind-objects refer to mental content such as beliefs, desires, sensations and volitions.
3. <http://palicanon.org/index.php/sutta-pitaka/digha-nikaya/137-dn22-mahasatipa-hana-sutta-the-greater-discourse-on-the-foundations-of-mindfulness> Also see translation in Kessler's *Voices of Wisdom* pg. 27
3. From the Upajjhatthana Sutta.
4. S:XII,7,65 (See Gruzalski p. 18)

Lao Tzu: The Life of Natural Harmony

“Practice not-doing, and everything will fall into place.”

Historical Background:

Lao Tzu (pronounced *Lao Dsuh*) is one of the greatest Chinese philosophers to have ever lived. That is, *if* he ever lived. He is known as the author of *Tao Te Ching* (pronounced *Dow Deh Jing*) which was written in the fourth or third century B.C.E., but the name Lao Tzu means “the old master” and it is unclear whether this masterpiece of Taoist philosophy was written by a single master called Lao Tzu, or whether this title represents the teachings of several masters.

Insofar as there may have been a philosopher named Lao Tzu, we don't know anything for certain about him. There was a scholar named Lao Tan during the Zhou dynasty who reportedly became known as Lao Tzu (the old master). And there are plenty of stories (real or mythical) about Lao Tzu. A common one is that he became disillusioned with city life, and at the age of 90, 160, or 200 years (depending on who you believe) he left town riding atop a water buffalo. When he got to the Western gate of the city, the gatekeeper recognized him and asked him to write down his philosophy. This piece of writing is reportedly the *Tao Te Ching*. Lao Tzu (about 570 B.C.E. - ?) was most likely an older contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) There are many tales (not necessarily reliable, but often instructive) of these two great teachers meeting. For example, one states that after their first meeting, Confucius came away in a bit of a stupor, saying:

“I know that birds can fly, fish can swim, and animals can run. That which runs can be trapped, that which swims can be netted, that which flies can be shot. As to a dragon, I don’t know how it rides on winds and clouds and ascends to heaven. Lao Tzu whom I saw today is indeed like a dragon! ¹

As this tale implies, Lao Tzu’s teachings are cryptic. They are subtle, mysterious, slippery, and deep. As the *Tao Te Ching* puts it:

When a superior man hears of the Tao,
he immediately begins to embody it.
When an average man hears of the Tao,
he half believes it, half doubts it.

When a foolish man hears of the Tao,
he laughs out loud.
If he didn’t laugh,
It wouldn’t be the Tao.

Despite the uncertainty over the authorship of the *Tao Te Ching*, for the purpose of simplicity, I will regard Lao Tzu as the sole author of the text for the remainder of this chapter. The following passages from the *Tao Te Ching* are arranged according to some of the most prevalent themes of the text: the Tao as the source of all things, yin/yang (complimentary interdependent opposites), wu-wei (natural action), and the nature of wisdom.

In Lao Tzu’s Words:

The Source

1

The tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.

The unnamable is the eternally real.
Naming is the origin
of all particular things.

Free from desire, you realize the mystery.
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations
arise from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.
The gateway to all understanding.

4

The Tao is like a well:
used but never used up.
It is like the eternal void:
filled with infinite possibilities.

It is hidden but always present.
I don't know who gave birth to it.
It is older than God.

6

The Tao is called the Great Mother:
empty yet inexhaustible,
it gives birth to infinite worlds.

It is always present within you.
You can use it any way you want.

7

The Tao is infinite, eternal.
Why is it eternal?
It was never born;
thus it can never die.
Why is it infinite?
It has no desires for itself;
thus it is present for all beings...

25

There was something formless and perfect
before the universe was born.
It is serene. Empty.
Solitary. Unchanging.
Infinite. Eternally present.
It is the mother of the universe.
For lack of a better name,
I call it the Tao.

It flows through all things,
inside and outside, and returns
to the origin of all things...

51

Every being in the universe
is an expression of the Tao.
It springs into existence,
unconscious, perfect, free,
takes on a physical body,
lets circumstances complete it.
That is why every being
spontaneously honors the Tao.

The Tao gives birth to all beings,
nourishes them, maintains them,
cares for them, comforts them, protects them,
takes them back to itself,
creating without possessing,
acting without expecting,
guiding without interfering.
That is why love of the Tao
is in the very nature of things.

25

The Tao is great.
The universe is great.
Earth is great.
Man is great.
These are the four great powers.

Man follows the earth.
Earth follows the universe.

The universe follows the Tao.
The Tao follows only itself.²

Yin/Yang and Wu Wei

2

When people see some things as beautiful,
other things become ugly.
When people see some things as good,
other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.
Difficult and easy support each other.
Long and short define each other.
High and low depend on each other.
Before and after follow each other.

5

The Tao doesn't take sides;
it gives birth to both good and evil.
The Master doesn't take sides;
she welcomes both saints and sinners.

15

...Do you have the patience to wait
till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
till the right action arises by itself?

The Master doesn't seek fulfillment.
Not seeking, not expecting,
she is present, and can welcome all things.

29

Do you want to improve the world?
I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.
It can't be improved.
If you tamper with it, you'll ruin it.
If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it.

...The Master sees things as they are,
without trying to control them.
She lets them go their own way,
and resides at the center of the circle.

37

The Tao never does anything,
yet through it all things are done.

If powerful men and women
could enter themselves in it,
the whole world would be transformed
by itself, in its natural rhythms.
People would be content
with their simple, everyday lives,
in harmony, and free of desire.

When there is no desire,
all things are at peace.

39

In harmony with the Tao,
the sky is clear and spacious,
the earth is solid and full,
all creature flourish together,
content with the way they are,
endlessly repeating themselves,
endlessly renewed.

When man interferes with the Tao,
the sky becomes filthy,
the earth becomes depleted,
the equilibrium crumbles,
creatures become extinct...

76

Men are born soft and supple;
dead, they are stiff and hard.
Plants are born tender and pliant;
dead, they are brittle and dry.

Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible
is a disciple of death.
Whoever is soft and yielding
is a disciple of life.

The hard and stiff will be broken.
The soft and supple will prevail.

78

Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
nothing can surpass it.

The soft overcomes the hard;
the gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
but few can put it into practice...

23

Express yourself completely,
then keep quiet.
Be like the forces of nature:
when it blows, there is only wind;
when it rains, there is only rain;
when the clouds pass, the sun shines through...

Open yourself to the Tao,
then trust your natural responses;
and everything will fall into place.

27

A good traveler has no fixed plans
and is not intent upon arriving.
A good artist lets his intuition
lead him wherever it wants.
A good scientist has freed himself of concepts
and keeps his mind open to what is.

Thus the Master is available to all people
and doesn't reject anyone.

He is ready to use all situations
and doesn't waste anything.
This is called embodying the light.

What is a good man but a bad man's teacher?
What is a bad man but a good man's job?
If you don't understand this, you will get lost,
however intelligent you are.
It is the great secret.

Wisdom

10

Can you coax your mind from its wandering
and keep to the original oneness?
Can you let your body become
supple as a newborn child's?
Can you cleanse your inner vision
until you see nothing but the light?
Can you love people and lead them
without imposing your will?
Can you deal with the most vital matters
by letting events take their course?
Can you step back from you own mind
and thus understand all things?

Giving birth and nourishing,
having without possessing,
acting with no expectations,
leading and not trying to control:
this is the supreme virtue.

15

The ancient Masters were profound and subtle.
Their wisdom was unfathomable.
There is no way to describe it;
all we can describe is their appearance.

They were careful
as someone crossing an iced-over stream.
Alert as a warrior in enemy territory.
Courteous as a guest.
Fluid as melting ice.

Shapable as a block of wood.
Receptive as a valley.
Clear as a glass of water....

48

In pursuit of knowledge,
every day something is added.
In the practice of the Tao,
every day something is dropped.
Less and less do you need to force things,
until finally you arrive at non-action.
When nothing is done,
nothing is left undone...

81

..The Master has no possessions.
The more he does for others,
the happier he is.
The more he gives to others,
the wealthier he is.

8

The supreme good is like water,
which nourishes all things without trying to.
It is content with the low places that people disdain.
Thus it is like the Tao.

In dwelling, live close to the ground.
In thinking, keep to the simple.
In conflict, be fair and generous.
In governing, don't try to control.
In work, do what you enjoy.
In family life, be completely present.

When you are content to be simply yourself
and don't compare or compete,
everybody will respect you.

16

Empty your mind of all thoughts.
Let your heart be at peace.
Watch the turmoil of beings,
but contemplate their return.

Each separate being in the universe
returns to the common source.
Returning to the source is serenity.

If you don't realize the source,
you stumble in confusion and sorrow.
When you realize where you come from,
you naturally become tolerant,
disinterested, amused,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.
Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life brings you,
and when death comes, you are ready.

50

The Master gives himself up
to whatever the moment brings.
He knows that he is going to die,
and he has nothing left to hold on to:
no illusions in his mind,
no resistances in his body.
He doesn't think about his actions;
they flow from the core of his being.
He holds nothing back from life;
therefore he is ready for death,
as a man is ready for sleep
after a good day's work.

Analysis:

Next to the Bible the *Tao Te Ching* is the most translated book in the world, and due to its poetic style and subtle subject-matter there is often considerable variation from one translation to another. Even the title can be translated in a number of ways. *Tao* most literally means “way” or “path” *Te* can mean “power,” “virtue,” “excellence,” or “integrity,” and *Ching* means “book,” “tome” or “classic.” This leads to several plausible interpretations of the full title, such as: *The Book of the Way and Its Power*, or *The Classic of the Way and Its Virtue*, or *The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way*.

The first and foremost question to the new student of Taoism is “What is the Tao?” Lao Tzu’s answer is particularly cryptic. In the very first passage of the *Tao Te Ching*, he writes: “The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.” At first view this seems self-contradictory or even hypocritical. If the eternal Tao (which is the only real Tao) can’t be told, then why does Lao Tzu write an entire book telling us about it? To make matters worse, in passage 14 we are told that one cannot know the Tao. How is the new student of Taoism to react? What is the point of attempting to learn about the Tao if it cannot be told or described or known?

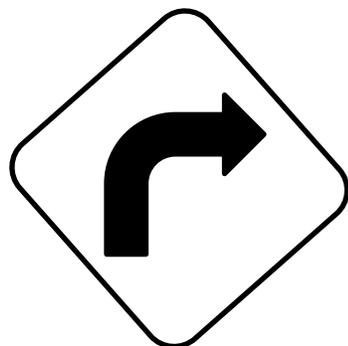
My suggestion is that we do not take Lao Tzu too literally here. Lao Tzu tells us quite a lot about the Tao, so in *some sense* the Tao can be told. Similarly, some people, like Lao Tzu, know something about the Tao (in some sense of “know”) such that they are appropriate teachers of The Way, while others are entirely ignorant. Nevertheless, Lao Tzu is clearly warning us about the dangers of applying words to the Tao and of trying to “know” the Tao in the way that we know most other things. He is

seems to be warning us against literalism and “nailing down” the Tao with our words, concepts, and propositional knowledge. The reason for this is easy to see. If the Tao is truly infinite, then it is too big for our limited conceptual categories, and hence for our concepts which are based on those categories. He puts the point rather nicely in another work, the *Hua Hu Ching*:

The Tao gives rise to all forms, yet it has no form of its own.
If you attempt to fix a picture of it in your mind, you will lose it.
This is like pinning a butterfly; the husk is captured, but the flying is lost...

Imagine for a moment that you see a beautiful butterfly, dancing on the air. It is so beautiful, that you wish to keep it for yourself. So you catch it in your net, gas it with ether, and then stick a pin through its back and place it in your collection. Did you succeed in capturing that beautiful flying creature? Of course not. You have certainly caught something, but you have changed its very nature. What you have is a static crispy corpse – not a beautiful, lighter than air, flying creature. The same goes for the Tao. If you nail it down in your mind by putting it in words or concepts, you will have captured something, but it won't be the eternal Tao. You will have changed it – killed it – turned it into something that it is not.

So how should we take the descriptions of the *Tao Te Ching* if the Tao cannot be told? In a word: *metaphorically*. Here is an example. You see a road sign up ahead:



Seeing this sign, you know exactly what to do and prepare to turn right. But notice, the sign is only helpful because you do *not* take it literally. If you took the sign as the literal truth about the road ahead, you would slam on the breaks because the road is about to get very tiny and end in a point! So you must look at the sign, not as a literal description of the road, but rather as symbol. So long as you take it as such it can guide your mind in the right direction. Similarly, we must take Lao Tzu's words as signs or metaphors. They can help to take our minds in the right direction so long as we don't mistake the signs for the Tao itself. The Buddha made a similar point in his famous example of the finger pointing at the moon:

This is similar to a person pointing his finger at the moon to show it to someone else. Guided by the finger, the other person should see the moon. If he looks at the finger instead and mistakes it for the moon, he loses not only the moon but the finger also. Why, because he mistakes the pointing finger for the bright moon.[§]

So if we take all talk about the Tao metaphorically, and think about it loosely, rather than attempting to nail it down in our minds, then perhaps Lao Tzu's words can help to point our attention in the right direction. He describes the Tao as a way or path. We can take this metaphor in a few different ways, all of which seem to be intended. First, we might think of a "way of doing things" or a "way of living," like the way a skilled potter pulls up the clay, or the way a virtuous person deals with conflict. Second, we might think of it as a path or route, kind of like the "yellow brick road" from *The Wizard of Oz*. Thus one can follow the path of the Tao, or stray from that path. And third, we might think of a way in terms of reality, as in *the way things are*.

The Source

This third sense of *the way* can be seen in the passages listed under the heading “The Source.” In these passages the Tao is attributed with not only the existence of all things, but also with why they are as they are. The Tao is described as “The Great Mother” giving birth to “infinite worlds.” Yet all being in the universe is nothing more than “an expression of the Tao.” The Tao is what “nourishes them, maintains them,” and guides them. However, we must be careful not to let such language lead us into imagining a personal being here (as in the western view of God). The Tao guides and nourishes not from a desire for some outcome, but rather, simply because it is. The way things are is simply the way of the Tao. As we see in passage 25:

Man follows the earth.
Earth follows the universe.
The universe follows the Tao.
The Tao follows only itself.

In these passages the Tao is characterized as the underlying metaphysical reality of all things. But the *Tao Te Ching* is also a book about ethics – about how one should live. For the Taoist, these two topics are intimately connected. Only by understanding the nature of reality can one know how to live, for the good life is one of natural harmony with the Tao.

Yin/ Yang and Wu Wei

So what is the life of natural harmony? Or to put it another way, how does one follow the path of the Tao? As we saw in the preceding passage, the earth follows the

universe, and the universe follows the Tao. Within Taoist metaphysics this is both natural and inevitable. The laws of physics are simply an expression of the Tao. But when it comes to human beings, things are a bit different. While human nature too is an expression of the Tao, human beings are unique insofar as we can follow the path that nature has laid out for us, or we can struggle against it and make our own path. Lao Tzu recommends following the path that is embedded in nature – the path of Tao. Such a life provides peace and equanimity, compassion and humility. To fight against the flow of the Tao, and to forge a separate path, leads to an existence of struggle and strife and of arrogance, since one has come to believe that they know better than the universe itself.

So, if we are inclined to follow the path of the Tao, we can let nature be our guide. And what do we find in nature? Two major themes that Lao Tzu discovers in nature are the interdependence of yin/ yang and the effortless action of wu wei.

Most people are at least somewhat familiar with yin/yang from its symbol.



The symbol is ubiquitous, appearing on everything from jewelry to t-shirts to surfboards. People seem to love its simple elegance and inherent symbolism. It really does do an incredible job of depicting the concept of yin/yang. Consider the ideas at work. First, it is composed of black and white, symbolizing opposites, yet both are unified within a

single circle. Each section is of equal size, representing balance. Notice that the white side has a black dot, and the black side has a white dot. This suggests that while the two sides are opposites, there is nevertheless a bit of the other within them. Neither is completely “one-sided.” Notice also that the shape of each side affects the shape of the other. If for instance the “head” of the white were shaped differently, the “tail” of the black would simultaneously be changed. This depicts a kind of interdependence between the two. Putting this all together, we can characterize yin/yang as the balance of interdependent opposites.

