

P1 – The Purpose of Life

Dear: When I'm walking and get to "P", there's quite a bit that I review – and it'll take quite a few "P-chapters" for me to explain it all. To start, rather than burden you with it all at once, here's how I start "P":

P: Pirate – pushing out.

Philosophy – the only serious philosophical question is how to stop laughing! We're just tubes... so many tied in knots... without a purpose other than reproduction, following people rather than a few simple principles. Instead, follow principles, not people. Also, try to repay the world's producers – aware that: "The only way to repay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to ourselves."

In fact, for this chapter, I won't be able to show you all that I mean by even the above (in which the ellipses, "...", represent ideas that I usually spend some time thinking about when I'm walking); nonetheless, let me begin.

Actually, the first part of the above (*P: Pirate – pushing out*) was derived from that "communications workshop", mentioned in an earlier chapter. I don't recall why, but about half way through the week-long workshop, we chose to give brief descriptions of fellow attendees, some of whom (if not most) agreed that I reminded them of a "swashbuckling pirate" – apparently not because of my appearance but because of the way I expressed myself (probably too bluntly). In time, I came to accept their assessment, and actually didn't mind it, thinking that it conformed to my desire to keep "pushing out" (if not conquering, then at least exploring, new intellectual territories) and remembering a line from Albert Camus (whom I'll return to, below): "What is a rebel? Someone who says no!" – by which I expect he meant (and I know I mean!), 'no' to some social norms and customary ideas; not 'no' to life.

The next part of what I review with "P" (which partially prompted me to conclude *the only serious philosophical question is how to stop laughing*) also has something to do with Albert Camus (1913-1960), who won the 1957 Nobel Prize in Literature. I had heard the line (and was scorning it): "The only serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide", but now that I've found his exact statement on the internet, I see

that the Algerian born French philosopher and novelist, Camus, actually wrote the following, in his 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide. Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie. Le reste, si le monde a trois dimensions, si l'esprit a neuf ou douze catégories, vient ensuite. Ce sont des jeux; il faut d'abord répondre...¹

If you can find the time, Dear, I encourage you to learn more of Camus's ideas (e.g., by searching on the internet). Although I totally disagree with his idea that the only serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide, I agree with many of his ideas – and I'm certain that many of them will stimulate you. For example, there's his "Life is a sum of all your choices" as well as his

Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.

To explain why I totally reject his assessment that suicide is the only serious philosophical question, let me sketch how he reached what I call his "absurdity", namely, that life is absurd.

Camus conveys his idea that life is absurd in his short essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated versions of which you can find on the internet (along with many good discussions of his essay). In turn, if you took the "excursion" **Ix**, and if (as I hope) you treated yourself to reading Homer, then perhaps you remember his mentioning Sisyphus [pronounced as if it were spelled SIS-eh-fehs, with the "eh" sound as for the "e" in 'agent']. In particular, Homer wrote (in Book or Chapter XI of *The Odyssey*, ~2700 years ago!):

And I [Ulysses (aka Odysseus), when he visited Hell or the House of Hades] saw Sisyphus at his endless task raising his prodigious stone with both his hands. With hands and feet he tried to roll it up to the top of the hill, but always, just before he could roll it over on to the other side, its weight would be too much for him, and the pitiless stone would come thundering down again on to the plain. Then he would begin trying to push it up hill again, and the sweat ran off him and the steam rose after him.

¹ Should you desire to check your translating skill, Dear, here is one that you can find on the internet: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer [the questions of suicide]..."

In turn, Dear, if you want to know why the Ancient Greeks would have accepted that such a horrible punishment for poor Sisyphus was “justified”, you’ll need to search on the internet to find more information about what he was alleged (in myths) to have done. Here, especially with the help of what Camus wrote in his essay, let me summarize what I expect you’ll find.

Allegedly, Sisyphus (“the wisest and most prudent of mortals”) showed disrespect for the gods, including telling some of their secrets and, at least for a while, putting the goddess Death in chains – after which, with death under control, Hades emptied. It’s not clear what happened to the inhabitants that, at the time, were in Hell. Further, as if telling the gods’ secrets and chaining Death weren’t enough, when Sisyphus, himself, was supposed to be dead, he lingered on earth to enjoy the simple pleasures of living. Small wonder, then, that by decree of the gods, he was taken back to Hades and assigned the futile, absurd task of pushing a rock up the same hill, for eternity. As Camus wrote:

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth.

Now, as much as I admire how Camus framed his portrait of Sisyphus, I find that the picture he then draws (which I’ll sketch below) is grotesque. In my view, he makes the mistake (a mistake that, unfortunately, is common among artists) of pursuing details in an analogy that do nothing but distract. Consequently, at the outset, let me insert what I consider to be the obvious meaning of the myth, a meaning that the clerics of Ancient Greece undoubtedly expected everyone to quickly grasp: even the wisest and most prudent of mortals will not succeed for long in tricking Death, and even the otherwise wisest and most prudent of mortals is headed for Hell – unless the secrets of the gods (i.e., the secrets of the clerics) are respected. Thus, as always and as in all societies, myths are used by clerics to establish and buttress their parasitic existences and their powers over the people.

Camus, in contrast, presented a new interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus – and it’s surely one of the most astounding cases of grasping at logical straws and having them lead to a Nobel Prize! To his credit, Camus rejected all ideas of all gods as being ridiculous. Confirmation of this can be seen not

only in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* but in his frequent, fond references (even in his Nobel Laureate acceptance speech) to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose most famous statement was: “God is dead.”²

Then, correctly seeing that no god ever established a purpose for any human but mistakenly seeing death as without purpose, Camus concluded that “the human condition” was as absurd as the task of Sisyphus, pointlessly pushing a rock up an endless hill. Camus wrote [to which I’ve added some comments in “square brackets”]:

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding [as promoted in all religions] upheld him? The workman of today works everyday in his life at the same tasks, and his fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods [i.e., worker (or lowest class) relative to the gods], powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of [Camus proposes] during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

I disagree with Camus’s last-quoted conclusion; in particular, as he demonstrates with his logic, one can’t surmount the fate of illogic by scorn, if one remains unaware of one’s logical errors!

But more significantly, and for reasons to be described below, I totally disagree with his conclusion that the human condition is “absurd”. Yet, again to Camus’s credit, he did find a straw to cling to. He concluded that humans could yet be happy, even in an absurd situation. He wrote:

... the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to its silence [i.e., without gods], the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up. Unconscious, secret calls, invitations from all the faces, they are the necessary reverse and price of victory. There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says “yes” and his efforts will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is, but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable [viz. or e.g., death]. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting, he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory’s eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that

² Incidentally, Dear, to explore a truly wonderful internet site, try <http://www.nobel.se/index.html>, where you’ll find the “acceptance speeches” of essentially all Nobel laureates.

is human, a blind man, eager to see, who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Once again, there is much, here, with which it's easy to agree, including "there is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night" and "the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart" (i.e., happiness is in making progress toward your goals). But, Dear, I hope you never become so depressed as to conclude that your life is absurd, that your goals are as pointless as those of Sisyphus, endlessly pushing a rock up a hill. Instead, Dear, I hope you'll see what Camus apparently didn't, that (although I'd prefer to abandon his analogy for reality) the rock that we humans push up an endless hill is the advancement of humanity – in particular, the advancement of intelligence.

Now, Dear, I know that I've harped on this same theme many times before, but please permit me to go over it again – this time with added emphasis on the purpose of life (a concept that Camus totally mangled) – because your thoroughly understanding the "purpose of life" is really quite important. In fact (or at least, in my opinion!), understanding the purpose of life is close to being not only the most important knowledge that you can possess but also the most important knowledge in the universe.³ With it, as I will shortly try to show you, you become greater than any god was (or is) alleged to be.

First, let me again praise Camus for seeing part of what's needed, and let me even give some praise for his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*: it's a creative masterpiece (even though it's horribly misleading). But as I wrote above: as is all too common for "artists", his analogy carried him away. In reality, the myth of Sisyphus doesn't convey any "truth", either as seen by Camus or

³ Dear: I "hedged" on that statement (by saying the "understanding the purpose of life is close to being... the most important knowledge that you can possess..."), because if you'll think about the matter for a while, I expect that you'll agree that the most important knowledge is how to gain knowledge, e.g., about the purpose of life! Thereby, as I'll show you a little more in this chapter and will dig into in more detail in the next chapter, the knowledge that the best way to gain knowledge about the world exterior to your mind is *via* the scientific method is even more important than knowing your purpose in life!

by any cleric; instead, the Sisyphus myth is merely more propaganda propagated by parasite priests.

But more significantly, Camus became entangled in his own confusion (as do all clerics): life is not absurd and death is not the enemy! With his reasoning, Camus finds just the tiniest thread for humanity to pull itself out of the pit of despair that he labels as “absurd”. Consistently, he claims that the only serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide. But he got himself tangled in a mental knot with his own logical absurdities. Instead, in reality, *life isn't pointless; it's the point!*

Dear: to ask (as did Camus) “What’s the purpose of life?” is to tie one’s mind in a verbal knot. Nothing could be stupider than to ask what’s the purpose of living. “Purpose” can only be measured relative to life. Rocks don’t have a purpose; people do; all life does: to continue living. Asking about the purpose of life is asking about the purpose of the purpose (or the life of life)!

Further, Dear, although I certainly agree with Camus’s summary (of zero data!) that no god has ever existed, and although I certainly agree with his conclusion to say “No!” to suicide, I conclude that Camus was forced into such logical contortions, because he totally ignored a huge quantity of data that screams: *death isn't a problem; it's a solution!*

Please, Dear, if you don’t see my meaning, then I urge you to evaluate all available data about death. Then, compare your analyses not only with the stupid conclusions promoted by all clerics of the world but also with the stupid conclusions of so many philosophers, such as Camus. If you will undertake such an evaluation, then I can’t see how you can come to any conclusion except the one that’s totally obvious: all data (from ~1 billion years of experimentation – the greatest collection of data in the universe!) almost screams that death has a highly useful purpose – for life!

Dear: any human, any tree, any frog, any individual of any species has a limited life-span to promote the continuation of its species (or more accurately, promote the continuation of the genes of its species). There are limited resources to support any species, all species profit from evolving to be most fit for changing conditions, and a billion years of experimentation has revealed that it’s especially useful for any species to continuously modify its DNA code, to change characteristics of its hosts as conditions

change in its physical and biological environments (e.g., as climate or resources change and to thwart attacks by ever-changing parasites, such as viruses, that “learn” to “unlock” its host’s “treasures” of proteins).

As an aside, it’s valuable even for parasites to evolve, to learn new ways to unlock their host’s changing codes! I’d even add that there’s value to humans to continuously modify our ideas, to thwart the parasites known as priests. But at least until the scientific revolution, the damn parasite priests were unfortunately able to keep modifying their religions – so they could continue their parasitic existence.

But please don’t be distracted by that aside, Dear. Try to focus on the bigger picture. Please try to see that death isn’t a problem; it’s a solution – and an extremely effective and efficient solution as well.