We find this relation of interdependent opposites throughout nature: Long and short, hot and cold, male and female, etc. Traditionally, the dark side of the symbol is associated with what is called *yin*. Yin represents the soft, the cool, the passive, the receptive, and the feminine. Its interdependent opposite is referred to as *yang*. It represents the bright, the hard, the hot, the active, the aggressive, and the masculine. The *Tao Te Ching* highlights these interdependent opposite pairs within nature, but it also emphasizes the fact that people tend to value one side at the expense of the other. Most often, we seem to value the yang over the yin. We are impressed by the power hard, the active and aggressive, and tend to neglect the power and value of the soft, the passive and receptive. The *Tao Te Ching* calls us back to a place of balance by emphasizing the yin.

Know the male,
yet keep to the female:
receive the world in your arms.
If you receive the world,
the Tao will never leave you
and you will be like a little child.#

Coinciding with Lao Tzu's emphasis on the yin polarity, is his admiration of *wu wei*. This is a term that refers to a kind of effortless spontaneity or natural action. *Wu wei* is often exemplified by the expert or virtuoso. When one has mastered a skill, whether it is tennis, the violin, surfing, dance, or basketball, one's actions become effortless. When first learning a sport, art, or any complex activity, every little movement takes a great deal of thought and effort, and even then the result is usually poor. The expert can make the same movements, without any thought or effort, and do it smoother, higher, faster, etc. This is effortless action. A second sort of effortless action (one that doesn't require virtuoso abilities) involves using the power of the soft, the flexible, the receptive. This is the kind of action that is exemplified by water.

Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
nothing can surpass it.

The soft overcomes the hard;
the gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
but few can put it into practice...%

If you want to follow the path of the Tao, Lao Tzu's advice is to be like water. So often when we encounter hard and rigid people in our lives we stiffen up. We become hard ourselves and meet their aggressive yang energy with our own aggressive yang energy. We butt heads, and before long we both have a headache. This is often because we become blind to the power of the soft and flexible. Instead of meeting their anger with anger, try meeting the hard with the soft. Meet the hard person with compassion and

concern for whatever has upset them. Look for a middle ground upon your needs and theirs can be simultaneously satisfied.

Wisdom

The themes previously covered all tie into the Taoist conception of wisdom. The wise person must know the metaphysical reality and the processes that govern the universe, for if one doesn't understand the nature of how things are, they will never understand their place within that reality. The sage will therefore be a student of nature, and will come to see how the world is built upon interconnected opposites. They will learn to value the subtle powers of the often neglected yin – the power of the fluid receptive actions that epitomize wu wei. They will put their confidence in the natural order of things, and allow themselves to move within its flow:

Open yourself to the Tao,
then trust your natural responses;
and everything will fall into place.+

At the core of Lao Tzu's philosophy is the idea that human nature is essentially good, and in touch with the Tao. Hence, his references to the sage being like a child, and the recurring theme of "letting be", or "returning to the original" and "trusting our natural responses." People become bad only because they have lost touch with their essential nature. In other words, their original nature has been corrupted or defiled. And what defiles a person's nature? Certainly a child can be ruined by growing up in a mean or petty household or in a perverse society, but it is also crucial to note that our nature is also defiled or obstructed by our mental constructions (our beliefs, desires,

and conceptualizations). This includes how our culture has taught us to view the world and how it has taught us to see ourselves:

Success is as dangerous as failure.
Hope is as hollow as fear.
...Hope and Fear are both phantoms,
that arise from thinking of the self.
When we don't see the self as self,
what do we have to fear?^

The obliteration our conception of "self" and "other" leads in turn to benevolence and non-competition:

See the world as yourself.
Have faith in the way things are.
Love the world as yourself;
then you can care for all things.

As well as a profound sense of humility:

He considers those who point out his faults
as his most benevolent teachers.
He thinks of his enemy
as the shadow that he himself casts.

In Lao Tzu's philosophy of death, we again find a merging of metaphysics and ethics. The wise person will not fear death, because they realize that all life is an expression of the Tao. For them, death simply means returning to the Source:

When you realize where you come from,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.
Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life bring you,
and when death comes, you are ready.

Exercises: How to Live Like Lao Tzu

Exercise 1: Take a Nature Walk

From Lao Tzu's perspective, nature can teach you everything you need to know about the Tao. In fact, nature can teach you anything worth knowing. So head out to the forest, the meadow, the beach, the desert – anywhere in which you can observe nature in a fairly pristine state. Observe and enjoy.

A. Discover that yin/yang is all around you

As you walk, take notice of yin/yang as they manifest themselves all around you. Observe the beauty of the sun between the trees. It is the interplay of light and dark, and positive and negative space that make this beauty possible. A wave crashing on the rocks exemplifies the interplay of hard and soft, rigid and flexible.

B. Find your natural rhythm

As you walk try not to rush. Allow your body to find its natural rhythm. Feel the Tao flow through you as you walk and breathe.

Exercise 2: Win a Dispute through Wu Wei

Today try overcoming the hard by way of the soft, and instead of looking for a victory *over* the other, see if you can achieve a victory *with* them. There are many ways that this can be done. You might adjust your co-worker's attitude by baking them some cookies, or, you might listen carefully and with concern to your roommate's complaints before jumping straight into your defensive counter-complaints. Here's a more detailed example from my own life. For months I had been embroiled in a battle with my dog. In

the evenings I wanted her to come in and sleep in the laundry room. She, however, had decided that she would rather sleep outside so she could bark at every nocturnal animal she could find – thereby driving my family and my neighbors crazy. Every night was a struggle. I'd call her and she would not come. I'd go out to find her and she would hide in the bushes. It was a true test of wills, and I was losing – and becoming quite frustrated in the process. But then I had a simple, yet brilliant idea. I opened the back door. Then, I opened the refrigerator door. She'd hear the familiar squeak of that door and come running in for a treat. I'd then give her a little morsel and put her to bed, and we'd both go to sleep happy. It was a total win-win situation – we both got what we wanted. It was cooperation rather than conquest.

Exercise 3: Let Your Mud Settle

When we find ourselves in confusion -- when some practical dilemma leaves us unsure of what to do, the typical approach tends to be to obsess about it, stress about it, and think about it constantly until we can make up our mind. The next time such situation arises, try following the advice from passage 15:

...Do you have the patience to wait
till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
till the right action arises by itself?

The Master doesn't seek fulfillment.
Not seeking, not expecting,
she is present, and can welcome all things.

Here is your task:

Get a large glass or jar and drop in a small scoop of regular dirt from the garden. Then, fill the glass with water and stir vigorously. Now, find a quiet place and assume a seated

meditative position with your spine erect. Look deeply into your glass of muddy water, and follow Lao Tzu's advice:

1. **Remain unmoving.** For most people this in itself can be quite challenging. You will probably feel constant calls to move. Your back hurts, you have an itch, staring at a glass of water is too boring, etc. Ignore these calls. They are insignificant and will pass if you let them. Just focus on your water.
2. **Don't seek. Don't expect.** As you watch the mud settle in your glass, try not to expect it to become clear in any particular time, instead, just let things be.
3. **Quiet your mind.** Do this very gently. Don't force your mind in any particular direction. Just watch your glass of muddy water. Notice its stillness and allow yourself to quiet down naturally. Be like the water.

When your glass of water has become sufficiently clear (to your satisfaction), then get up, bow to your teacher (i.e., the glass of water), and continue with your day. (Note, this meditation may take 20 minutes or more. If you feel that is more than you can handle, you might set a timer for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes.) Perhaps at this point you will have the answer you originally sought. If not, don't despair. Give it a bit more time. Go about your normal activities and the answer may just percolate up from the murky depths of your psyche.

Exercise 4: Get in the Zone

Have you ever had that feeling that you were totally "in the zone?" Perhaps it was when engaging in a sport, where every move seemed effortless and spot on. Or it may have been while playing music, or engaging in your favorite hobby. That "feeling of being in the zone" exemplifies wu wei, and it is about as close to living in true harmony with the Tao as we ever get. It is a beautiful experience. This week, try to cultivate that

experience. Since, for most people, such experiences are rare, so this will be difficult to do. To make matters worse, the act of “trying” to be in the zone, will most likely prevent you from getting into the zone. So don’t try – don’t force it. Instead, just create the opportunity for this state to arise of its own accord by doing the activities that enable it, and by leaving your “self” behind. Be one with the activity. As Eugen Herrigel puts it in *Zen in the Art of Archery*, “Don’t think of what you have to do, don’t consider how to carry it out!” he exclaimed. “The shot will only go smoothly when it takes the archer himself by surprise.”

Exercise 5: Be like water

Water is Lao Tzu’s favorite metaphor for the Tao, and for the “Master” or “Superior person.” Today, try to emulate water. Below are a few suggestions.

A. Water benefits all living beings and does not compete with them.

Throughout the day avoid the urge to compete with others. Instead, look for ways to collaborate with them to find a solution that works for everyone. And don’t forget to consider how your actions affect other beings. You can do this by giving more thought to the products you buy and the energy you consume.

B. Water is content with the low places that others disdain.

To be content with the “low places” is to be humble. Avoid the urge to feel superior to others, to look down upon them, and to gossip about them. Especially avoid putting others down in order to make yourself look or feel better.

C. Water attains clarity by being still.

When you have a problem, don’t let anxiety and nervous energy rule the day.

Instead, slow down, take a minute, come back to your breath. Be like the water, and let things become clear by stepping back and allowing the mud to settle on its own. (For more on this, try exercise #3.)

D. Overcome the hard and brittle.

Water overcomes the hard and brittle by being fluid, soft, and flexible. Try doing the same when you encounter hard people and hard problems. Consider going around, rather than through. Try compassion rather than responding with anger.

6. Learn from the people you dislike.

Observe the people you dislike most. What can you learn from them? Consider their shortcomings as exaggerated versions of your own traits. Think about how those same traits manifest in you. Then use the fact that you sometimes are motivated by that same trait – whether it be greed, animus, jealousy, etc., to generate compassion toward others. Also use it to help you recognize the shortcomings within yourself that you may have ignored or hidden away.

Notes

1. There are many versions of this encounter. This particular telling came from: *On Lao Tzu* by David Hong Chen, Wadsworth, Belmont Ca, 2000
2. This is the second half of passage 25. The first half appears in the previous section “The Way of Ultimate Reality.”
3. This comes from the Shurangama Sutra Volume 2, available online at: <http://www.zhaxizhuoma.net/DHARMA/Tripitaka/ShurangamaSutra2.htm> However, the story is most famous for its retelling by Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*, Warner Bros. 1973.

\$. #. Passage 28 %. Passage 78 Passage 68

+ Passage 23

^ Passage 13

Socrates: The Examined Life

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Historical Background:

In Socrates' Words:

Analysis:

No one desires evil.

No one does wrong knowingly.

Virtue is knowledge.

Virtue is sufficient for happiness.

The “Socratic Paradox” refers to Socrates' statement, “I know that I know nothing.” Socrates believed that the first step towards wisdom is knowing that you are ignorant.

Exercises: How to Live Like Socrates

Plato: The Rule of Reason

Historical Background:

In Plato's Words:

Analysis:

The Tripartite Self

Relate the passions to dopamine in the brain. (see The Happiness Hypothesis pg. 16)

Relate the passions to subconscious prejudices. (See Happiness Hypothesis pg. 26-8)

Implicit Racism Test

People choosing professions that sound like their names

Choosing spouses with similar names.

Exercises: How to Live Like Plato

Aristotle: The Ultimate Good

Historical Background:

In Aristotle's Words:

Analysis:

Practical Wisdom: The will to do the right thing plus the skill to know how to accomplish it. Aristotle watched the craftsman and builders of his day. You cannot measure a round column well with a straight rule – so the builders invented a bendable rule (like a tape measure). Like these builders, the wise person knows when to “bend the rule.”

See Barry Schwartz Ted talk

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/barry_schwartz_using_our_practical_wisdom.html

Exercises: How to Live Like Aristotle

Exercise 1:

1. What events after your death could affect the success of your life?

What, if anything, can you do during your lifetime to prevent such future events?

Exercise 2: Virtues and Vices: Which Way Do I Lean?

Aristotle says that virtue is the mean between two extremes. From the list of virtues and their opposite extremes, determine which extreme is your typical weakness. Be mentally ready to overcome those weaknesses when the opportunity arises.

Courage -- Foolhardiness vs Cowardice

Generosity –

Proper Pride -- Arrogance vs Meekness

Epictetus: The Stoic Way

Historical Background:

In Epictetus' Words:

Analysis:

The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing.”

-- Marcus Aurelius see Irvine p.59

Hedonic Adaptation (Getting bored with the source of pleasure) See Irvine p. 67

Amor Fati -- The phrase has been linked to the writings of Marcus Aurelius, who did not himself use the words (he wrote in Greek, not Latin).

Epictetus wrote:

“Do not seek to have everything that happens happen as you wish, but wish for everything to happen as it actually does happen, and your life will be serene.”

(See Blakewell: Montaigne p. 113)

Seneca had a most unusual way to practice this “amor fati.” (See Blakewell: Montaigne p. 114) He was an asthmatic and would sometimes have severe attacks in which his throat constricted, his lungs ached, and he could barely breathe. He would use these torturous events to practice “choosing what is.” As he endured the pain and loss of breath, he would think to himself: Yes...I will this. I choose it. And, if necessary, I *will* myself to die from it.

Exercises: How to Live Like Epictetus

Exercise 1: A Study of Control

Consider the activities you have planned for this week. Then, make a list of the relevant actions and events according to the following rubric:

1. Those things over which you have no control.
2. Those things over which you have partial control.

3. Those things over which you have total control.

Exercise 2: Pride and Blame

Make a list of things you take pride in. For each item on the list, ask yourself whether it is for something over which you had total control, partial control, or no control. Then consider whether you truly deserve the credit for that thing.

If you find that you have been taking complete credit for something for which you are not wholly responsible, you might consider whether you have adequately shown appreciation to those who also contributed.

Make a list of things that you blame yourself for. For each item on the list, ask yourself whether it is for something over which you had total control, partial control, or no control. Then consider whether you truly deserve the blame for that thing.

If you determine that the blame is shared with others, before you blame them you should investigate whether they had total control, partial control, or no control of their contribution.

Exercise 3: Imagine the Worst

Give credit to Irvine p. 65

Exercise 4: Embrace Tragedy

Practice *amor fati* by choosing life – exactly as it is. Wish for nothing to be different. This is easy enough when life is pleasant. The real trick is to be able to choose even the hard times. As we saw, Seneca took this to the extreme, endeavoring to choose even his own death if his asthmatic attack were to demand it. Now it is your

turn. Throughout the week look for opportunities to practice. Notice those times when you seem to be resisting reality – when you are resisting life as it is. You might start with the small things, for example, if you are stuck in a long line at the DMV, endeavor to embrace this fact rather than resist it. *Choose your life just as it is.* If you are home sick with cold, choose it. With practice, you may yourself with the ability to choose your fate even when it comes to life’s biggest tragedies: death, betrayal, poverty, etc.

Exercise 5: Take a New Perspective on Your Desire

Here is an exercise that is especially good if you find yourself a slave to desire. Marcus Aurelius used to deflate the power of his desires by viewing them from a more objective perspective. In his journal he wrote:

How good it is, when you have roast meat or suchlike foods before you, to impress on your mind that this is the dead body of a fish, this the dead body of a bird or pig; and again, that the Falernian wine is the mere juice of grapes, and your purple-edged robe simply the hair of a sheep soaked in shell-fish blood! And in sexual intercourse that it is no more than the friction of a membrane and a spurt of mucus ejected.

Following Marcus’ advice, the next time you find yourself pulled by a desire that you would really rather not succumb to, take a new perspective on it – one that presents it in a much less desirable light.

Epicurus: The Pursuit of Pleasure

“Death is nothing to us.”

Historical Background:

In Epicurus' Words:

Analysis:

Imagine your death. Apple CEO Steve Jobs showed his agreement with Epicurus in his 2005 commencement speech at Stanford University: He told the graduates that, “Remembering that I’ll be dead soon, is the best tool that I’ve encountered to help me make the big choices in life.” For the past thirty three years he had started each morning by looking in the mirror and asking himself: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?” If the answer turned out to be “no” for too many days in a row, then Jobs knew he needed to make some kind of change in his life.#

“It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely, honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely, honestly and justly without living pleasantly.”

Exercises: How to Live Like Epicurus

Exercise 1: Imagine your death

(1) Imagine the day of your death. Pick a way of dying for yourself. Visualize it. Watch the reactions of the people around you. See your body being embalmed. Watch it get lifted into your coffin. Imagine your funeral, your burial, your decomposition.

(2) Note your emotional reaction to your death. Does the fact that you are going to die bother you? Do you see the fact of your death as good, or neutral, or negative, or as one of the worst things imaginable?

(3) Now reflect upon whether your emotional reaction fits the facts of your death, or whether it is a response to the sorts of things you just imagined. But weren't you imagining the reality of your death? Notice that Epicurus would say no, because it is impossible to imagine your own death. Seeing the faces of the mourners, hearing their cries, imagining the body's decomposition – these all belong to the living. "Being dead" has nothing to do with any of these things.

Exercise 2: Spend the Day (or week) as an Epicurean

1. Focus on the simple pleasures.

Reflect on how non-simple pleasures lead to more and more extravagant desires. Reflect on the ultimate cost of those desires.

2. Spend quality time with friends.

Reflect upon your friends. Whose company do you truly enjoy the most and why?

Michel de Montaigne: The Life of Introspection

Historical Background:

In his later years Montaigne spent most of his days in the circular library that occupied one of the corners of his castle.

In Montaigne's Words:

Analysis:

Regarding Our Bodies

“Upon the highest throne in the world, we are seated, still, upon our asses.” *

“Kings and philosophers shit: and so do ladies.”*

“The genital activities of mankind are so natural, so necessary and so right: what have they done to make us never dare mention them without embarrassment, and to exclude them from serious orderly conversation? We are not afraid to utter the words kill, thieves, or betray; but those others we only dare to mention through our teeth.” %

Exercises: How to Live Like Montaigne

Exercise 1: Capture Your Stream of Consciousness

Montaigne was quite fond of the Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder who said: “Each man is a good education to himself, provided he has the capacity to spy on himself close up.” So today's assignment is try something that Montaigne was quite adept at: spy on yourself. Grab a pad of paper and a pencil and start writing. Write down your thoughts no matter what they may be. The only rule is to keep your pencil

moving. You may at times feel (especially when you first begin) that you have nothing to say. Nevertheless, just start writing – even if it’s “stupid” – even if it is just whining thoughts about what a lame assignment this is. Eventually thoughts will come, and you might be quite surprised about what you learn about yourself.

Exercise 2: Conquer Arrogance

One of Montaigne’s favorite places in all the world was his library. Along with the thousands of books he had floor-to-ceiling murals, and quotations painted along the ceiling beams. Here you can find the words of Pliny the Elder: “Only one thing is certain: that nothing is certain. And nothing is more wretched or arrogant *than* man.” We are all prone to arrogance from time to time, and for some it is a defining characteristic. So here is your assignment: engage someone in a substantial conversation. You can talk about politics, religion, human nature, etc., anything that is significant and somewhat controversial. While in the conversation, do the following:

- A. Reflect on your approach.** What do you seem to be focused on within the conversation? Is it to learn more about the topic by hearing the other person’s thoughts and unique perspective? Or is it to show how much *you* know? Or is it to “win” the argument? Or is it something else altogether? Then consider which approach Montaigne would admire most. Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Does this mean you need to work on changing your approach?
- B. Try out a new tag-line.** This is something you’ll want to try later in the conversation (after giving due attention to your approach), or perhaps in

another conversation of the same sort. Whenever you make an assertion about any controversial matter upon which intelligent people may disagree, finish your statement with the Montaigne's characteristic line – "though I don't know."

Exercise 3: Examine and Depict Your Education

Summing up his views on education Montaigne wrote: "I gladly come back to the theme of the absurdity of our education: its end has not been to make us good and wise, but learned. And it has succeeded. It has not taught us to seek virtue and to embrace wisdom: it has impressed upon us their derivation and their etymology..."

How was (or is) your formal education? Is the focus on becoming learned or becoming wise? Make a pie chart depicting the amount of time you've spent learning items that you find irrelevant to your life vs. the amount of time you've spent learning things that have improved your life.

Exercise 4: Accept Your Body and Its Functions

Montaigne wrote: "The most uncouth of our afflictions is to despise our own being... We should cease waging civil war on our perplexing physical envelopes and learn to accept them as unalterable facts of our condition, neither so terrible nor so humiliating."& So today your assignment is to accept your body. Here are a few things you can do to that end:

A. Get Naked

Stand in front of a full length mirror completely naked. Try to look at yourself objectively – like a scientist from an alien race. Try not to judge, just notice

the features of your “physical envelope.” You are likely to notice some flabby spots, some blemishes, some parts that strike you as too large or too small, or oddly shaped. Be sure to recall (as any alien scientist will admit) that almost every human has flabby spots, blemishes, parts that seem inordinately large or small or oddly shaped. Say to yourself: “This is my body. This is me. I accept it, flaws and all.” (Though you may also be inspired to make a vow to take better care of it in the future.)

B. Discuss Your Bodily Shortcomings

With a trusted friend or lover, discuss the aspects or areas of your body about which you are unhappy or embarrassed. What are, to your mind, your worst qualities? Do you have physical attributes that you are embarrassed to mention? Are there parts of the body that you find it uncomfortable to talk about? Talk about any or all of these things. The more you do, Montaigne believed, the more normal and natural they seem.

C. Discuss an Embarrassing Bodily Moment

We’ve all had experiences where our body did not conform to our wishes or expectations – sometimes in the most embarrassing ways. With that trusted friend or lover, share a view of these experiences. This will help to defuse the shame or embarrassment that we carry with the memory.

Create: Inspire your home with great quotations

Montaigne put his favorite quotations on the beams of the ceiling of his library. Write your favorite quotation (or several) somewhere in your home. If you can’t mark the walls, you might consider buying a small chalkboard to hang, or paint a wall or cabinet

door with chalkboard paint. One advantage of chalk is that you will be able to change quotations whenever you come across a new one that inspires you.

Notes:

*. As quoted in *The Consolation of Philosophy* p. 126.

%. & As quoted in *The Consolation of Philosophy* p. 127.

&. As quoted in *The Consolation of Philosophy* p. 123.

Nietzsche: Pulling Away from the Herd

“Man is something to be surpassed.”

Historical Background:

In Nietzsche’s Words:

Analysis:

“By morality the individual is taught to become a function of the herd, and to ascribe to himself value only as a function...Morality is the herd instinct in the individual.”

From *The Joyful Wisdom*, quoted in Solomon, *The Big Questions* (224)

“Man is a rope tied between the animal and the Superman – a rope over an abyss.”

As quoted in *The Philosophy Book* p. 218

Exercises: How to Live Like Nietzsche

Henry David Thoreau: The Simple Life

Historical Background:

In Thoreau's Words:

Analysis:

Diogenes of Sinope observed that “the gods had given to men the means of living easily, but this had been put out of sight, because we require honey and cakes, unguents and the like.” (In Irvine: *A Guide to the Good Life* p. 31)

Exercises: How to Live Like Thoreau

Exercise 4: Read to a Child

Share Thoreau's philosophy of life with a child by reading them the delightful children's book, *Henry Hikes to Fitchburg*. The story is based around a passage from Thoreau's *Walden*. Henry and his friend both agree to meet on evening in Fitchburg. Henry decides to walk the thirty miles, while his friend works all day to earn the train fair. Who will get their first, and who will have the most enjoyable trip?

Listen:

Check out the lyrical adaptation of Thoreau's philosophy in Jack Johnson's "Breakdown" available on *A Broke Down Melody: Music from and Inspired by the Film*, Universal-Island Records, 2006.

Jean-Paul Sartre: How to Be an Existentialist

Historical Background:

In Sartre's Words:

Analysis:

Exercises: How to Live Like Sartre

Exercise 1: Being Toward Death (Seize the Days)

Multiply your age by 365 (this is your current age in days). Then subtract that number from 27,375 (which is the average life span in days). The remaining number is the number of days you have left you live the average life span. It's funny, the shift in perspective that can take place when you realize you have a dwindling number of days left. Of course, you have much fewer years than you do days, but years are so long that they seem a bit vague to our imaginations. But days – we are intimately familiar with the length of a day, and how quickly it can slip past. How will you spend the limited number of days that you have left? How many can you afford to waste? Let this exercise kick your butt into authenticity. Realize that while your days are limited, the number of ways you could spend those days is truly unlimited, and ultimately up to you.

Carpe Diem!

Exercise 2: Adventures in Saliva

Take a shot glass, or any small glass, and spit into it several times until you get a nice little puddle of saliva. (If you are running a bit dry, you can add an equal amount of water.) Now, drink up the spit.

How was it?

Did you even do it? My experience is that most people won't even try this exercise. Some get all creeped out just by the very thought of doing this. Why not drink up the spit? The common response is that it is "disgusting," "gross," or "too weird." But notice, your mouth is full of saliva at this very moment. Do you find that to be gross or weird? Apparently this reaction is learned. Babies slobber all over their toys and then put them in their mouths. They don't see anything disgusting about it.

The point of this little exercise is to notice how strong and "set" your interpretations and attitudes regarding spit are. Intellectually, we can see that it is rather silly to think that saliva is "just fine" while it is in our mouths but magically, instantaneously, it becomes "gross" the second it leaves our mouths. If Sartre is correct, "grossness" is not the facticity of spit. Rather, it is your freely chosen interpretation of the spit. But it doesn't feel freely chosen. We tend to see it as *just the way spit is*. But when we see it this way we are in bad faith. We are lying to ourselves about our role in all of this – acting as if we have nothing to do with the grossness of spit.

Think now, about all those other things that strike you as weird, gross, wrong, abnormal, etc. Are you denying your role in these interpretations too – passing it off as facticity – as simply the way things are? Use what you've learned from this exercise to take a

fresh look at your learned, unreflective interpretations. Practice creating meaning as you choose, rather than as society has chosen for you.

Exercise 3: Catch Yourself in Bad Faith

How often do you lie to yourself? Have you ever kept track? For this week, keep a “bad faith journal” and carry it with you wherever you go. Any time you lie to yourself about anything – and especially about your freedom – write it in your journal. We’ve already seen that one of the most common ways that people lie to themselves – by convincing themselves that they “have” to do this or that. Here are some other examples of bad faith.....

When the week is over, categorize your instances of bad faith.....

John (Fire) Lame Deer: Seeing Through Symbols

Historical Background:

John (Fire) Lame Deer – *Tahca Ushte* in Lakota – (1900 or 1903 – 1976) was a Minneconjou-Lakota Sioux, born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, although there is some uncertainty surrounding the exact date. Lame Deer was a *wícaśa wakan* or “medicine man.” He was a healer, a spiritual guide, and preserver of the ancient ways of the Lakota people of the American Plains.

Lame Deer’s life was transformed by a vision quest when he was sixteen years old. Alone on a hilltop for four days and nights without food or water, he beheld a vision of his great-grandfather, the original Lame Deer, old man chief of the Minneconjou, dripping with blood from where a white soldier had shot him in the chest. From this vision he knew that his great-grandfather wanted him to take his name, and that he would become a medicine man.

After a rather raucous period as a young man, when he worked the rodeo circuit as a clown, became a heavy drinker, gambler, and womanizer, Lame Deer had another somewhat mystical encounter that put him back on track with his destiny. He came upon the house where the original peace pipe, given to the Lakota people by the mystical *Buffalo Calf Woman*, was kept. The keeper of the pipe told Lame Deer that she had been waiting for him for quite some time. This encounter led him to take his life seriously and become a true *wícaśa wakan* and to become a leader in the American Indian movement.

The selections below come from Lame Deer's autobiography, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions: The Life of a Sioux Medicine Man*, written with Richard Erdoes. In this reflective account of his life and the harsh circumstances confronting American Natives, Lame Deer beautifully expresses the values and perspective of the Sioux and provides a penetrating critique of modernity.

In Lame Deer's Words:

Medicine, Good and Bad

I am a medicine man – a *wi'ca'sa wakan*. “Medicine man” – that's a white man's word like squaw, papoose, Sioux, tomahawk – words that don't exist in the Indian language. I wish there were better words to make clear what “medicine man” stands for, but I can't find any, and you can't either, so I guess medicine man will have to do. But it doesn't convey the many different meanings that come to an Indian's mind when you say “medicine man”...

The *wi'ca'sa wakan* wants to be by himself. He want to be away from the crowd, from everyday matters. He likes to meditate, leaning against a tree or rock, feeling the earth move beneath him, feeling the weight of that big flaming sky upon him. That way he can figure things out. Closing his eyes, he sees many things clearly. What you see with your eyes shut is what counts. The *wi'ca'sa wakan* loves the silence, wrapping it around himself like a blanket – a loud silence with a voice like thunder which tells him of many things. Such a man likes to be in a place where there is no sound but the humming of insects. He sits facing the west, asking for help. He talks to the plants and they answer him. He listens to the voices of the *wama ka'skan* – all those who move upon the earth, the animals. He is as one with them. From all living beings something flows into him all the time, and something flows from him. I don't know where or what, but it's there. I know.

This kind of medicine man is neither good nor bad. He lives – and that's it, that's enough. White people pay a preacher to be “good,” to behave himself in public, to wear a collar, to keep away from certain kinds of women. But nobody pays an Indian medicine man to be good, to behave himself and act respectable. The *wi'ca'sa wakan* just acts like himself. He has been given the freedom – the freedom of a tree or bird. That freedom can be beautiful or ugly; it doesn't matter much.

Medicine men – the herb healers as well as our holy men – all have their own personal ways of acting according to their visions. The Great Spirit wants people to be different. He makes a person love a particular animal, tree, or herb. He makes people feel drawn to certain favorite spots on this earth where they experience a special sense of well-being, saying to themselves, “That’s a spot which makes me happy, where I belong”...

Even animals of the same kind – two deer, two owls – will behave differently from each other... I have studied many plants. The leaves of one plant, on the same stem – none is exactly alike. On all the earth there is not one leaf that is exactly like another. The Great Spirit likes it that way. He only sketches out the path of life roughly for all the creatures on earth, shows them where to go, where to arrive at, but leaves them to find their own way to get there. He wants them to act independently according to their nature, to the urges in each of them.

If Wakan Tanka [The Great Spirit] likes the plants, the animals, even little mice and bugs, to do this, how much more will he abhor people being alike, doing the same thing, getting up at the same time, putting on the same store-bought clothes, riding the same subway, working in the same office at the same job with their eyes on the same clock and, worst of all, thinking alike all the time. All creatures exist for a purpose. Even an ant knows what that purpose is – not with its brain, but somehow it knows. Only human beings have come to a point where they no longer know why they exist. They don’t use their brains and they have forgotten the secret knowledge of their bodies, their senses, or their dreams. They don’t use the knowledge the spirit has put into every one of them; they are not even aware of this, and so they stumble along blindly on the road to nowhere – a paved highway which they themselves bulldoze and make smooth so that they can get faster to the big, empty whole which they’ll find at the end, waiting to swallow them up. It’s a quick, comfortable superhighway, but I know where it leads to. I have seen it. I’ve been there in my vision and it makes me shudder to think about...

The Green Frog Skin

The green frog skin – that’s what I call a dollar bill. In our attitude toward it lies the biggest difference between Indians and whites... The green frog skin – that was what the fight [The Battle of Little Bighorn] was all about. The gold of the Black Hills, the gold in every clump of grass. Each day you can see ranch hands riding over this land. They have a bagful of grain hanging from their saddle horns, and whenever they see a prairie-dog hole they toss a handful of oats in it, like a kind little old lady feeding the pigeons in one of your city parks. Only the oats for the prairie dogs are poisoned with strychnine. What happens to the prairie dog after he has eaten this grain is not a pleasant thing to watch. The prairie dogs are poisoned, because they eat grass. A

thousand of them eat up as much grass in a year as a cow. So if the rancher can kill that many prairie dogs he can run one more head of cattle, make a little more money. When he looks at a prairie dog he only sees a green frog skin getting away from him.

For the white man each blade of grass or spring of water has a price tag on it. And that is the trouble, because look at what happens. The bobcats and coyotes which used to feed on prairie dogs now have to go after a stray lamb or a crippled calf. The rancher calls the pest-control officer to kill these animals. This man shoots some rabbits and puts them out as bait with a piece of wood stuck in them. That stick has an explosive charge which shoots some cyanide into the mouth of the coyote who tugs at it. The officer has been trained to be careful. He puts a printed warning on each stick reading, "Danger, Explosive, Poison!" The trouble is that our dogs can't read, and some of our children can't either.

And the prairie becomes a thing without life – no more prairie dogs, no more badgers, foxes, coyotes. The big birds of prey used to feed on prairie dogs, too. So you hardly see an eagle these days. The bald eagle is your symbol. You see him on your money, but your money is killing him. When a people start killing off their own symbols they are in a bad way.