Let me put it another way – although let me immediately insert that I want you to continue reading the rest of the paragraph (and maybe even the rest of the chapter!), so that you don’t make a logical error and choose to commit suicide! With that cautionary statement included, let me then state what’s obvious from a billion-or-so years worth of data: the major contribution most humans make to humanity is to die! Of course it’s hoped that dying isn’t the only contribution that an individual makes (I, for one, am very grateful for contributions from others such as spoons and quilts and quantum mechanics), but nonetheless, dying, alone, is a major contribution: for humanity, as for all life on earth, death isn’t a problem, it’s a solution.⁴

⁴ Dear: If you want to explore details about how nature “figured out” (by evolution) how to rid itself of “old fogies” (such as a certain old grandfather, whose name might best be omitted – for I’m not above suggesting that it’s unwise to tempt the gods!), then be prepared to encounter controversies. For example, you might want to start by reading an article (which you can find on the internet) by George C. Williams dealing with evolution; also, I encourage you to read the book by Richard Dawkins entitled *The Selfish Gene*. In this chapter, however (and even in this book), I don’t want to get mired in such details – especially because I’m way out of my field of expertise! Instead, it’s enough for my purposes that Mother Nature found “the best way”, through a billion-or-so years worth of experimentation, to keep DNA molecules “alive”. In economic terms, she dispenses with “old fogies” when a “cost-benefit analysis” demonstrates that benefits of their continued existence isn’t worth the cost! And if you think that there might be a lesson here for our society, in which hundred of billions of dollars per year are expended to keep old fogies alive (long after Mother Nature has given up on them), then welcome to more controversies, in a world with major social problems. In our society, surprisingly, old people who no longer pay taxes are permitted to elect representatives to vote on how tax money will be spent (a form of “representation without taxation”) – but then, I suppose, that’s no worse than permitting people on welfare programs to elect representatives to vote for more tax money to be allotted to welfare programs!

And of course I admit that death is somewhat of an inconvenience for the individual – something that most people normally try to delay as long as possible – but the only thing “absurd” about death is to consider it absurd! Further, Dear, describing the human condition as absurd is only part of the absurdity promoted by Camus, an absurdity almost as ridiculous as the absurdities promoted by the clerics. Let me summarize my counter argument this way: every single human alive (and who has ever lived), as well as every other animal, every tree, every blade of grass, and even every microbe is closer to being an immortal god than even the greatest god ever depicted in the most outrageously silly myth (e.g., all the myths in all the “holy” books).

Dear: please consider the proposal that, if ever there were any immortal gods (and no evidence suggests that there ever were!), then every human who has ever lived surpasses them! To evaluate that idea, please try to establish a complete and honest summary of all relevant data. Thus, compared with the endurance of our DNA molecules, the most famous “immortal” god “lived” (and “lived” only in people’s imaginations) only for the tiniest speck of time – only for a few thousand years. In contrast, Dear, you are the host of something that has been living for approximately a thousand thousand thousand (i.e., a billion) years. Further, if humanity can gain sufficient sanity, this DNA molecule will continue to live at least as long as the sun continues (multi-billions of years more), and quite likely this DNA molecule (or its “new and improved” evolved form) will live forever – assuming, as I do, that future humans will colonize first other star systems and then other galaxies – and that the universe will never end.⁵

If you then agree, Dear, with what I consider to be a totally obvious summary of the data – that you are the temporary host of something that has already lived for about a billion years (and, with a little luck and a little help from you and others) will continue living for at least several more billion years – then perhaps you already see why I call Camus’s ideas totally

⁵ Dear: if you’ve encountered the theory that the universe is steadily increasing in size and therefore will eventually “freeze to death” or the theory that the universe will eventually stop expanding, start contracting, and end in “the Big Crunch”, I recommend that you don’t take such theories very seriously. On the one hand, such theories are extremely tentative (and undoubtedly will be modified or discarded), and on the other hand, such theorized eventualities are far too far in the future to be of any concern. Further, “on the third hand” (!), I have my own speculation (which I outline in **Z**) about the universe’s future, and it yields a much more cheerful scenario: I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s found that at the “edge of our universe”, new space, mass, energy, etc. are being created (out of the “nothing” that’s “outside” this universe), in the same way that what is now here was created from absolutely nothing. So there!

absurd: how could anyone possibly conclude that any individual's part in this astounding process is absurd? Each one of us is a temporary host of something more immortal than the most "immortal" god!

Anyone who concludes, as does Camus, that "the human condition" is as absurd as it was for Sisyphus endlessly pushing a rock up a hill, that death is a problem rather than a solution, that "the only serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide", totally misses the point: an individual isn't condemned to endlessly pushing a rock up a hill; every one of us is rewarded, is honored, is exalted..., because each of us has been given the opportunity to help humanity up the hill, which almost certainly will lead humanity to the heavens. Thereby, each one of us, if only for a little while, not only is the universe "I'ing" but acts on behalf of (as the agent of, indeed as the conscious part of) the only known "immortal", i.e., the DNA molecule.

If one wanted to pursue an analogy (which I don't desire to do), then far better, far more accurate, than making an analogy of "the human condition" to that of Sisyphus, would be to see each human analogous to a god. Further, each human is not just god for a day, week, or year, but for an entire lifetime. And of course it's true that, on occasion, any one of us can become despondent [because we get the chance to be this universe "I'ing" and to be a host for this fabulous "life form" (we get to be god!) for only a little while, lasting only a lifetime, wishing that our little consciousness would continue], but such despondency is derived from multi-levels of confused thought.

Should you ever become despondent with "the human condition", in particular, despondent about your inevitable death, then, Dear, please:

- Recall the many advantages for the continuation of the human species (or human genome) if individuals have only a finite life,
- Appreciate that life of any individual is more poignant exactly because it has only a finite duration (i.e., we'd be bored to death if we didn't die!), and
- Realize that, in fact, an individual consciousness can continue – so long as it has produced something that subsequent humans can use (from spoons to quilts to quantum mechanics!), i.e., if only we can create something of sufficient value for other humans.