The Sioux have a name for white men. They call them *wsicun* – fat-takers. It is a good name, because you have taken the fat of the land. But it does not seem to have agreed with you. Right now you don't look so healthy – overweight, yes, but not healthy. Americans are bred like stuffed geese – to be consumers, not human beings. The moment they stop consuming and buying, this frog-skin world has no more use for them. They have become frogs themselves... Fat-taking is a bad thing even for the taker. It is especially bad for Indians who are forced to live in this frog-skin world which they did not make and for which they have no use...

You put "In God We Trust" on your money. I'm glad you left the Great Spirit out of it. What you want to use your God for is your own business. I tried to show you that the green frog skin is something that keeps whites and Indians apart. But even a medicine man like myself has to have some money, because you force me to live in your make-believe world where I can't get along without it. Which means that I have to be two persons living in two different worlds. I don't like it, but I can't help it...

As long I still had some of the horses and cattle left which my father had given me, I had no thought about earning money... Then the day came when I swapped or sold the last of my livestock. I was almost happy. Now I no longer had any property to take care of, to tie me down. Now I could be what I wanted – a real Sioux, an *ikce wicasa*, a common, wild, natural human being. How such a creature could survive in a frog-skin land was something I would have to find out. I thought I'd do some hunting to

keep meat on my table. I found out that I needed a hunting license if I wanted to go after deer or antelope. The idea of an Indian having to pay for a fancy piece of paper in order to be allowed to hunt on his own land to feed his own, genuine, red man's belly seemed like a bad joke to me. It made me laugh, but it also made me angry. The same people who had killed off the buffalo, who were chopping up the last wild horses into dog food, now were telling me that I was a danger to wildlife preservation if I wanted some red meat on my table, that I had to be regulated. Why couldn't I be satisfied with the starches they were handing out to us? They told me I should be flattered, that having to buy a license put me up there on the same level with the white gentleman hunter. I answered, through an interpreter, that I was no goddam sportsman, just a hungry, common, natural Indian who did not like fancy stamped papers and new of only one way he could use them...

No matter how much I hated it I had to face up to the fact that I would have to earn some money. I was like many other full-bloods. I didn't want a steady job in an office or factory. I thought myself too good for that, not because I was stuck up but simply because any human being is too good for that kind of *no-life*, even white people. I trained myself to need and want as little as could be so that I wouldn't have to work except when I felt like it...

The Circle and the Square

What do you see here, my friend? Just an ordinary cooking pot, black with soot and full of dents.

It is standing on the fire on top of that old wood stove, and the water bubbles and moves the lid as the white steam rises to the ceiling. Inside the pot is boiling water, chunks of meat with bone and fat, plenty of potatoes.

It doesn't seem to have a message, that old pot, and I guess you don't give it a thought. Except the soup smells good and reminds you that you are hungry....But I'm an Indian. I think about ordinary, common things like this pot. The bubbling water comes from the rain cloud. It represents the sky. The fire comes from the sun which warms us all – men, animals, trees. The meat stands for the four-legged creatures, our animal brothers, who gave of themselves so that we should live. The steam is living breath. It was water; not it goes up to the sky, becomes a cloud again. These things are sacred. Looking at the pot full of good soup, I am thinking how, in this simple manner, Wakan Tanka takes care of me. We Sioux spend a lot of time thinking about everyday things, which in our mind are mixed up with the spiritual. We see in the world around us many symbols that teach us the meaning of life. We have a saying that the white man sees so little, he must see with only one eye. We see a lot that you no longer notice. You could notice if you wanted to, but you are usually too busy. We

Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one. To you symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book. To us they are part of nature, part of ourselves – the earth, the sun, the wind and the rain, stones, trees, animals, and even little insects like ants and grasshoppers. We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and we need no more than a hint to give us meaning.

What to you seems commonplace to us appears wondrous through symbolism. This is funny, because we don't even have a word for symbolism, yet we are all wrapped up in it. You have the word, but that is all...

You know, it always makes me laugh when I hear young white kids speak of some people as "squares" or "straights" – old people hardened in their ways, in their minds, in their hearts. They don't even have to be old. You can be an "old square" at eighteen. Anyway, calling these people "squares" – an Indian could have thought it up. To our way of thinking the Indians' symbol is the circle, the hoop. Nature wants things to be round. The bodies of human beings and animals have no corners. With us the circle stand for the togetherness of people who sit with one another around the campfire, relatives and friends united in peace while the pipe passes from hand to hand. The camp in which every tipi had its place was also a ring. The tipi was a ring in which people sat in a circle and all the families in the village were in turn circles within a larger circle, part of the larger hoop which was the seven campfires of the Sioux, representing one nation. The nation was only a part of the universe, in itself circular and made of the earth, which is round, of the sun, which is round, of the stars which are round. The moon, the horizon, the rainbow – circles within circles, with no beginning and no end.

To us this is beautiful and fitting, symbol of reality at the same time, expressing the harmony of life and nature. Our circle is timeless, flowing; it is new life emerging from death – life winning out over death.

The white man's symbol is the square. Square is his house, his office buildings with walls that separate people from one another. Square is the door which keeps strangers out, the dollar bill, the jail. Square are the white man's gadgets – boxes, boxes, boxes and more boxes – TV sets, radios, washing machines, computers, cars. These all have corners and sharp edges – points in time, white man's time, with appointments, time clocks and rush hours – that's what the corners mean to me. You become a prisoner inside all these boxes.

More and more young white people want to stop being "straight" and "square" and try to become more round, join our circle. That is good.

From birth to death we Indians are enfolded in symbols as in a blanket. An infant's cradle board is covered with designs to ensure a happy, healthy life for the child.

The moccasins of the dead have their soles beaded in a certain way to ease the journey to the hereafter...Every day in my life see symbols in the shape of certain roots or branches. I read messages in the stones. I pay special attention to them, because I am a Yuwipi man [a distinctive type of medicine man who works with stones] and that is my work. But I am not the only one. Many Indians do this...

Words too are symbols and convey great powers, especially names. Not Charles, Dick and George. There's not much power in those. But Red Cloud, Black Elek, Whirlwind, Two Moons, Lame Deer – these names have a relationship to the Great Spirit. Each Indian name has a story behind it, a vision, a quest for dreams. We receive great gifts from the source of a name; it links us to nature, to the animal nations. It gives power. You can lean on a name, get strength from it. It is a special name for you and you alone – not a Dick, George, Charles kind of thing...

To a white man symbols are just that: pleasant things to speculate about, to toy with in your mind. To us they are much, much more. Life to us is a symbol to be lived.

Analysis:

Good and Bad

Lame Deer contends that there is no literal way to translate *wiçaša wakan* into the English language. This is in part because it is a general term that covers a variety of roles within the Sioux culture. It includes the healer, the spiritual guide, the herbalist, the leader of spiritual ceremonies and more. Some suggest that the best translation is “holy man,” but Lame deer opts for the traditional, though greatly inadequate term “medicine man.” One reason why even “holy man” is misleading is due to modern associations with the term. Typically, when we think of a “holy” person, we image a sort of saint who is above sin. Or, in the case of a priest or pastor, is at least striving to avoid the temptation to sin wherever it arises. But the *wiçaša wakan*, he tells us, is “neither good nor bad.” Instead of striving to be good, he strives to simply be himself, and that is all that the community expects of him. For example, you may have been surprised to read that Lame Deer was a drinker, a gambler, a womanizer, etc. Lame

Deer sees no contradiction between these acts and his role as a medicine man. In fact, he sees these experiences as a valuable tool. He says that a medicine man shouldn't strive to be a saint. Instead, "he should experience and feel all the ups and downs, the despair and joy, the magic and the reality, the courage and the fear, of his people. He should be able to sink as low as a bug, or soar as high as an eagle. Unless he can experience both, he is no good as a medicine man." (79)

This outlook is both practical and spiritual/metaphysical. Practical, because in order to help the community, one must be able to relate and connect deeply to the community and its trials and tribulations; spiritual, because neither nature nor the Great Spirit are perfect. "The world couldn't stand that perfection," Lame Deer writes. (79) From this perspective, the saint's attempt to be without sin is an attempt to rise above nature – to contradict the way in which the Great Spirit wants things to be. The bottom line is that all people including the *wicása wakan*, ought to simply be themselves instead of striving to be something that they are not. None of us are pure, nor were we meant to be.

To be clear, this is not to condone or encourage all the sorts of behavior that Lame Deer engaged in over his life. Alcoholism, for example, is a huge problem among American Indian peoples. Lame Deer reflects on the reasons for this:

They drink to forget, I think, to forget the great days when this land was ours and when it was beautiful, without highways, billboards, fences and factories. They try to forget the pitiful shacks and rusting trailers which are their homes. They try to forget that they are treated like children...We drink to forget that there is nothing worthwhile for a man to do, nothing that would bring honor or make him feel good inside. There are only a handful of jobs [in or by the reservation] for a few thousand people. These are all Government jobs, tribal or federal. You have to be a good house Indian, an Uncle Tomahawk, a real apple – red on the outside,

white on the inside – to get a job like this. You have to behave yourself, and never talk back, to keep it. If you have such a job, you drink to forget what kind of person it has made of you. If you don't have it, you drink because there's nothing to look forward to but a few weeks of spud-picking, if you are lucky. You drink because you don't live; you just exist. That may be enough for some people; its not enough for us.

The fact that he was a medicine man did not exempt Lame Deer from this sort of life (or “no-life” as he sometimes calls it) and the sense of hopelessness that it tends to leave. And he found it no more shameful for him to go on a drinking binge than it would be for anyone else in the community.

The emphasis on the importance of simply being yourself also figures into Lame Deer's critique of modernity. In a powerful analogy he states that no two leaves even on the same plant are exactly alike. The Great Spirit must like it that way – each thing in the universe fulfilling its own unique and individual nature. So he finds it appalling that people today are “putting on the same store-bought clothes, riding the same subway, working in the same office at the same job with their eyes on the same clock and, worst of all, thinking alike all the time.” There are many forces that have led to increased conformity in our society. Three of the most significant are advertising, career specialization, and globalization. One hundred years ago, an American Indian could live their whole life without seeing as single advertisement for anything. Today it is estimated that the typical child sees about 20,000 thirty second television commercials each year. These ads send strong messages (the strongest they can muster) about what we should want, what we should wear, how we should smell, and how we should act. The power of advertising is so strong and so pervasive, it is impossible to imagine what a modern society would be like without it. Consider also, that the American Indian had to be a “jack of all trades.” In any given week one might be a hunter, a fisherman, a

butcher, a home builder, a trader, a craftsman a cook, and so on. In contrast, contemporary “modern” culture is all about specialization. Most people tend to spend 40+ hours every week at the same kind of task – and in some occupations this task can be incredibly narrow, such as assembling the same part of a product on an assembly line or reviewing the same government form, one after another, for hours on end. And even the diversity that came with culture is being rubbed out by globalization. While TV and the internet are bringing people together with many positive effects, these shared influences, shared products, and shared advertising is also creating more conformity, as we eat alike, dress alike, shop alike, on a global level.

Green Frog Skins

Lame Deer contends that the biggest difference between Indians and whites pertains to the role of money in their lives. You could say that, from his perspective, money is the root of, not all, but perhaps most of the evils in the world. Most importantly, so much of the destruction of nature we have seen was done for the sake of money. From large scale desecration, such blowing the very tops off of the Appalachian Mountains to get at the coal seams beneath, the slashing and burning of the rainforests to create more pastureland for cattle, to the extermination of the prairie dogs as well as their natural predators. Nature has become simply a means to a monetary end. As Lame Deer poignantly puts it, when the cowboy “looks at a prairie dog he only sees a green frog skin getting away from him.”

. The destruction of nature is just one aspect of what we might describe as “the

monetization of everything.” Today, we see land as money, water as money, animals as money and people as money. The list of things that can be bought and sold seems to be growing on a daily basis. Contemporary Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel describes this in terms of a shift from having a market economy to having a market society. For example, he notes that if you go to jail in Santa Barbara California, you can purchase a “cell upgrade” for \$90.00 a night. Or, suppose you want to sit in on an important congressional hearing or Supreme Court case, but don’t want to spend hours in line. There are now companies that hire out “line standers” who can do the waiting for you. In many cities we are even paying children to do well in school. Some schools in Dallas Texas for example, pay kids \$2.00 for each book that they read.@ As a college professor, I get paid by the number of courses I teach. But due to the fact that some professors have high drop out rates large classes, while others

The Circle and the Square

Lame Deer’s world is infused with a deeper meaning behind even the most common-place things. “From birth to death we Indians are enfolded in symbols as in a blanket,” he tells us. (113)

Modern culture is not devoid of symbols, though it certainly seems to encourage less symbolic thinking. But perhaps even more important than the sparcity of our symbols is how symbolic meaning is infused. The cowboy who sees the prairie dog as a green frog skins slipping away from him, and the car salesman who sees customers coming onto the lot as little more than potential frog skins, are both seeing the world symbolically. But the meaning behind this symbolism is both narrow (reducing the complex to the simple) and destructive. In contrast, the symbolic meaning of a pot of

stew for Lame Deer expands his universe and makes it richer, more nourishing, more spiritual. Perhaps also, we do not take our symbols as seriously as we should. There is a sad irony in the fact that American environmental policies nearly led to the extinction of the Bald Eagle, the symbol of our very nation.

Viewing the world symbolically in the manner that Lame Deer does, ultimately creates a sense of connectedness with the natural world around him. In his epilogue, Richard Erodes puts the point nicely:

“Some of my Indian friends tend to look upon life as a long series of symbolic images forming definite, harmonic patterns. They see man not as a separate entity viewed against a background, but as part of the earth upon which he walks. They see him as a kind of plant, almost, which extends roots and fibers in a number of directions, taking nourishment from different sources, exchanging juices with other plants, being perhaps eaten by some other creature and thereby becoming something else in the process, a living organism gaining strength from his surroundings as well as from certain powers inherent in nature. They see man as a small but essential partical of the universe, linked to all other living things by a number of what – for lack of a better word – I would describe as unseen but strongly perceived umbilical cords. It is difficult to look in this way upon a white man living in a city apartment.” 274

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxO96M-yHI8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq6OHCzEcqY>

Money shouldn't buy those things that money can corrupt. (start)

More paid military contractors on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan than there were government troops. 5:00

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/15/business/media/15everywhere.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 Supermarket eggs have been stamped with the names of [CBS](#) television shows. Subway turnstiles bear messages from Geico auto insurance. Chinese food cartons promote Continental Airways. [US Airways](#) is selling ads on motion sickness bags. And the trays used in airport security lines have been hawking Rolodexes.

Discuss: "They have become frogs themselves." p. 44 (included in excerpt)
monetization of people
Discuss Giveaways pgs 44-48
Indians chase the vision, white men chase the dollar. P. 46
What if I got paid by the student? Might I begin to see students as green frog skins?

Pantheism and Animism:

In the Judeo-Christian traditions, a clear distinction is made between the creator and the creation. God made the world, but the world is not God. To mistake worldly things for God is often considered blasphemy. In the Lakota world-view, there is no sharp distinction between the creator and the creation. Wanka Tanka, the Great Spirit abides in all of nature. The energy of the Great Spirit flows through everything; the animals, the trees, the grasses, the mountains, rivers, and stones. And each has their own sort of spiritual power. There are two philosophical descriptions that apply here. First, we can describe it as an animistic view. *Animism* is the belief that everything in nature% has an animating spirit (including those things that modern people call inanimate, like trees and stones). Second, we can describe it as a pantheistic view. *Pantheism* refers to the belief that everything is God or a part of God.

Diff in Time perception/symbol

Notes:

% Animism is restricted to nature, insofar as find it doubtful that Lame Deer would think that a ball point pen or a cell phone has an animating spirit. He even contends that domesticated cattle have lost their spirit (at least to a great extent). That is why you can walk right up to them and kill them.

@ Quoted from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxO96M-yHI8> See also, What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of the Market by Michael Sandel

Exercises: How to Live Like John (Fire) Lame Deer

Exercise 1: Find Your Symbols

What are your symbols? Do you need to see more symbolically? Do you need to re-envision your symbols?

Exercise 2: Explore Your Relationship with Green Frogskins

Lame Deer says that when the rancher sees a prairie dog he sees only a green frog skin getting away from him. What objects have you come to see as money – or as money slipping away?

Exercise 3: Eat like an Indian

Lame Deer suggests that our way of life does not agree with us. We have plenty to eat, but are not healthy. He compares us to “overstuffed geese” bred to be consumers.

Eat Natural

Avoid Excess Packaging

Avoid GMOS

Exercise 4: Be an Individual

“The Great Spirit,” Lame Deer writes, “wants people to be different.” Just as no two leaves of the same plant are exactly alike, everything should seek its own unique nature. But we.....

Find your sacred places

Exercise 5: Receive a New Name

Exercise 6: Spend a Day Without Technology

Go on Indian Time

Create:

Create a poster, collage, or painting that depicts you as a tree from roots to branches to leaves. Think symbolically. What do your roots extend into? What gives them nourishment? What is your foundation? Where do your branches and leaves extend to? What gives them nourishment? What else do they touch? You might also draw umbilical cords that connect you to other parts of the world.

Bertrand Russell: Getting Beyond the Self

Historical Background:

Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970) was one of the preeminent philosophers of the Twentieth Century. His most influential philosophical work was on the foundation of mathematics in the groundbreaking three volume work *Principia Mathematica*, which he wrote with Alfred North Whitehead. In addition to over ___ scholarly books and articles on wide-ranging issues within academic philosophy, Russell wrote a number of popular books and essays for the general public, often taking controversial stands on social, moral, and political issues. Although Russell was a staunch defender of rationality in all aspects of life, his criticism of conventional sexual morality and religion inspired a civil law suit that led to his being denied a professorship at the City College of New York. This was not the first time that his independent thinking led to personal hardship. His publication of several articles advocating pacifism were regarded as subversive by the British government as they prepared to enter World War I, and Russell was sentenced to six months in prison. Continuing a life of social and political activism, he bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki spurred Russell into becoming a leading figure in protests against nuclear arms. His influential broadcast in 1954 entitled “Man’s Peril,” led to his collaboration with Albert Einstein on the famous “Einstein – Russell Declaration.” This document was signed by many of the leading scientists of the day and presented to world leaders in an attempt to end nuclear proliferation. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950. The excerpts that follow are taken from Russell’s autobiography (1967) and his *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930).

In Russell's Words:

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a great ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy – ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness – that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what – at last – I have found.

With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate this evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.

The Conquest of Happiness

Chapter 1: What makes people unhappy?

Animals are happy so long as they have health and enough to eat. Human beings, one feels, ought to be, but in the modern world they are not, at least in a great majority of cases. If you are unhappy yourself, you will probably be prepared to admit that you are not exceptional in this. If you are happy, ask yourself how many of your friends are so. And when you have reviewed your friends, teach yourself the art of reading faces; make yourself receptive to the moods of those whom you meet in the course of an ordinary day.

A mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe,

says Blake. Though the kinds are different, you will find that unhappiness meets you everywhere. Let us suppose that you are in New York, in New York, the most typically modern of great cities. Stand in a busy street during working hours, or on a main thoroughfare at a week-end, or at a dance of an evening; empty your mind of your own ego, and let the personalities of the strangers about you take possession of you one after another. You will find that each of these different crowds has its own trouble. In the work-hour crowd you will see anxiety, excessive concentration, dyspepsia, lack of interest in anything but the struggle, incapacity for play, unconsciousness of their fellow creatures. On a main road at the week-end you will see men and women, all 'comfortably off, and some very rich, engaged in the pursuit of pleasure. This pursuit is conducted by all at a uniform pace, that of the slowest car in the procession; it is impossible to see the road for the cars, or the scenery, since looking aside would cause an accident; all the occupants of all the cars are absorbed in the desire to pass other cars, which they cannot do on account of the crowd; if their minds wander from this preoccupation, as will happen occasionally to those who are not themselves driving, unutterable boredom seizes upon them and stamps their features with trivial discontent. Once in a way a car-load of coloured people will show genuine enjoyment, but will cause indignation by erratic behaviour, and ultimately get into the hands of the police owing to an accident: enjoyment in holiday time is illegal.

Or, again, watch people at a gay evening. All come determined to be happy, with the kind of grim resolve with which one determines not to make a fuss at the dentist's. **It is** held that drink and petting are the gateways to joy, so people get drunk quickly, and try not to notice how much their partners disgust them. After a sufficient amount of drink, men begin to weep, and to lament how unworthy they are, morally, of the devotion of their mothers. All that alcohol does for them is to liberate the sense of sin, which reason

suppresses in saner moments.

The causes of these various kinds of unhappiness lie partly in the social system, partly in individual psychology -- which, of course, is itself to a considerable extent a product of the social system. I have written before about the changes in the social system required to promote happiness. Concerning the abolition of war, of economic exploitation, of education in cruelty and fear, it is not my intention to speak in this volume. To discover a system for the avoidance of war is a vital need for our civilisation; but no such system has a chance while men are so unhappy that mutual extermination seems to them less dreadful than continued endurance of the light of day. To prevent the perpetuation of poverty is necessary if the benefits of machine production are to accrue in any degree to those most in need of them; but what is the use of making everybody rich if the rich themselves are miserable? Education in cruelty and fear is bad, but no other kind can be given by those who are themselves the slaves of these passions. These considerations lead us to the problem of the individual: what can a man or woman, here and now, in the midst of our nostalgic society, do to achieve happiness for himself or herself? In discussing this problem, I shall confine my attention to those who are not subject to any extreme cause of outward misery. I shall assume a sufficient income to secure food and shelter, sufficient health to make ordinary bodily activities possible. I shall not consider the great catastrophes such as loss of all one's children, or public disgrace. There are things to be said about such matters, and they are important things, but they belong to a different order from the things that I wish to say. My purpose is to suggest a cure for the ordinary day-to-day unhappiness from which most people in civilised countries suffer, and which is all the more unbearable because, having no obvious external cause, it appears inescapable. I believe this unhappiness to be very largely due to mistaken views of the world, mistaken 'ethics, mistaken habits of life, leading to destruction of that natural zest and appetite for possible things upon which all happiness, whether of men or animals, ultimately depends. These are matters which lie within the power of the individual, and I propose to suggest the changes by which his happiness, given average good fortune, may be achieved.

Perhaps the best introduction to the philosophy which I wish to advocate will be a few words of autobiography. I was not born happy. As a child, my favourite hymn was: 'Weary of earth and laden with my sin'. At the age of five, I reflected that, if I should live to be seventy, I had only endured, so far, a fourteenth part of my whole life, and I felt the long-spreadout boredom ahead of me to be almost unendurable. In adolescence, I hated life and was continually on the verge of suicide, from which, however, I was restrained by the desire to know more mathematics. Now, on the contrary, I enjoy life; I might almost say that with every year that passes I enjoy it more. This is due partly to

having discovered what were the things that I most desired and having gradually acquired many of these things. Partly it is due to having successfully dismissed certain objects of desire - such as the acquisition of indubitable knowledge about something or other - as essentially unattainable. But very largely it is due to a diminishing preoccupation with myself. Like others who had a Puritan education, I had the habit of meditating on my sins, follies, and shortcomings. I seemed to myself - no doubt justly - a miserable specimen. Gradually I learned to be indifferent to myself and my deficiencies; I came to centre my attention increasingly upon external objects: the state of the world, various branches of knowledge, individuals for whom I felt affection. External interests, it is true, bring each its own possibility of pain: the world may be plunged in war, knowledge in some direction may be hard to achieve, friends may die. But pains of these kinds do not destroy the essential quality of life, as do those that spring from disgust with self. And every external interest inspires some activity which, so long as the interest remains alive, is a complete preventive of ennui. Interest in oneself, on the contrary, leads to no activity of a progressive kind. It may lead to the keeping of a diary, to getting psycho-analysed, or perhaps to becoming a monk. But the monk will not be happy until the routine of the monastery has made him forget his own soul. The happiness which he attributes to religion he could have obtained from becoming a crossing-sweeper, provided he were compelled to remain one. External discipline is the only road to happiness for those unfortunates whose self-absorption is too profound to be cured in any other way.

Chapter 11: Zest

In this chapter I propose to deal with what seems to me the most universal and distinctive mark of happy men, namely zest.

Perhaps the best way to understand what is meant by zest will be to consider the different ways in which men behave when they sit down to a meal. There are those to whom a meal is merely a bore; no matter how excellent the food may be, they feel that it is uninteresting. They have had excellent food before, probably at almost every meal they have eaten. They have never known what it was to go without a meal until hunger became a raging passion, but have come to regard meals as merely conventional occurrences, dictated by the fashions of the society in which they live. Like everything else, meals are tiresome, but it is no use to make a fuss, because nothing else will be less tiresome. Then there are the invalids who eat from a sense of duty, because the doctor has told them that it is necessary to take a little nourishment in order to keep up their strength. Then there are the epicures, who start hopefully, but find that nothing has been quite so well cooked as it ought to have been. Then there are the gormandizers, who fall upon their food with eager rapacity, eat too much, and grow plethoric and stertorous. Finally there are those who begin with a sound appetite, are glad of their

food, eat until they have had enough, and then stop. Those who are set down before the feast of life have similar attitudes towards the good things which it offers. The happy man corresponds to the last of our eaters. What hunger is in relation to food, zest is in relation to life...

Suppose one man likes strawberries and another does not; in what respect is the latter superior? There is no abstract and impersonal proof either that strawberries are good or that they are not good. To the man who likes them they are good; to the man who dislikes them they are not. But the man who likes them has a pleasure which the other does not have; to that extent his life is more enjoyable and he is better adapted to the world in which both must live. What is true in this trivial instance is equally true in more important matters. The man who enjoys watching football is to that extent superior to the man who does not. The man who enjoys reading is still more superior to the man who does not, since opportunities for reading are more frequent than opportunities for watching football. The more things a man is interested in, the more opportunities of happiness he has, and the less he is at the mercy of fate, since if he loses one thing he can fall back upon another. Life is too short to be interested in everything, but it is good to be interested in as many things as are necessary to fill our days. We are all prone to the malady of the introvert, who, with the manifold spectacle of the world spread out before him, turns away and gazes only upon the emptiness within. But let us not imagine that there is anything grand about the introvert's unhappiness...

The forms of zest are innumerable. Sherlock Holmes, it may be remembered, picked up a hat which he happened to find lying in the street. After looking at it for a moment he remarked that its owner had come down in the world as the result of drink, and that his wife was no longer so fond of him as she used to be. Life could never be boring to a man: to whom casual objects offered such a wealth of interest. Think of the different things that may be noticed in the course of a country walk. One man may be interested in the birds, another in the vegetation, another in the geology, yet another in the agriculture, and so on. Any one of these things is interesting if it interests you, and, other things being equal, the man who is interested in any one of them is a man better adapted to the world than the man who is not interested.

How extraordinarily different, again, are the attitudes of different people to their fellow-men. One man, in the course of a long train journey, will fail entirely to observe any of his fellow travellers, while another will have summed them all up, analysed their characters, made a shrewd guess at their circumstances, and perhaps even ascertained the most secret histories of several of them. People differ just as much in what they feel towards others as in what they ascertain about them. Some men find almost everybody boring, others quickly and easily develop a friendly feeling towards those with whom they are brought in contact, unless there is some definite reason for feeling otherwise. Take again such a matter as travel: some men will travel through

many countries, going always to the best hotels, eating exactly the same food as they would eat at home, meeting the same idle rich whom they would meet at home, conversing on the same topics upon which they converse at their own dinner-table. When they return, their only feeling is one of relief at having done with the boredom of expensive locomotion. Other men wherever they go see what is characteristic, make the acquaintance of people who typify the locality, observe whatever is of interest either historically or socially, eat the food of the country, learn its manners and its language, and come home with a new stock of pleasant thoughts for winter evenings.

In all these different situations the man who has the zest for life has the advantage over the man who has none. Even unpleasant experiences have their uses to him. I am glad to have smelt a Chinese crowd and a Sicilian village, though I cannot pretend that my pleasure was very great at the moment. Adventurous men enjoy shipwrecks, mutinies, earthquakes, conflagrations, and all kinds of unpleasant experiences, provided they do not go so far as to impair health. They say to themselves in an earthquake, for example, "So that is what an earthquake is like", and it gives them pleasure to have their knowledge of the world increased by this new item. It would not be true to say that such men are not at the mercy of fate, for if they should lose their health they would be very likely to lose their zest at the same time, though this is by no means certain. I have known men die at the end of years of slow torture, and yet retain their zest almost till the last moment....

Analysis:

Relate the last paragraph of page 180 (The Good Life) to "the happiness paradox".

In Praise of Idleness

"In America I have spent most of my time in preaching idleness. I made up my mind when I was young that I would not be restrained from preaching a doctrine merely because I have not practiced it. I have not been able to practice the doctrine of idleness because the preaching of it takes up so much time." (325)

"It is really a terrible thing to get the human being with all his capacities – to get him into blinkers with such a narrow outlook that he can only run along one little path. It is a disfigurement of the human being – it is something that every person who wants to see growth finds intolerable. A population of stunted human beings is growing up, shut out from the pleasures of human companionship, the pleasures of art, the pleasure from all the things that really make life worth living. Because, after all, to strubble all your days

to amass a fortune is not really an end worthy of anyone.” (326) **“How to Be Free and Happy”** in *On Ethics, Sex, and Marriage*

“The exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess Success is our national disease.” – William James (as quoted by Solomon in *The Big Questions* p. 204

“I don’t want to suggest to anyone that pleasure, mere pleasure, is an end in itself. I don’t think it is...” p. 326

Rising Above Fear

“The gist of the matter is to be rid of fear. Fear lies very deep in the heart of man; fear has been the source of most religions; fear has been the source of most moral codes; fear is our instincts; fear is encouraged in our youth, and fear is at the bottom of all that is bad in the world. When once you are rid of fear you have the freedom of the universe.” (328)

Guarantees to happiness

“I do not say that I can offer as much happiness as is to be obtained by the abdication of reason. I do not say that I can offer as much happiness as is to be obtained from drink or drugs or amassing great wealth by swindling widows and orphans. It is not the happiness of the individual convert that concerns me; it is the happiness of mankind. If you genuinely desire the happiness of mankind, certain forms of ignoble personal happiness are not open to you. If your child is ill, and you are a conscientious parent, you accept medical diagnosis, however doubtful and discouraging; if you accept the cheerful opinion of a quack and your child consequently dies, you are not excused by the pleasantness of believe in the quack while it lasted.” (313 – see footnote)

The Secret of happiness

“The secret of happiness is to face the fact that the world is horrible, horrible, horrible...you must feel it deeply and not brush it aside...you must feel it right here” – hitting his breast – “and then you can start being happy again.” (*then you can focus on what is attainable and not waste time with self-pity and cosmic complaints.*) (314)

“a kind of intense union with the world, a kind of intense love, something glowing, warm, like a personal affection and yet universal. If you can achieve that you will know the secret of a happy life.” (334)

Exercises: How to Live Like Bertrand Russell

Exercise 1: Identify Your Guiding Passions

Russell identifies three passions that guided his life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.

Step 1: Identify two to five of your life's guiding passions.

Step 2: Analyze your life. Are you being true to your guiding passions? A key facet of Russell's happiness was that he stayed true to his passions and built his life around them. Are you allowing your passions to guide your life? Or are you setting them aside for other lesser goals or temporary distractions.

Step 3: Find ways to better align your life with your passions. This may be something as simple as finding more time in your life for artistic creativity, or putting more effort into your love life. Or, it could be as radical as quitting your job or changing your career path.

Exercise 2: Study Faces

Part 1:

Sit back, in a coffee shop, at work, in the classroom, on the freeway, etc., and study the faces of the people around you.

Make a chart like the one below and tally the number of people who seem truly happy vs those who don't.

Happy People	unhappy People

Of course the numbers you get will depend somewhat on the surrounds that you are in, but Russell's point is that unhappy people are always in abundance. Reflect on that for a few minutes. What is it that separates the happy from the unhappy?

Part 2:

Now study the faces of people who appear to be over fifty years old. Do they look happy? Chart *them* out just as you did before. How does their happiness compare to the figures you got for the general population? Do they seem more or less happy? Now think about your preconceptions about aging. Do you expect to be more, or less happy twenty years into the future? Recall that Russell said that his happiness increased with advancing age, partly because he'd given up certain desires that were not serving him well, and partly because over the years his interests have expanded. Consider the people you know who are over sixty five. Think about the happy ones, and the unhappy ones in terms of Russell's hypothesis that happiness correlates with external interests. Do the happier ones have more interests? And if not, what do you think accounts for their happiness?

Exercise 3: Expand Your Interests

How often do you find yourself bored with nothing to do? I recall that as a kid I often complained to my parents saying “I’m bored.” Later, as a parent myself, I would hear my kids say the same. At one point of frustration with my son over this common complaint I told him: “You’re not bored... you’re *boring*. There are millions of things to learn about and do on this planet, and you just don’t happen to be interested in any of it. That’s what it is to be boring.”