Dear: neither you nor any human was ever (or ever will be) doomed, like Sisyphus, to the absurd task of endlessly pushing a rock up the same hill. As I already wrote, I'm certain that the hill that humanity has been climbing (and continues to climb) will lead us to the heavens. In the meantime, though, there are some pesky asteroids in the way, which maybe you would like to help eliminate, as well as some mighty pesky parasites, which maybe you would like to help eliminate – such as various viruses and all clerics of the world!

Indeed, Sisyphus's struggle could be interpreted entirely differently – and I think should be, given the clerics' description of his "sin" (defying the gods). As a symbol of all humanists, as his contribution to the fight against the clerics of the world, Sisyphus heroically pushes the rock up the hill, pushes the clerics' gods to the top of the hill, with the intent of then pushing their "rock of ages" over the cliff, smashing it on the boulders below!

And not to worry, Sisyphus, eventually we'll succeed. As the science fiction writer Isaac Asimov answered when he was asked why he fights religion with no hope for victory:

Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts.

I suspect that's exactly what Sisyphus would have said.

But returning to the rock that I've been pushing, I already commented (at least a little) on some of the mess made by religions (for example in **M**, dealing with the God-awful mess of moralities, and in **O**, dealing with the naïve to horrible objectives of all clerics). In the "excursions" **Qx** and **Yx**, I'll show you more. Here, let me list a brief summary of the almost inconceivable stupidities of the proposed "purposes for people" promoted by the principal religions of our culture; in subsequent **P**-chapters, I'll go into more details for at least some of the following.

- In Judaism, the purpose of God's "chosen people" is to serve God and to praise him, because he's jealous of the other gods: he wants praise, demands obedience, and is to be feared.

- In Christianity (in its many insane forms, including Mormonism), people are to both fear and love God (which already is enough to drive many god-fearing Christians and Mormons insane), to love everyone including one's enemies (which pushes most of the rest of them insane), and to obey whatever other craziness the clerics dictate.
- In Islam (which is the Arabic word for “surrender”), the prime purposes of the people are to surrender to God (aka Allah) and to get everyone else to similarly surrender – a task for which terrorism is explicitly recommended.

And actually, such examples point to something bigger, as described by Paul Kurtz in his book *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (Prometheus Books, Amherst, 1988, p. 235):

In the last analysis, it is the theist who can find no ultimate meaning in this life and who denigrates it. For him life has no meaning *per se*. This life here and now is hopeless, barren, and forlorn; it is full of tragedy and despair. The theist can only find meaning by leaving this life for transcendental world beyond the grave. The human world as he finds it is empty of “ultimate purpose” and hence meaningless. Theism thus is an attempt to escape from the human condition; it is a pathetic deceit. To the theist, death is not real; it is not final [its] tragedy is not irreparable. There is always hope of some saving grace. Living in this world, unable to cope with its problems, dilemmas, and conflicts, the theist leaps beyond it into another world, more akin to his fancy...

The theist's stupidity should be contrasted (a task that I'll take up in later chapters) with the purpose promoted in humanism: to help humanity continue, to prosper, to evolve into a more intelligent, creative, caring, helpful, kind... species.

As to how to help humanity continue, Dear, and relative to an individual's consciousness continuing, consider how long, already, some valuable ideas of various people have endured. For example, for ~3,000 years we've had the idea that Homer recorded as “Moderation is best in all things”, for ~4,000 years we've had what Shin-eqi-unninni recorded as “smile on simple pleasures in the leisure time of your short days”, for ~5,000 years we've had Ptahhotpe's “Be cheerful while you are alive”; for more than 6,000 years we've had the use of wheels; and for who knows how long and thanks to who-knows-whom, we've had ways to grow crops, domesticate animals,

easily maintain our body temperatures with clothing and shelter, and control fire. And maybe for 10,000 years, we've even had friendly puppies to alert us to dangers and to keep on smiling! Which then, in my own contorted way, leads me to explain what I mean when I review when I'm walking: *the only serious philosophical question is how to stop laughing. We're just tubes...*

I've forgotten the origin of the idea that I start to recall in "P" with *We're just tubes...* (and then, when I'm walking, I commonly recreate details, until they get me laughing again!), but I'm fairly sure that I saw at least a sketch of the idea in one of the books by Alan Watts. The idea, which I've probably embellished over the years, isn't some philosophical or mystical nonsense, but an obvious way of summarizing an astounding amount of data. That is, Dear, when you consider the following, please don't think that I'm trying to do anything but summarize a billion-or-so years worth of data!

Thus, a billion-or-so years ago, soon after these amazing DNA molecules "learned" (*via* experimentation) how to reproduce, then when conditions began to change, some of these molecules learned (again by experience) that they could continue to exist if they encased themselves in a bag full of the original organic "goo" – provided that needed nutrients could come in and resulting wastes could pass out through the cell's bounding membrane, while still protecting the DNA's method of reproduction. Those that didn't learn this technique didn't continue.

In time, the surviving cells organized into tube-like organs (groups of encapsulated and cooperating cells), which were self-sufficient – provided methods were included to incorporate food, eliminate wastes, and still protect their ability to reproduce. As more time passed and competitive pressures increased, these tubes developed appendages, such as fins and teeth, better to scurry after food, devour it, eliminate wastes, and reproduce.

With still more time, as these tubes ventured onto land, the appendages developed into arms and legs, better to chase after food, grab it, and stuff it into their mouths – without hampering their ability to eliminate wastes and reproduce. And with still more time, these tubes came down out of the trees with quite an amazing brain, better able to outsmart other tubes, catch them and eat them, eliminate wastes, and reproduce!