Today I’m almost never bored. And it seems clear to me that the difference is due to an expansion of my interests. These days I have much more that I want to do than I ever have time for. The question is not so much “What is there to do?” as “How much can I fit in today?” Russell argues that having “external interests” is the key to happiness, so you might wonder, do I have enough?

1. Identify your interests.

How many strong interests do you have? There is really no specific number to look for. One interest, if you are totally passionate about it, can be sufficient. But for most people, a wider variety can really contribute to one’s overall happiness. Here is one gauge: Do people say that you are tough to shop for during the holidays? If so, this may indicate that your interests appear (at least to them) to be few and far between.

2. Analyze your interests.

Are they internal (about you – e.g., your fashion, your make-up, your financial success, etc.) or are they external (such as an interest in astronomy, or a certain genre of music, etc.) Russell maintains that only the former leads to happiness.

3. **Create new interests.**

In Russell's view you can never have too many interests. The more you have, the more interesting life will be. Perhaps the easy way to develop a new interest is to become an expert. For example, if you learn about the various types of plants indigenous to your area, then when you go for a nature walk, you will almost inevitably become interested in discerning the types of plants you come by, and this may make your walk much more interesting.

Exercise 4: The Painful Truth

Russell recommends that you admit to yourself at least one painful truth every day as a way of developing moral and intellectual courage.

Your Assignment:

Over the next week admit to yourself two painful truths about yourself each day – one in the morning, and one in the evening.

The Upshot:

What will you gain from this assignment -- besides becoming depressed about your numerous shortcomings? Russell thinks you will gain (A) happiness – because you will come to realize that “life is still worth living even if _____” and (B) you will conquer your fear

Exercise 5: Protest

Exercise 6: Practice Idleness

Exercise 7: Overthrow Irrationality in Your Life

Notes:

1. *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, volume 1, London: George Allen and Unwin; Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1967, pgs. 3-4.
2. *The Conquest of Happiness*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 1930, pgs. _____

Thich Nhat Hanh: Life as Practice

Historical Background:

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926--) is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and Zen master. He became a monk at the age of sixteen, and worked as a peace activist during the Vietnam war. He is a leader in the “Engaged Buddhism” movement, which combines meditation, Buddhist philosophy, and non-violent civil disobedience. He started the School of Youth and Social Service, which provided humanitarian aid to those afflicted by the war, founded a peace magazine, and urged political leaders to find non-violent ways to resolve their conflicts. In 1966 he came to the US to tell of the tremendous suffering of the Vietnamese people. He wrote a letter to Martin Luther King Jr. urging him to publicly denounce the Vietnam war, and in 1967 Dr. King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. About the nomination Dr. King said, "I do not personally know of anyone more worthy of than this gentle monk from Vietnam. His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity"¹

Exiled by both the communist and non-communist governments of Vietnam, Hanh was granted asylum in France which remains his primary residence. Commonly referred to as Thay, which simply means “teacher” in Vietnamese, he has founded monasteries in France, California, and Vermont. He leads numerous retreats, and is the author of over one hundred books. The following excerpts are from Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Path of Emancipation**, which is a transcript of a twenty-one day retreat that Thay led for four hundred in Burlington, Vermont in the Spring of 1998.

In Thay's Words:

For the Beginner in the Practice

If you are a beginner in the practice, don't worry about what is the correct thing to do. What is most important is to allow yourself to be in the Sangha. Just be yourself. Stop struggling. During our retreat, we will practice mindful walking, sitting, and breathing. We will have meals together in mindfulness and Dharma discussions. Please enjoy every minute of our being together. Learn to walk so that each step brings you peace, relaxation, and joy. Learn to breathe in and out in a way that joy and life become possible. You are the only one who knows if you are practicing correctly. No one else can judge. If you take a step and feel peaceful and happy, that is the correct practice. When you practice breathing in and out, if you feel peaceful, if you enjoy your in-breath and out-breath, then you know that you are doing it correctly. Have confidence in yourself. When you do it correctly, there is a feeling of well-being, of peace and of joy. Whether you stand in the right place or bow at the right moment is not important. Wherever you find yourself, if you feel at ease and peaceful and not under pressure, then you are doing it right. Mindfulness is the energy that helps you be in the here and now in order to experience this kind of bliss, this kind of peace and joy.

We are not here to do intensive practice. I don't like the word "intensive." What does it mean? Walking meditation is just walking meditation. If you do it correctly, you get the peace, solidity, and freedom you deserve. There is no need to do it intensively. Each step has its own value. If every step can help you cultivate more freedom, peace, and joy, that is good enough. The practice should be pleasant. Don't struggle. Whether you are practicing walking or breathing, it should bring you joy, relaxation and peace... (Eman.p4)

Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is very pleasant. We sit beautifully. We are aware of the people that are a part of our Sangha sitting around us. We are aware of the food on our plates. This is a deep practice. Each morsel of food is an ambassador from the cosmos. When we pick up a piece of a vegetable, we look at it for half a second. We look mindfully to really recognize the piece of food, the piece of carrot or string bean. We should know that this is a piece of carrot or a string bean. We identify it with our mindfulness: "I know this is a piece of carrot. This is a piece of string bean." It only takes a fraction of a second. When we are mindful, we recognize what we are picking up. When we put it into our mouth, we know that we are putting it into our mouth. When we chew it, we know what we are chewing. It's very simple.

Some of us, while looking at a piece of carrot, can see the whole cosmos in it,

can see the sunshine in it, can see the earth in it. It has come from the whole cosmos for our nourishment. You may like to smile to it before you put it in your mouth. When you chew it, you are aware that you are chewing a piece of carrot. Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in. And when you chew, chew only the carrot, not your projects or your ideas. You are capable of living in the present moment, in the here and now. It is simple, but you need some training to just enjoy the piece of carrot. This is a miracle.

...This is also why we don't talk during breakfast. If we talk about the weather or the political situation in the Middle East, we can never say enough. We reserve our time to do the things we want to do during our retreat – mindful eating, breathing, smiling, and being here with our Dharma brothers and sisters. Talking takes away the precious time that we share here. We are not depriving ourselves of the joy of talking or imposing silence on ourselves so that we can become a Buddha. We need the silence to enjoy our own presence and the presence of our Dharma brothers and sisters. This kind of silence is very alive, powerful, nourishing and transforming. It is not oppressive or sad. Together we can create this kind of noble silence. Sometimes it is described as “thundering silence” because it is so powerful.

Mindful Walking

Please make every step you take during the retreat is a mindful step. When you move from one place to another, please practice mindful walking no matter how short the distance. We will learn mindful walking with the Sangha, and we will walk mindfully together every day.

Perhaps you have used a seal before. When you stamp a seal onto a piece of paper, you make sure that the whole seal prints on the paper, so that when you remove the seal, the image is perfect. When we practice walking, we do the same thing. Every step we take is like placing a seal on the ground. Mindfulness is the ink. We print our solidity and peace on the ground. In our daily lives, we don't usually walk like that. We print our hurry, worry, depression, and anger on the ground. But here, together, we print our solidity, peace and freedom on the ground. You know whether you succeed or not with each step. Bring all of your mindfulness to the soles of your feet and walk. Enjoy every step you take, not only when you walk together with the Sangha, but when you walk alone to the dining room, the meditation hall, or the Dharma discussions. Allow plenty of time to walk. Every step can be healing and transforming. Every step can help you cultivate more solidity, joy, and freedom...

Please enjoy every step you take. Every mindful step is not only for your sake, but for the sake of the whole Sangha, the whole world. When you take a peaceful step,

all of your ancestors in you take that step at the same time. You also walk for your children, whether they are born or unborn. Do not underestimate the strength, the value, of one step taken in mindfulness. One mindful step can produce healing and transformation for many generations. I promise to do my best. Peace is every step...

Mindful Breathing/Seated Meditation

The first exercise of mindful breathing that the Buddha proposed is “In/out.” It means “Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.” In this teaching we consider our breath as part of our body. Our breathing is a physical formation. It is the door through which we go home to our self and reconcile ourselves with our self. The object of our mindfulness is our in-breath and out-breath, nothing else. We identify our in-breath and our out-breath as our out-breath. It is easy. Then instead of reading to ourselves, “Breathing in, I know I am breathing in,” we just use the word “in” and “out.” The words “in” and “out” are instruments in order to maintain our mindfulness. While breathing in, we are aware that we should nourish our in-breath. “In” is no longer a word; it is the reality of our in-breath. If we do this, all our thinking will stop.

We don’t suppress our thinking at all. There is no effort to stop thinking. If we really enjoy our in-breath one hundred percent, then thinking suddenly stops. Sometimes we try to force ourselves to be mindful. That is not good. Mindfulness is very enjoyable. When our practice is pleasant, concentration is easy... We breathe so that our in-breath and out-breath are pleasant, so that we are awake and mindful, and our concentration is strong. Mindfulness, concentration, and insight give birth to one another. Mindfulness carries the energy of concentration within itself, and concentration carries the energy of insight within itself.

During sitting meditation, you can sit and enjoy your in-breath and out-breath and nothing else. Make your in-breath mindful and genuine. This is already resting and healing. Sometimes you may like to lie down and enjoy your in-breath and out-breath. Please sit in such a way that your body can rest. You can sit erect like this, and yet your muscles are completely relaxed. Your head and spinal column form a straight line. Do not slouch. Sit erect and release all your muscles. Sit in a lotus or half-lotus position with or without a cushion. The cushion may be thick or thin. You need to find a cushion that fits your physical condition. Find a way of sitting that allows you to sit for at least twenty minutes without feeling tired or stiff. As soon as you sit down, begin mindful breathing and pay attention to your breath. Then pay attention to your sitting position. Relax the muscles in your face – there are about three hundred muscles in your face. Every time you get angry, worried, or afraid, these muscles are tense. People can see the tension in your face. If you breathe in mindfully and become aware of your face, and breathe out mindfully and smile lightly, you relax the hundreds of

muscles in your face. Then you move down to your shoulders and also let go. Do not try hard to practice. If you struggle, you are using effort, and you cannot relax...

When you sit and watch television, you don't make any effort. That is why you can sit there for a long time. When you sit in meditation, you struggle a lot, and that is why you cannot sit for very long. Please imitate the way you sit in the living room. Effortlessness is the key to success. Don't fight. Don't try hard. Just allow yourself to sit. This relaxing way of sitting is also resting. Allow your body to rest.

Releasing Our Cows⁵

A lot of joy and happiness comes from getting away or leaving something behind... There are many things we are unable to leave behind, which trap us. Practice looking deeply into these things. In the beginning you may think that they are vital to your happiness, but they may actually be obstacles to your true happiness, causing you to suffer. If you are not able to be happy because you are caught by them, leaving them behind will be a source of joy for you. The Buddha and many of his disciples experienced this, and have handed down their wisdom to us...

One day the Buddha was sitting with a group of monks in the woods near the city of Sravasti. They had just finished a mindful lunch and were engaged in a small Dharma discussion. Suddenly, a farmer came by. He was visibly upset and shouted, "Monks! Have you seen my cows?"

The Buddha said, "No, we have not seen any cows."

"You know monks," the man said, "I am the most miserable person on earth. For some reason, my twelve cows all ran away this morning. I have only two acres of sesame seed plants, and this year the insects ate them all. I think I am going to kill myself." The farmer was really suffering.

Out of compassion, the Buddha said, "No, sir, we have not seen your cows. Maybe you should look for them elsewhere."

When the farmer was gone, the Buddha turned to his monks, looked at them deeply, smiled, and said, "Dear friends, do you know that you are the happiest people on Earth? You don't have any cows to lose."

So, my friends, if you have cows, look deeply into the nature of your cows to see whether they have been bringing you happiness or suffering. You should learn the art of releasing your cows to see whether they have been bringing you happiness or suffering. You should learn the art of releasing your cows.

Analysis:

In *Zen Keys*, Thich Nhat Hanh recounts a conversation between the Buddha and a philosopher of his time.

“I have heard that Buddhism is a doctrine of enlightenment. What is your method? What do you practice every day?”

“We walk, we eat, we wash ourselves, we sit down...”

“What is so special about that? Everyone walks, eats, washes, sits down...”

“Sir, when we walk, we are aware that we are walking; when we eat, we are aware that we are eating...When others walk, eat, wash, or sit down, they are generally not aware of what they are doing.” (25)

This serves as a perfect summary of Thich Nhat Hanh’s approach to Zen. In his monasteries, and the countless retreats he has offered to the public, his emphasis is always on bringing mindfulness to daily life. When most people think of Zen, they think of sitting meditation, and it is, without a doubt a crucial part of the practice. Sitting meditation is a great way to cultivate one’s ability to focus their awareness, and to rein in the “monkey mind” that darts here and there and generates constant chatter. But mindfulness should not end when one gets up from the cushion. For that reason, Thich Nhat Hanh puts a great deal of emphasis on walking meditation, mindful eating, mindful working, mindful speech and so on.

The Present Moment

All of the practices discussed in the reading are designed to bring us back to the present moment. So much of the time we are not present. We are thinking about

tomorrow, or worrying about what happened yesterday. We have developed strong “habit energy” of pulling away from the here and now, and fixing our attention on other things. In order to be mindful, one must practice *stopping*. Meditation is the art of stopping. Much like training a dog, one must train one’s mind and body to “sit” and “stay.” In meditation, one stays with the breath, in walking, one stays with their steps, and in relationships one stays with the other. When one is completely present, they contend, we become calmer, happier, more peaceful and more able to give and receive love.

Another aspect of this emphasis on the present moment is that we cannot keep putting things off into the future – especially our happiness. We often think that when I get this, or when I achieve that, *then* I will be happy. Instead they maintain, “There is no way to happiness, happiness is the way.” We already have the conditions necessary for happiness here in the present moment – if we would only attend to that moment rather than pushing it off for our projections about the future. Life must be addressed in the present moment, for that is the *only* place where life occurs.

Consider the example of anti-war protestors. It is not unusual to see protestors against war and violence, marching and rallying with anger and rage in their hearts. They contend that this is no way to end violence. If you want to end violence, you must start right now, by removing the violence within yourself. He says that “Peace is every step.” If you want to achieve peace, then begin right now with your actions this moment. To achieve non-violence, one must become non-violence. Every step you take should be mindful, and communicate peace and compassion, the same goes for every word spoken, every action taken, and every thought. This, of course, does not

come easy to most of us. That is why Thay emphasizes (and in many cases has invented) a wide array of practices to train the mind and body. Every moment in life is an opportunity to practice mindfulness. Take, for instance, our use of the telephone. For most of us, when the phone rings, we answer it without giving much thought to the situation or to our state of mind. Doing so is generally not disastrous, but it does nothing to guarantee that we bring our best self to the conversation. For this reason, Thich Nhat Hanh has developed a “practice” for even something as mundane as answering the telephone. When the phone rings, he suggests that one should treat the sound of the chime or ringtone as a “call to mindfulness” just like the sound of the bell that marks the beginning of seated meditation in most monasteries. When you hear the bell you should stop what you are doing and come back to yourself and to your breath. With each ring, one can internally recite: “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile.” Only after the third ring, should one answer the phone, for then they will have ensured that they are completely present, and ready to receive the other person with love and compassion.

The Three Dharma Seals

Thay refers to impermanence, nonself, and nirvana as the *Three Dharma Seals*. They serve as a test for the authenticity of the Buddha’s teachings. They are three core elements that run through everything that the Buddha taught, and they can be found at the base of Thay’s teachings as well.

Impermanence simply means that nothing in our experience is ever permanent. All formations, whether physical or mental, are transitory. Not a single cell in our bodies is permanent, no thought, no memory, no pain or desire lasts forever. People often find

this disconcerting. We want to hold on to things forever, we want to live forever. But, as we saw in the Chapter on the Buddha, this clinging or attachment to things is the source of all suffering. Therefore, the key to happiness lies, in part, by letting go – by enjoying the present moment without trying to capture it, or to grab hold of it. It is to experience the world with an open hand.

Nonself is an interrelated concept. In one sense it is identical with impermanence. If by “Self” we mean something permanent within the thing (i.e., what makes you *you*, or what makes it *it*), the doctrine of nonself simply denies that there is any such permanent entity. In the case of a human being, the Buddhist view is that we are an aggregate of form, feelings, formations, and consciousness, all of which are transitory. There is no “thing” that is you above and beyond these that lasts forever. But there is more to nonself that distinguishes it from impermanence. Impermanence (including the impermanence of the self or person) is what we find when we view reality through the lens of time – nothing remains the same over time. Non-self is what we find when we view reality through the lens of space – nothing is completely distinct. Instead, everything is interdependent. Reality, They would say, manifests itself through “interbeing.” Interbeing is another way of referring to what Buddhists call “emptiness”.

To be empty is to be empty of a separate self. Let us look again at the example of a flower. It a manifestation of reality. If we look deeply into the flower and touch it deeply, we touch everything in the cosmos: the sunshine, a cloud, the earth, time, space, everything. We can say that the flower is full of everything, is full of the cosmos. Why do we call it empty? Because the flower is full of everything except one thing: a separate existence, a separate self.+

Interbeing applies to everything, Thay says.

My body is like a flower. There are many clouds in me. If you remove the clouds from me, I will collapse. That is how I inter-am with the clouds. Not only was I a cloud in my past life, but I continue to be a cloud in this moment. You cannot take the cloud out of me. I inter-am with the cloud, the sunshine, and the forest.

The result of realizing the interdependent nature of all things, is an increase in gratitude, in compassion, and concern for all of existence.

Thay compares impermanence and nonself to two sides of the same coin, and nirvana as the metal. He writes:

Impermanence is nonself; they are two sides of the same reality. If you touch impermanence deeply, you touch nonself, interbeing, and emptiness. These terms all mean the same thing... Touching one side of reality deeply, you also touch the other side. You can only understand the meaning of impermanence when you have understood the meaning of nonself or interbeing.

Thay suggests that we should think of them as two sides of the same coin...

Exercises: How to Live Like Thich Nhat Hanh

Exercise 1: Daily Gathas

Gathas are short verses or poems designed to help bring about mindfulness during daily activities. They bring the practitioner's attention to what they are doing, bringing them back to the present moment, and reminding them to perform the action

with mindfulness, love, and understanding. Here are several to try throughout the week.

Waking Up Gatha⁹

*Waking up this morning, I smile.
Twenty-four brand new hours are before me.
I vow to live fully in each moment
and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion.*

Brushing Your Teeth Gatha

*Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.*

Toilet Gatha

*Defiled or immaculate,
increasing or decreasing --
these concepts exist only in our minds.
The reality of interbeing is unsurpassed.*

Telephone Gatha

*Words can travel thousands of miles.
May my words create mutual understanding and love.
May they be as beautiful as gems,
as lovely as flowers.*

Gatha for Anger

*Breathing in, I feel my anger.
Breathing out, I smile.
I stay with my breathing,
so I won't lose myself.*

Driving Gatha

*Before starting the car,
I know where I am going.
The car and I are one.
If the car goes fast, I go fast.*

Exercise 2: Eat Like a Monk¹

1. Start with your empty plate

As you get ready to serve, gaze at your empty plate and recite the following gatha, aimed at developing compassion for others, and at remembering the ultimate purpose of the meal.

*My plate, empty now
will soon be filled with precious food.
I see how fortunate I am
to have enough to eat
to continue the practice.*

2. Serving your food

While serving, be mindful of the portions that you take. Rather than simply succumbing to the cravings of the moment, serve only that which will be helpful to your mind and body, and be considerate of the needs of others. Also, you may wish to contemplate the interconnectedness of all things with the following gatha:

*In this food
I see clearly
the entire universe
supporting my existence.*

3. Sitting down at the table

When taking a seat at the table, be aware that you intend to eat mindfully, free from all other distractions. Recite the following gatha to help you to stay

focused on the food, its nourishment and flavors without the mind wandering off to other places and projects.

*Sitting here
is like sitting under a Bodhi tree.
My body is mindfulness itself,
free from all distraction.*

4. Just before eating

Ideally, this gatha, called The Five Contemplations, should be recited aloud by one person at the table for the benefit of all.

*This food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.
May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.
May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed and learn to eat with moderation.
May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that we reduce the suffering of living beings, preserve our planet and reverse the process of global warming.
We accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, strengthen the sangha (community) and nourish our ideal of serving all beings.*

5. Beginning to eat

Be mindful of your food, with your full attention on its flavors and nourishment. Enjoy the feeling of gratitude for what the food will do for you and for those who prepared the meal. This gatha may be recited silently while chewing the first four mouthfuls.

*With the first mouthful, I practice the love that brings joy.
With the second mouthful, I practice the love that relieves suffering.
With the third mouthful, I practice the joy of being alive.*

With the fourth mouthful, I practice equal love for all beings.

6. Washing the dishes

Just as with eating, the intention during clean-up is similar. The aim is to be mindful of what one is doing it. Be present throughout the washing – without distraction and without the mind wandering. Further, do not resist the task as petty or annoying. All tasks provide the opportunity for mindfulness and enlightenment. This gatha is intended to guide you.

*Washing the dishes is like bathing a baby Buddha.
The profane is the sacred.
Everyday mind is the Buddha's mind.*

Exercise 3: Walking Meditation

Task 1: Do a fifteen minute walking meditation.

You can do this anywhere – down a city street, in your backyard, or even through your house. But if possible, you will find this exercise most refreshing if you do it in nature, such as on a forest trail, or along the shoreline. Your aim is to take every step mindfully. As your footprints testify, your steps are like a stamp or seal. As you walk make sure that every step creates a slow careful seal on the ground. You can treat this as a loving action – each step is a caress upon the earth. Focus completely on each step. When your focus is complete, all other thoughts, worries, and distractions will disappear.

Task 2: Continue your mindful walking practice everywhere you go.

In task 1 you “practiced” mindful walking. Now it is time to apply it to the rest of your life. Try walking mindfully wherever you go. This may seem difficult (or even impossible) in our hectic lives, but it may simply be an indication that we need to slow down, and allow more time between tasks. Thich Nhat Hanh and the monks and nuns of his monasteries walk mindfully *everywhere* – even in airport terminals as they hurry to their connection.

Task 3: Create a mindful walking zone.

Very few people (outside of monasteries) have succeeded in making mindful walking a constant habit. It is difficult to achieve. For this reason Thich Nhat Hanh recommends setting up a mindful walking zone in your home or workplace. Pick a route that you walk often, e.g., the hallway from your bedroom to the bathroom, or from your office to the copy machine, etc. and designate it in your mind as a path for walking mindfully. Every time you walk that path, be sure to walk slowly and mindfully, just as you did in the walking meditation. Ideally, this path will be a recurring reminder to walk mindfully, and that will eventually influence your walking wherever you go.

Exercise 4: Sitting Meditation

There are many types of meditation and many meditation techniques. The primary practice used at Thich Nhat Hanh’s monasteries is the practice of mindful breathing. It is a very simple practice with the aim of returning home to the present moment. Or, as he often puts it, the purpose of this meditation is to simply *enjoy* being alive in the present moment. For this reason, you are encouraged not to “over-do” it. If

you are not used to meditating, you should start with shorter periods such as ten to twenty minutes.

Find a comfortable position with your spine erect, whether you sit on a cushion, a blanket, a chair, or directly on the floor. If possible, inhale through your nose and feel your abdomen expand. As you exhale, feel your abdomen return. The practice is to simply be present, aware of your breathing. To maintain awareness on your breathing, you can silently say “in” with your in-breath, and “out” with your out-breath. If you find yourself having difficulty relaxing, you might try the following gatha:

Gatha for Calming the Breath

Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.

While the intention is to maintain awareness on one’s breathing, this intention should remain gentle. Distractions will almost inevitably arise – thoughts, feelings, pains, etc. When this occurs, do not chase them, or obsess about them. Instead, simply recognize them for what they are “that is a thought” and return your attention to your breath. Bodily pains and sensations are a common distraction, and sometimes one will choose to adjust one’s posture. The following gatha helps to keep such movements mindful.

Gatha for Adjusting Meditation Posture

Feelings come and go
like clouds in a windy sky.
Conscious breathing
is my anchor.

Exercise 5: Orange Meditation

This is an exercise that Thich Nhat Hanh often recommends to his students.

Take an orange and hold it in front of you. Notice that the orange is nothing less than a miracle, and a source of deep insight. Look deeply into the orange and ask yourself the following questions:

What is an orange really?

As you look deeply into the orange, see if you can find: sunshine, rainclouds, earth, breath, love. What else do you find?

When did the orange begin?

Before this orange was a fruit, it still existed, but as a white flower blossom.

Before this flower blossom bloomed, it was a green and purple bud. But that bud did not arise out of nothing. It existed within the tree. And that tree did not arise out of nothing. It came from a seed, which came from an orange like this one.

Use this orange meditation to contemplate interbeing, and to see through our notions of birth and death.

Exercise 6: Release Your Cows

The story about the Buddha and the farmer who lost his cows points to the idea that it is often our possessions, goals, and projects that interfere with our happiness.

Almost everyone you meet complains that they are “too busy,” and often they are exhausted and unfulfilled. This exercise calls on you to take an inventory of your “cows.” What sorts of things are you chasing, and are they making your life better or worse? A cow could be a car that requires you to work overtime in order to make the

payment. A cow could be a promotion at work, having six-pack abs, or keeping up with the current fashion trends. Buddhist monks and nuns tend to avoid having too many cows by owning only a bowl and three robes. But even they can find themselves chasing cows. For instance, Thich Nhat Hanh writes of a monk he knew who said: “Before I became a monk, I was very busy, and thought that once I was a monk, I would be less busy.” But in fact, I am busier than ever.” His temple had become a cow. When he told this to a friend, his friend laughed and asked him, “Why don’t you become a real monk?”

If you are not a monk, you are surely going to have a few cows. But are your cows working for your overall happiness, or are they getting in the way of your happiness?

1. Make a list of your cows, and contemplate their contribution to your happiness.
2. Identify the cows that you would be better of releasing.
3. Let those cows go in order to create more space, peace, and freedom in your life.

Create:

Make an altar to honor your ancestors.

Include, your biological ancestors, your spiritual ancestors, and anyone else (living or deceased) who has had a profound impact upon creating who you are. Attach their pictures, or artifacts that remind you of these people. Do whatever you can to

make it a beautiful tribute to them. When finished, you can meditate in front of the alter, lighting a candle for these ancestors, expressing gratitude for all they have done for you.

During your meditation, you may want to contemplate:

1. The nature of interbeing. Realize that there is no “you” that is separate and distinct from these people. It is because of them that you exist. It is because of them, that you are the way that you are. Look at the faces of your biological ancestors. Notice the resemblances. Your body is a continuation of theirs. Contemplate the thoughts and deeds of your spiritual teachers. Your thoughts and deeds are the continuation of their thoughts and deeds. Realize that your ancestors, biological and spiritual, are not gone. They continue in you and through you. You are their continuation.

2. Your love and gratitude. The love, care, work and inspiration of these people have nourished you throughout their life. Reflect on each one of them individually. Acknowledge their presence in your life and fill your heart with gratitude and appreciation.

3. Forgiveness. Our relationships with our ancestors are often complicated, and sometimes they bring up negative feelings and resentment. Some of your ancestors may have hurt you. Whether they did this intentionally, or unintentionally, realize that this was due to lack of knowledge or lack of skill. They were unable to find happiness, and to overcome the wounds inflicted upon them. As their continuation, you can embody the peace and freedom that they lacked. Do so for them as well as for yourself.

Notes:

1. King, Martin Luther, Jr. (letter) (January 25, 1967). "[Nomination of Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize](#)". Archived on the Hartford Web Publishing website. Retrieved 13 September 2010.
2. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Path of Emancipation*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 2000. (Some of the section headings are my own.)
3. + Path of Emancipation pg. 172.
4. All of the practices in this exercise are from *Chanting from the Heart: Buddhist Ceremonies and Daily Practices*, by Thich Nhat Hanh and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 2007 pgs. 34-36. All gathas are direct quotes, except for the Five Contemplations. For these I chose a newer revised version from the Deer Park Monastery website:
<http://deerparkmonastery.org/mindfulness-practice/eating-meditation> 10/31/13
5. K
6. K
7. Pages 69-70.
8. K
9. K
10. K
11. All of these gathas used in this exercise are from *Present Moment Wonderful Moment: Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living*, by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 2006. The titles of the gathas have been altered.

Nel Noddings: Caring Relationships

Historical Background:

In Noddings' Words:

Analysis:

Exercises: How to Live Like Nel Noddings

Exercise 1: Diagram the Circles and Chains of Caring Relations in Your Life

Exercise 2: Identify Your Ethical Ideals

Peter Singer

The Life You Can Save

Historical Background:

In Singer's Words:

Saving a Child

On your way to work, you pass a small pond. On hot days, children sometimes play in the pond, which is only about knee-deep. The weather's cool today, though, and the hour is early, so you are surprised to see a child splashing about in the pond. As you get closer, you see that it is a very young child, just a toddler, who is flailing about, unable to stay upright or walk out of the pond. You look for the parents or babysitter, but there is no one else around. The child is unable to keep his head above the water for more than a few seconds at a time. If you don't wade in and pull him out, he seems likely to drown. Wading in is easy and safe, but you will ruin the new shoes you bought only a few days ago, and get your suit wet and muddy. By the time you hand the child over to someone responsible for him, and change your clothes, you'll be late for work. What should you do?

I teach a course called Practical Ethics. When we start talking about global poverty, I ask my students what they think you should do in this situation. Predictably, they respond that you should save the child. "What about your shoes? And being late for work?" I ask them. They brush that aside. How could anyone consider a pair of shoes or missing an hour or two at work, a good reason for not saving a child's life? ...But consider that, according to UNICEF, nearly 10 million children under five years old die each year from causes related to poverty. Here is just one case, described by a man in Ghana to a researcher from the World Bank:

Take the death of this small boy this morning, for example. The boy died of measles. We all know he could have been cured at the hospital. But the parents had no money and so the boy died a slow and painful death, not of measles but out of poverty.¹

Think about something like that happening 27,000 times every day. Some children die because they don't have enough to eat. More die, like that small boy in Ghana, from measles, malaria, and diarrhea, conditions that either don't exist in developed nations, or, if they do, are almost never fatal. The children are vulnerable to these diseases

because they have no safe drinking water, or no sanitation, and because when they do fall ill, their parents can't afford any medical treatment. UNICEF, Oxfam, and many other organizations are working to reduce poverty and provide clean water and basic health care, and these efforts are reducing the toll. If the relief organizations had more money, they could do more, and more lives would be saved.

Now think about your own situation. By donating a relatively small amount of money, you could save a child's life. Maybe it takes more than the amount needed to buy a pair of shoes—but we all spend money on things we don't really need, whether on drinks, meals out, clothing, movies, concerts, vacations, new cars, or house renovation. Is it possible that by choosing to spend your money on such things rather than contributing to an aid agency, you are leaving a child to die, a child you could have saved?...

The Basic Argument

[The story of the drowning child reveals] our intuitive belief that we ought to help others in need, at least when we can see them and when we are the only person in a position to save them. But our moral intuitions are not always reliable, as we can see from variations in what people in different times and places find intuitively acceptable or objectionable. The case for helping those in extreme poverty will be stronger if it does not rest solely on our intuitions. Here is a logical argument from plausible premises to the same conclusion.

First premise: Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.

Second premise: If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so.

Third premise: By donating to aid agencies, you can prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, without sacrificing anything nearly as important.

Conclusion: Therefore, if you do not donate to aid agencies, you are doing something wrong.

The drowning-child story is an application of this argument for aid, since ruining your shoes and being late for work aren't nearly as important as the life of a child...

Ask yourself if you can deny the premises of the argument. How could suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care not be really, really bad? Think of

that small boy in Ghana who died of measles. How you would feel if you were his mother or father, watching helplessly as your son suffers and grows weaker? You know that children often die from this condition. You also know that it would be curable, if only you could afford to take your child to a hospital. In those circumstances you would give up almost anything for some way of ensuring your child's survival. Putting yourself in the place of others, like the parents of that boy, or the child himself, is what thinking ethically is all about. It is encapsulated in the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Though the Golden Rule is best known to most westerners from the words of Jesus as reported by Matthew and Luke, it is remarkably universal, being found in Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Jainism, and in Judaism, where it is found in Leviticus, and later emphasized by the sage Hillel. ² The Golden Rule requires us to accept that the desires of others ought to count as if they were our own. If the desires of the parents of the dying child were our own, we would have no doubt that their suffering and the death of their child are about as bad as anything can be. So if we think ethically, then those desires must count as if they were our own, and we cannot deny that the suffering and death are bad.

The second premise is also very difficult to reject, because it leaves us some wiggle room when it comes to situations in which, to prevent something bad, we would have to risk something nearly as important as the bad thing we are preventing. Consider, for example, a situation in which you can only prevent the deaths of other children by neglecting your own children. This standard does not require you to prevent the deaths of the other children.