And now, all around us, are all these quite amazing tubes, with quite amazing brains – save for the obvious: so many silly tubes whose minds have gone berserk, twisting themselves in mental knots, worrying about the fate of their imagined souls, pondering the purposes of invented gods, trying to figure out “the purpose of the purpose”, or convinced that the only serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide! If it weren’t so sad, it would be hilarious!

And thus the obvious conclusion: the only serious philosophical question is how to stop laughing – at such silly tubes, which, so many times, tie themselves in so many mental knots that they can’t reproduce, eliminate wastes, or even eat (because their stomachs, too, are “tied in knots”)! But, Dear, quickly I should add at least three points: 1) I’m only half serious, 2) I’m well aware how to stop laughing (just have one’s survival threatened or the survival of one’s family), and 3) actually, now, we’re much more than tubes. Let me comment more on this third point.

What I’m particularly concerned about, Dear, is that when you see that we are “just” temporary hosts of the amazing DNA molecule, just tubes with the ability to consume food, eliminate wastes, and reproduce, then you may become so discouraged (as I was when I first saw it clearly) that, consistent with Camus’s conclusion, you might conclude (as did I) that the only serious question was whether or not to commit suicide! My faulty reasoning (well, actually, the reasoning might have been okay, but it was based on a faulty premiss) was derived from my sense of values: I am opposed to all slavery – especially my own! Yet, I found myself to be a slave of a stupid, mindless, molecule, doing nothing but hosting it, feeding it, and reproducing it! And I saw no way out of the slavery, save by suicide.

Fortunately for me, though, I’m a great procrastinator (“What’s the rush?”), and fortunately at least for me, I soon saw my faulty premiss. Dear, we’re not slaves of the molecule, because our minds (the minds of the children of this molecule) have advanced far beyond the minds of our “parents”. With our minds, not only can we now see the design of the DNA molecule, but also we can now envision and proceed toward new designs. “The molecule” wants to eat; our minds can say how much. It wants to reproduce; our minds can manage its desires. It wants to survive; our minds can dictate the conditions. It wants to continue; with our minds, we might be able to determine a way.

Which then leads me to want to show you a more reasonable philosophy (and consistent polices), which as you may hope, lies somewhere between the extremes of committing suicide or laughing to death! I've shown much of this philosophy to you already in earlier chapters, but besides wanting to see if I can develop still more patience in a certain grandchild (😊), I want to show you a little more, in case, thereby, you might be able to identify some goals that you might want to adopt. In the rest of this book, I'll show you more; in fact, trying to show you more details of this philosophy is the essence of the rest of this book. In a word, it's humanism; in two words, its scientific humanism. In the rest of this chapter, therefore, I want to at least introduce you to some fundamentals of the philosophy of humanists.

First, Dear, let me remind you of the definition of the word 'philosophy', which is derived from the Greek words *philos*, meaning to love, and *sophos*, meaning wise, so that 'philosophy' means something close to "love of wisdom". According to my copy of Webster's dictionary, the meanings for philosophy are:

1. originally, love of, or the search for, wisdom or knowledge
2. theory or logical analysis of the principles underlying conduct, thought, knowledge, and the nature of the universe...
3. the general principles or laws of a field of knowledge, activity, etc. (the *philosophy* of economics)
4. **a)** a particular system of principles for the conduct of life **b)** a treatise covering such a system
5. **a)** a study of human morals, character, and behavior **b)** mental balance or composure thought of as resulting from this; calmness.

And immediately let me express my conviction that, right near its beginning (right after its premisses), any sound philosophy must adopt the totally obvious "purpose of life" (known by all plants, puppies, and porpoises – and "deep down", even by people): as dictated by all DNA molecules, the purpose of all life is to continue to live!

If an analogy to computer software is used (which I must admit is an analogy that I rather like), then it can be said that the DNA molecule has "programmed" this prime purpose of life into the genes of its hosts as the instruction: your prime goal is to survive. How the DNA molecule managed to write this "computer program" was rather brutal yet obviously very effective: those hosts that had "bugs" in their programs (or that didn't correctly read the instruction) didn't survive!

In the case of animals, rather amazingly, the DNA molecule added some “subroutines” to their prime program. (I’m afraid I don’t know enough about plants to comment on their behavior.) For animals (such as humans) the subroutine instructs their DNA hosts with various “If-then statements”, such as: “If the survival of your offspring is threatened, then generally choose your offspring’s survival over your own.” Again, natural selection eliminated those hosts that weren’t adequately programmed with this subroutine to “sacrifice one’s life for the sake of one’s offspring”.

For “social animals” (such as wolves, dolphins, and people), they’re apparently programmed with subroutine that extends such “sacrifices” (of the individual) even to cases when survival of the host’s “extended family” is threatened. I don’t claim to know the exact statement of this subroutine, but from the result, it must be something similar to: “If in doubt, then the preferred choice is to promote the survival of your genes.” Again, natural selection (i.e., the benefit to the genetic code) led to adoption of this “sacrificial moral code” among the survivors. And thus we humans find ourselves in possession of our dual prime goals, seeking our own survival and the survival of our extended families; thereby, we seek not only to continue to live but also, similar to dolphins, we seek to help our wounded cousins survive.

Most human brains, however, far surpass the capabilities of the brains of all other animals on Earth, and with our amazing brains, we’ve learned how to write our own “computer programs”, adding and even deleting subroutines almost at will. We can delete the subroutine that states “survive” – and proceed to commit suicide! We can delete the subroutine that says something similar to “promote the welfare of the human genetic code” and replace it with subroutines that lead to subjugation, murder, and wars.

In fact, while I’m here, let me comment a little on some of these “bugs” or “glitches” that apparently have crept into many people’s “programs”. Thus, although humans have developed huge brains that sometimes help our DNA’s purpose, sometimes our thoughts hinder its purpose. For example, some people decide that their “purpose” is to commit suicide – which, come to think of it (given that such people’s thoughts are so confused), maybe that decision is the best way to contribute to the DNA’s purpose!