"Nearly as important" is a vague term. That's deliberate, because I'm confident that you can do without plenty of things that are clearly and inarguably not as valuable as saving a child's life. I don't know what you might think is as important, or nearly as important, as saving a life. By leaving it up to you to decide what those things are, I can avoid the need to find out. I'll trust you to be honest with yourself about it.

Analogies and stories can be pushed too far. Rescuing a child drowning in front of you... [is] different from giving aid to people who are far away. The argument I have just presented complements the drowning-child case, because instead of pulling at your heartstrings by focusing on a single child in need, it appeals to your reason and seeks your assent to an abstract but compelling moral principle. That means that to reject it, you need to find a flaw in the reasoning.

You might now be thinking to yourself that the basic argument— that we should donate to aid agencies when by doing so we can prevent suffering and death without giving up anything nearly as important— isn't all that controversial. Yet if we were to take it seriously, our lives would be changed dramatically. For while the cost of saving one child's life by a donation to an aid organization may not be great, after you have

donated that sum, there remain more children in need of saving, each one of whom can be saved at a relatively small additional cost. Suppose you have just sent \$ 200 to an agency that can, for that amount, save the life of a child in a developing country who would otherwise have died. You've done something really good, and all it has cost you is the price of some new clothes you didn't really need anyway. Congratulations! But don't celebrate your good deed by opening a bottle of champagne, or even going to a movie. The cost of that bottle or movie, added to what you could save by cutting down on a few other extravagances, would save the life of another child. After you forgo those items, and give another \$ 200, though, is everything else you are spending on as important, or nearly as important, as the life of a child? Not likely! So you must keep cutting back on unnecessary spending...

We tend to assume that if people do not harm others, keep their promises, do not lie or cheat, support their children and their elderly parents, and perhaps contribute a little to needier members of their local community, they've done well. If we have money left over after meeting our needs and those of our dependents, we may spend it as we please. Giving to strangers, especially those beyond one's community, may be good, but we don't think of it as something we have to do. But if the basic argument presented above is right, then what many of us consider acceptable behavior must be viewed in a new, more ominous light. When we spend our surplus on concerts or fashionable shoes, on fine dining and good wines, or on holidays in faraway lands, we are doing something wrong.

Excerpt from: Singer, Peter, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*, Random House Publishing Group, 2009, pgs. 1-12.

Analysis:

Peter Singer's story of the child drowning in the pond is a thought provoking analogy for the problem of world hunger and poverty. Anyone with a moral conscience would, without hesitation, choose to save the drowning child over their wardrobe. Our moral intuitions are very clear about this case. We would save the child because a child's life is infinitely more important to us than a pair of shoes or slacks. Nevertheless, most of us buy new clothes when we don't really need them, we buy bottled water

though perfectly nutritious water flows from the tap, and purchase all sorts of things that we don't really need and sometimes never even use. And we do all this knowing full well that children are dying all around the world whose deaths are easily preventable if we can just get the right resources to them.

Are we failing our moral obligations to the poor? While our intuitions are strong regarding the drowning child, most people have conflicting, yet similarly strong intuitions that there is nothing immoral about buying a cappuccino, a luxury car, or even a vacation home. Charity, our culture tells us, is optional. It is a great thing to give, and it sets you apart as an exceptional person, but it is not a requirement of moral decency. The person who owns multiple homes, expensive works of art, a luxury yacht is not only accepted by society, but is generally admired. In the case of such conflicting intuitions, we must decide which one is more solidly founded.

Singer contends that our intuition in the drowning child case is the one that is best supported, not just by certainty of our feelings about the case, but also by rational argument. Let's revisit the "basic argument."

1. Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.
2. If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so.
3. By donating to aid agencies, you can prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, without sacrificing anything nearly as important.

Therefore, if you do not donate to aid agencies, you are doing something wrong.

It is this second premise that runs in conflict with our more general intuitions about charity. We *know* that all sorts of horrible things are happening all around the

world, and we admire those who work actively and/or financially to make a difference. Yet we implicitly (and sometimes quite explicitly) deny that there is anything wrong with pursuing one's dreams, however, lavish and extravagant, while these others suffer.

In his book *The Life You Can Save*, Singer examines some of the possible justifications (or rationalizations) behind why many people believe that we have no duty to give:

1. People work for their money and have a right to spend it on themselves.

Singer's response to this is twofold. First, he appeals to our sense of fairness. While we tend to think that it is reasonable and fair to spend your own earning however you see fit, because after all, it's *your* money, Singer calls our attention to a rather unfair natural lottery. He writes: "if you are a middle-class person in a developed country, you were fortunate to be born into social and economic circumstances that make it possible for you to live comfortably if you work hard and have the right abilities. In other places, you might have ended up poor no matter how hard you worked."² He cites social scientist Herbert Simone who estimates that "social capital" is responsible for at least 90% of what people earn in affluent societies. So if so much of our wealth is the result of sheer luck – the luck of being born in an affluent society rather than an impoverished one – do you really "deserve" it over the child who is dying from the bad luck of being born in an impoverished society where preventable diseases go unchecked?

Singer's second appeal is to the distinction between rights and obligations. "Having a right to do something," Singer notes, "doesn't settle the question of what you *should* do."³ For instance, you may have the *right* to spend your Saturday playing video

games, but it may nevertheless be true that you really *should* go to see your sick mother at the hospital. So even if we were to suppose that one has a *right* to the money they earn, it may still be the case that they *should* give a considerable portion of it to aid the less fortunate.

2. *We are not responsible for the welfare of other people generally. Rather, we are only responsible for the harms that we cause to others.*

This is essentially the Libertarian view that if we each take care of ourselves, we'll all get along fine. In response, Singer first thinks that few truly hold this philosophy, for to follow it through would mean abolishing all state-supported welfare for those who are ill, disabled, etc. But he also argues that there are many ways in which the rich have harmed the poor. He asks us to consider the case of Ale Nodye:

He grew up in a village by the sea, in Senegal, in West Africa. His father and grandfather were fishermen, and he tried to be one too. But after six years in which he barely caught enough fish to pay for the fuel for his boat... He says..."there are no fish in the sea anymore." A European Commission report shows that Nodye is right: The fish stocks from which Nodye's father and grandfather took their catch and fed their families have been destroyed by industrial fishing fleets that come from Europe, China, and Russia and sell their fish to well-fed Europeans who can afford to pay high prices. The industrial fleets drag vast nets across the seabed, damaging the coral reefs where fish breed. As a result, a major protein source for poor people has vanished, the boats are idle, and people who used to make a living fishing or building boats are unemployed. ⁴

Stories like this can be heard in coastal areas around the globe. But the effect of commercial fishing on the poorest people of the world is just one of many examples. In their pursuit of oil, minerals, gemstones, the raw materials of the rainforest, and so on, wealthy entrepreneurs and corporations have often exploited those in poor nations, or simply left them worse off than they were before. It is somewhat naïve to think that the lifestyles to which we have grown accustomed have no effect on the poor, and that therefore we bear no responsibility whatsoever for their plight.

3. *Giving people money or food breeds dependency.*

Indeed, if we simply send money to the people of poor countries, we run a danger of making them dependent. Further, it is unlikely that this strategy would really solve the long term problems of hunger and poverty. As the Chinese proverb goes, “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.”

Singer contends that we need to find the forms of aid that are most successful. This is not always easy to determine, but it can be done. There are many effective programs being run by a variety of charities. Some strategies that have demonstrated success include:

- Providing condoms to prevent disease and overpopulation.
- Providing bed nets to prevent the transmission of malaria by mosquitos.
- Providing the means of water purification to prevent diarrhea.
- Providing micro-loans to provide people of impoverished nations the means to go into business for themselves.
- Capacity building – assisting people in developing their skills to become self-sufficient in any number of ways.
- Creating community structures that help people work together in order to resist oppression and escape poverty.

A Realistic Approach

Many find Peter Singer’s philosophical position to be utterly unrealistic. As we have seen, the “basic argument” leads him to conclude: “When we spend our surplus on concerts or fashionable shoes, on fine dining and good wines, or on holidays in faraway lands, we are doing something wrong.” Imagine how much the average American

family could give if they gave up all such luxury items. For many families this would amount to 25% of their income. For many others it may be 50%, and for the very rich it might be 80% or more. But we rarely find people who are *that* charitable, and most people, quite frankly, don't believe that they are so obligated. Nevertheless, Singer maintains that this is what a truly rational ethic would require. He believes that for some people (himself included), the recognition of this demanding moral standard pushes them in the right direction – even if they ultimately fall short of what the standard requires. But he also admits that for many, the call to adhere to such a standard backfires. When confronted with moral demands that they feel they cannot meet, some people start to question the point of even attempting to try at all.

In light of this, Singer approach to poverty has taken a less ambitious, but more practical turn. Instead of advocating that we all adhere to the strict standard of what morality truly requires of us as *individuals*, he urges us to take the course that would yield the best results if acted upon by most people in our *society*. This, he believes, is to give roughly 3-5% of their annual income for those who are financially comfortable, and progressively more for the very rich. To see how this “societal standard” would apply to you, go to: www.thelifeyoucansave.com. There you can enter your yearly household income and the calculator will generate your recommended contribution. Here are few sample amounts calculated through the website:

Annual Income	Recommended Contribution⁵	
\$30,000	\$398	(1.3%)
\$50,000	\$954	(1.9%)
\$80,000	\$2,658	(3.3%)
\$100,000	\$4,628	(4.6%)
\$150,000	\$7,600	(5.1%)

\$200,000

\$12,600 (6.3%)

Singer's goal is to create a social movement in charitable giving. The amount of money it would take per year to cut extreme poverty in the world in half, Singer estimates, is about \$125 billion. To put this into perspective, the amount that Americans spend on alcohol per year is \$116 billion. Extreme poverty is a solvable problem, and he's urging each of us to become a part of the solution.

Exercises: How to Live Like Peter Singer

Exercise 1: Make a Pledge

If you want to live like Peter Singer, the best place to start is by making a personal pledge to help the poor. Use the table above, or the "donation calculator" on Singer's website www.TheLifeYouCanSave.com, to determine what the recommended donation would be for your income bracket, then, pledge to make that donation (or more). A great way to give your pledge more motivational heft, is to do it openly and publicly by pledging your commitment on the website's "Take the Pledge" page. Then, spread the word. Don't be self-righteous or preachy, but let people know that you have joined a world-wide project to end hunger, and perhaps you will inspire them to do the same.

Exercise 2: Choose Your Charities

Once you've made a pledge to give, you'll probably want to choose a charity to help get your contribution to the poor effectively. There are many great charities to consider,

but to get you started, here is a list of charities that Singer's has found to be particularly effective.

- Schistosomiasis Control Initiative and Deworm the World
- Give Directly
- Against Malaria Foundation
- Oxfam
- Proven Impact Fund and Dispensers for Safe Water
- Fistula Foundation
- Seva and Fred Hollows Foundation
- Project Healthy Children
- Nyaya Health
- Population Services International

Once you've chosen your charity(s), it will help you to keep your pledge if you decide when you will give, and set the dates. Are you going to donate monthly, quarterly, or annually?

Exercise 3: Create a Personal "Poor Box"

This is something you can do in addition to "making the pledge," or, if you don't feel ready to commit to the pledge, it can serve as an alternative to get you started. Take an old shoebox and tape the lid shut. Then cut a slit into the top large enough to accommodate coins and bills. This is your "poor box." (A conventional piggy bank will also suffice.) The idea of the poor box is to put money into the box any time that you decide to forego an unnecessary extravagance for the benefit of the poor. For example, you might crave a cappuccino on the way to work, but decide that you would rather put those three dollars toward saving a life. Make a mental note of that, and put the three dollars you saved into the box when you return home. Feel free to put in extra cash whenever the mood grabs you. You might also toss in the change from your pockets at

the end of the night. Once the box gets relatively full, deposit it in the bank and write a check to your preferred charity.

Exercise 4: Write Your Political Representatives

Contact your national political representatives and tell them that you would like to see a stronger federal commitment to ending extreme poverty and that you would like to see your country's foreign aid directed toward only the world's poorest people.

Exercise 5: Join the “5.10.5.10” Club

Fair Share International is an Australia based organization that encourages people to follow the 5.10.5.10 formula by:

- Donating 5% of your income to help the poor and disadvantaged
- Reducing your environmentally harmful consumption by 10% each year until you can do no more
- Giving 5% of your time to help your community
- Taking democratic political action at least ten times a year, by contacting your representatives, joining demonstrations, etc.

Notes:

1. Deepa Narayan with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher, and Sarah Koch-Schulte. *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* Published for the World Bank by Oxford University Press (New York, 2000), p. 36.
2. Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*, Random House, New York, 2009, p. 26
3. Ibid., p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 29-30.
5. These amounts were calculated on through the website calculator on 2/28/14.

Ideas to Place:

Being Wrong: Catherine Schultz, from book *Being Wrong*.

Why is it so fun to be right? As pleasures go, it is after all, a second order one at best. Unlike many of life's other delights; chocolate, surfing, kissing, it does not enjoy any mainline access to our biochemistry. And yet the thrill of being right is undeniable, universal and almost entirely indiscriminating. We can't enjoy kissing just anyone, but we can relish being right about almost anything. Our indiscriminate enjoyment of being right is matched by an almost equally indiscriminate feeling that we are right. Most of us go through life assuming that we are basically right, basically all the time, about basically everything. As absurd as it sounds, when we stop to think about it, our steady state seems to be one unconsciously assuming that we are very close to omniscient.

If we relish being right and regard it as our natural state, you can guess how we feel about being wrong. For one thing we tend to view it as rare and bizarre, for another, it leaves us feeling ashamed. Of all the things we are wrong about, this error might well top the list. We are wrong about what it means to be wrong. Far from being a sign of intellectual inferiority, the capacity to error is crucial to human cognition. Far from being a moral flaw, it is inextricable from some of our most humane and honorable qualities. And far from being a mark of indifference or intolerance, wrongness is a vital part of how we learn and change. Thanks to error we can revise our understanding of ourselves and amend our ideas of the world. However disorienting, difficult or humbling our mistakes might be, it is ultimately *wrongness*, not rightness, that can teach us who we are.

Sample Your Experience: Psychologist and happiness researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi pioneered a method of "experience sampling" by giving test subjects beepers set to go off at various times to alert them to take note of what they were doing at that moment and what their level of happiness was at that moment. Following his idea, set a timer to go off several times a day. (A timer app on your phone can work nicely). Set it to go off in, say, 2 ½ hours. Then reset it so that it will go off in another 2 ½ hours, etc. Do this continually for a couple of days. (No need to set it during your sleeping hours.) Each time the time goes off, reflect on your happiness. What were you doing when the timer went off. Were you happy at that moment? Were you content, frustrated, anxious, hopeful? Use this timer to check in with yourself in order to learn about how you are really feeling throughout the day. When you finish the exercise, reflect on what it means on the whole. Does this new evidence support your views about how happy you are generally, or does it undermine it? And, if your happiness levels are a disappointment, think about what you can do to change it. Then

try the exercise again a week or two later. (As mentioned in Time Magazine, New Science of Happiness in Davis Ethics.)

Look into “Flow” research of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for Taoism.

As mentioned in Time Magazine, New Science of Happiness in Davis Ethics.

Happiness Research Data:

Neither wealth, nor education, nor IQ, nor Youth do much to raise levels of happiness. As mentioned in Time Magazine, New Science of Happiness in Davis Ethics.

Lottery Winners

“A study of lottery winners done in 1978 found, for instance, that they did not wind up significantly happier than a control group. Even people who lose the use of their limbs to a devastating accident tend to bounce back, though perhaps not all the way to their base line.” As mentioned in Time Magazine, New Science of Happiness in Davis Ethics.

Gratitude Journal

“A Diary in which subjects write down things for which they are thankful. UC Riverside psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky found that doing this once a week significantly increased subjects’ overall satisfaction with life over a period of six weeks.”

As mentioned in Time Magazine, New Science of Happiness in Davis Ethics.

Gratitude Visit

University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin Seligman found that “the single most effective way to turbocharge your joy, he says, is to make a “gratitude visit. That means writing a testimonial thanking a teacher, pastor or grandparent – anyone to whom you owe a debt of gratitude – and then visiting that person to read him or her the letter of appreciation. “The remarkable thing,” says Seligman, “is that people who do this just once are measurably happier and less depressed a month later.””

As mentioned in Time Magazine, New Science of Happiness in Davis Ethics.