Many other people decide that their purpose is to serve some fictitious god or other. Such policies are usually pursued because the people have been

convinced by their clerics that it's "the way" to gain eternal survival. Such a goal, if attainable, certainly would be consistent with the DNA molecule's goal, but whereas no data support the contention that "eternal survival" of an individual is available *via* any procedure advocated by any cleric, such pursuits are unwise.

Other people pursue their "eternal survival" through a variety of other means, from seeking the "fountain of youth" to cloning. Such policies, however, are also unwise, because eons ago, the DNA molecule already discovered a highly efficient and effective way to continue, namely, through reproduction. This is an especially "wise" procedure, given both the need for the DNA molecule to adapt its host to changing environmental conditions and for the DNA molecule of each species to seek means to overcome attacks by other species (e.g., scrambling human genetic codes to "outsmart" various parasitic viruses). But enough of that (at least for now).

On a more cheerful note, let me now comment on the possibly of our amazing minds to incorporate subroutines that permit us to pursue a huge range of other potential goals – although these subroutines obviously require that the prime goal, the individual's survival, remains operational. Data show that we humans can adopt a huge number of possible goals – which, however, many times lead us to contradictions, such as wanting to have our cake and eat it, too. But if such contradictions can be avoided, humans can pursue goals (and an associated set of values) such as exploring the ocean's depths, becoming the world's fastest runner, climbing the world's tallest mountains, and breaking free from the confines of this Earth – to mention only a few. We can also paint pictures, write poetry, solve Schrödinger's equation, and try to waste our grandchildren's time by writing some philosophical junk that's totally obvious!

But, Dear, reading this might not be a complete waste of your time, if it can help you choose your own goals and their associated values. Remember, please, that values have meaning only relative to some objective: if you set yourself the goal of finding a new solution to the Schrödinger equation, there's substantial value (on a scale of -10 to +10, maybe an 8.8) in doing well on your next math exam, or if you choose to be a politician, then may I suggest that there's more value in attempting to find compromises rather than seeming to seek more confrontations (☹).

The goals you choose is, of course, your own decision, subject however to a number of obvious constraints and recommendations, such as the following.

- Try to avoid conflicting goals.
- Try to avoid impossible goals – in the end, Nature will have her way!
- To pursue any other goal (except suicide), you'll need to survive.
- No matter the goal (or goals) you pursue, you'll find a "built-in meter" that monitors the progress you're making toward your goals (detected as "signals" of "pleasure" or "happiness").
- The signals that you receive from your "happiness meter", however, can be confused, confusing, and in general, quite garbled.

Thus, one problem with our "happiness meter" is its response time. Should I remind a certain grandchild of her remark, the next morning: "Oooh, I shouldn't have eaten so much candy last night." And now she wants to know if she should study or "go out and have some fun"? Will certain people never appreciate the response time of their happiness meter?!

Another problem is garbled signals, caused by masks that we all have been forced to wear. For example, I remember (with pain) when a certain grandchild was obviously very pleased with being awarded a necklace for successfully memorizing some Mormon doctrines, while her mother gave her a little hug. Poor sweetheart. And will my grandchildren soon adopt the goal of going on a "mission" for the church? And the source of your "pleasure signal" would be what?

And though other problems can be listed, a root problem is this: although in the short term our "happiness meter" can record powerful, positive signals (eating too much, promoting "the gospel", getting drunk, getting high on illegal drugs, getting an "emotional high" at a Church meeting, and so on), yet in the long term, if our short-term goals are inconsistent with our long-term goals, then when the temporary "positive swing of the needle" subsides, it'll return to a state with negative bias. In less mechanical terms, when we recover from binges, we're usually sad.

But setting that obvious stuff aside, let me now address what I consider to be the most important question: What goal (or goals) *should* a person adopt? And because it will take me quite a few pages to show you “the answer” to that question (and because maybe I have a natural tendency to want to tease certain grandchildren, a tendency that I should probably “work on” eliminating), therefore, let me state my answer right here, at the start: Dear, as far as I have been able to discern and as demonstrated by many people (ever since Aristotle first bungled it), there is no logical answer to the question: “What goal (or goals) *should* a person adopt?”

And if you’re thinking “Thanks a lot, grampa – with help from you who needs to be hindered”, then let me just state the conclusion that will take me a while to reach. Although there appears to be no logical answer to the question posed, there’s an enormous amount of data available that can be summarized with the testable hypothesis: *the most satisfying goal for any human to adopt is the humanist’s goal of trying to help humanity, especially (I think) by helping intelligence to continue and to expand.* Now, let me try to show you what leads me to that summary statement.

First, Dear, surely you agree that there’s an enormous quantity of data that can be summarized with the testable hypothesis that humans can adopt a huge number of goals. If you want to look at some “data on the fringes”, then have a look at the Guinness Book of Records (for example, browse <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/>). But, Dear, please don’t get “carried away” by seriously pursuing some silly stunt (such as becoming the world’s fattest person or pinning the most clothes pins on your face). And I won’t even comment on the attempt of a bunch of foolish college students who tried to break the world’s record for how many people could be packed into an Austin A-30 (which is even smaller than a Volkswagen beetle)! Who, me? Instead, Dear, I trust you’ll agree also with the conclusion that many of the goals that people adopt are done simply “for the fun of it” (which mostly means the fun of “foolin’ around with a bunch of friends”).

Meanwhile, judging “the wisdom” of pursuing any particular goal (that is, judging where some goal sits on some “foolishness scale” or, equivalently, some “seriousness scale”, with, say –10 being “incredibly stupid” and +10 being “tremendous idea”) is a matter of opinion – and certainly ample data support the assessment that opinions needn’t be uniform. I suspect that data would reveal that the vast majority of people hold the opinions that, on such a scale, committing suicide and searching for “the fountain of youth” are

close to a -10 and that trying to help children and to generally be kind are close to a +10. On the other hand, I know that other data reveal that opinions about the wisdom of seeking “eternal bliss for one’s immortal soul” (by placating some god in a manner dictated by a bunch of con-artist clerics) range “all over the map”, from my assignment of a -10 to your mother’s assignment of a +10. In such controversial cases, obvious questions are then: Whose opinion is “right”? What’s the more “moral” choice? What goals “should be” pursued?

Logic can’t help answer such questions, Dear, because (assuming your logic is correct, then as I’ll show you in **R**, which deals with Reasoning) the “answer” MUST BE contained in your premiss. Thus, if your premiss is that some “holy book” conveys “God’s revealed truth”, and if some clerics use this “truth” to dictate what you’re to do to gain “eternal bliss of your immortal soul”, then it’s logically consistent to do what the clerics say – especially the part about keeping their collection plates filled! On the other hand, if your premisses are that there aren’t (and never were) any gods and that the clerics are a bunch of con artists seeking away to avoid working for a living, then sound logic will lead to the conclusion that following the clerics’ advice and pursuing such a goal is stupid.

Of course, some people choose to “hedge their bets”, i.e., they adopt what’s called “Pascal’s wager”. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter (**Ii**) and will go into more details in a later chapter (**Y5**), the reasoning behind “buying into” Pascal’s wager” is essentially this: whereas there’s potentially a huge “pay back” if you win the bet (that there’s a god who’ll provide “eternal bliss”), and whereas the wager is relatively small (relative to the potential payback), then go ahead and place your bet (i.e., do as the clerics dictate).

But as I sketched in **Ii** and will show you in more detail in **Y5**, the fallacy in this “wager” is also not in the logic but in the premiss: that by doing what the clerics dictate, you have a chance to “win”. Instead, you’re just as likely to win the bet (and it’s equally impossible to evaluate the odds!) by doing exactly opposite to what the clerics dictate. That is, Dear, just as likely as the clerics’ “way” is that the only “way” to win eternal bliss may be to demonstrate to “God” that you’re not the type of person who just follows orders, who places a bet even when the odds can’t be calculated, who lets greed cloud one’s analyses, and who acts without thoroughly evaluating relevant data! Thus, Pascal’s wager is a very foolish (even stupid) bet.

And thus, Dear, your decision about what purposes to pursue depends on both your premisses and your moral code. If you adopt the premiss that there is a god and if the basis of your moral code is to obey (the clerics), then what you “should do” is whatever the clerics dictate, out to an including strapping explosives around your waist to be a suicide bomber. But if your premiss is that there are no gods and the basis of your moral code is to use your brain as best you can (to evaluate all relevant data and act consistent with hypotheses that best summarize the data and whose predictions have been validated), then in most cases, you’ll make different choices. And I trust that you expect me to urge you to evaluate relevant data, to use your brain as best you can, rather than just blindly obey a bunch of lame-brain clerics – who continue to preach a prehistoric model of the universe that should have been buried long ago in some Egyptian pyramid.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter (in **I3**) and will show you more in **R**, all logic has this same limitation: even when your reasoning is flawless, logical analysis can provide only information consistent with your premisses – not new information. Therefore, Dear, if you want to know what goals you “should” pursue, you’ll need to seek the knowledge by methods other than by logic. And as for what other method you might use, let me make a suggestion that I hope you’ll find has wider applicability.

Dear, whenever you’re “really stuck” on some question, then I recommend that you continue to “just” rephrase the question, until you “get some traction”. Let me use the current question (about what goals to pursue) to illustrate what I mean. Thus, if you’re stuck, you might try the following series of questions:

“What goals should I pursue? How can I see what I should try to do? How can I learn what’s best to do? How can I gain knowledge of the right path to take? Who has this knowledge? How did they gain this knowledge? How does anyone gain any knowledge? What is knowledge?... Oh, now I remember. ‘Science’ is Latin for ‘knowledge’. Knowledge about this universe is gained by the scientific method. To gain the knowledge of what goals to pursue, I should apply the scientific method: obtain a bunch of relevant data, analyze the data, summarize it with a testable hypothesis, perform experiments to test the predictions, obtain more data, and so on.”

That's my grandchild! But now, Dear, once you see that the only way to gain the knowledge you desire is by applying the scientific method, then the work begins.

Yet, before you begin, I strongly recommend that you do some planning, to try to identify the best way to proceed. You could decide, for example, to perform some experiments to obtain new data. For example, during the next many years (possibly for the rest of your life!), you could pursue many different goals, evaluate your experiences with each, and from these experiences (these experiments), formulate a hypothesis about characteristics of the "best goals" to pursue. I trust you see, however, that such an experimental procedure would yield, at best, a rather tentative and unsatisfactory hypothesis, both because you could perform only a limited number of experiments during your lifetime and because you wouldn't have much time left, at the end of your life, to then pursue the goals that you concluded were "best"!

As an alternative procedure, first look around you: there are more than five billion people already performing similar experiments, saving you the trouble! Of course, it would be rather difficult to collect data describing the results of all such experiments, but anyway, five billions sets of data are far more than you'd need! Therefore, "all" you need do is develop and apply methods to sample the results from other people's experiments – taking care that your "sampling" doesn't bias your results.

Now, Dear, I don't want to "short circuit" your experiment – feel free at any time to stop reading this book to develop and apply your own method to determine what other people have concluded are the best goals to pursue. Nonetheless, so that I can make some progress toward the point that I want to make, let me give you just a few samples from my own surveys, obtained by a variety of methods.

One of my methods, which I described early in this book, was basically to extrapolate from my own thoughts and experiences to determine if they conformed to data collected by others. As I showed you in **B**, I concluded that there's a huge body of data that (I think) can be summarized (with little controversy) by saying that the vast majority of people seek their dual survival goals (of themselves and their extended families). Incidentally (but not irrelevantly), these dual survival goals appear to be identical to the goals "programmed" by our DNA molecules (*via* evolution).

* Go to other chapters *via*

And let me repeat that even suicide bombers seek their survival (i.e., their “eternal survival”) and claim that their death in some clerically-defined “Jihad” is for the benefit of their extended families. I don’t think there’s need to consider the data that show other people choose to commit suicide; I dismiss such cases by saying that the mental processes of such people aren’t working properly: another “glitch” or “bug” in the program.

Meanwhile, another method to try to identify the goals that we “should” pursue is “just” to review some of the thousands or tens of thousands (or more) of readily available reports about the conclusions other people have reached, in which they state the results or their experiments. It’s possible, of course, that the available reports (in the form of myths, sayings, aphorisms, fables, poems, stories, and so on) describe the “best goals” only for the authors of such reports, but on the other hand, it may be that a substantial fraction of such reports contain “wisdom” applicable for most people, including you.

Now (as you may be pleased to know), I don’t plan to show you, here, any more than I’ve shown you in earlier chapters about the conclusion reached by others. I’ll leave it to you (should you be interested) to do your own search on the internet and, e.g., by perusing Bartlett’s book. Nonetheless, let me state that I doubt you’ll find a much better summary about the “best” goals to pursue than was given by “the world’s first identified author”, Shin-eqi-unninni. As you saw in **Ix** (if you took that “excursion”), he wrote, in his version of one of the world’s oldest myths, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (which is at least 4,000 years old and which contains the flood myth that was later copied into the Bible):

Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given. Be moderate as you flee for survival in a boat that has no place for riches.

As still another method, you can examine the huge amount of data available from “just” examining what goals contemporary people pursue. One class of such examples includes those people who first apparently pursued the goal of making as much money as possible – but then, look what most such people do, once they successfully accomplish that goal. For example, currently, the richest person in the world is Bill Gates, who now spends all of his time (with the help of his father and his wife) trying to identify ways

to spend his money that will help other people. The second richest person in the world seems to be the investor Warren Buffet; recently, he gave most of his billions to the Gates Foundation, so that Bill, his wife, and father could give it away! Similar is true both for George Soros (who has spent a substantial portion of the money he made trying to build what he calls “open societies”) and for the founder of CNN, Ted Turner (who used a substantial portion of his wealth even to “bail out” the United Nations when it was in one of its many financial difficulties).

I trust you notice, Dear, that all such cases are consistent with the prime directive of our DNA programming: the purpose of life is to help life progress. You’ll see similar, too, in the cases of the “robber barons” of the relatively recent past (such as Rockefeller and Carnegie) who used a substantial portion of their fortunes to create research foundations and universities. And similarly for people with not such massive fortunes but with considerable fame (such as the wonderful movie actress Audrey Hepburn and many “sports heroes”): after reaching their goals, it’s quite common for such people to use both their fame and fortune to help others, especially children. And notice, again, that all such cases are consistent with Shin-eqi-unninni’s recommendation, which I hope you’ll consider again:

Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given. Be moderate as you flee for survival in a boat that has no place for riches.

Unfortunately, exceptions occur. One that immediately comes to my mind is John Templeton, who apparently is using his substantial fortune (made by investing) to foolishly promote Christianity, just as many rich Muslims use their money to promote Islam and rich Mormons use their money to promote Mormonism. My opinion about the behavior of such people is that (similar to the cause of suicide), it arises from confused thought (derived from childhood indoctrination that they’re unable to overcome), because such behavior clearly promotes dissension in the world. And much data are available to support the hypothesis that, unfortunately, there’s a lot of confused thought in the world.

As still another method to try to identify the “best” goals to pursue, you could seek to identify “the central theme for living” as given in essentially all religions. Only the rare “cult” promotes suicide (it has been found to diminish the cult’s membership, restricting the booty collected by the

clerics!); in fact, most major religions promote that their members seek eternal survival! But more relevant and as I demonstrated for example in **K**, all the principal religions promote some “kindness principle”, which basically is a recommendation to help the survival of one’s extended family (with most religions unfortunately restricting the “extent” of one’s “extended family” to include only other members of the same religious sect). But that unfortunate limitation aside, notice that these goals are consistent with our DNA’s “instructions”, which, as I tried to show you in **K**, I think are best summarized with something similar to: “Be kind, if you can, but with keenness.” As dolphins and other social animals discovered, such a principle promotes the survival of their DNA.

From such surveys as suggested above, Dear, maybe you agree that, based on data, the “best” goals to pursue are your dual survival goals. But then, knowing a certain grandchild fairly well, I wouldn’t be surprised to hear her objection. I can almost hear it:

“Is that all you have to go on? It’s just opinion! You expect me to follow someone else’s opinion? What sort of double standard are you preaching? This is ridiculous! Phooey! I’m gonna be a bank robber, and then, maybe I’ll join the Mafia as a ‘hit-man’ – or better, a ‘hit-woman’.”

Now, now, Dear, go easy. Slow down a bit. Yes, I agree that it’s all just opinion, but if the above is anything similar to what you’re thinking, then there’s a hint, here, that you missed something important.

I agree that you should be wary of other people’s opinions. But don’t be wary of an idea just because it’s an opinion; some people form opinions by evaluating ideas and data. Would that all people would! What you should do is carefully check the idea, relevant data, and their evaluations – and if you’re still in doubt, then perform your own evaluations. Let me list some examples.

- In earlier times, almost everyone held the opinion that the world is flat. If you questioned them why they held that opinion, they’d probably respond, “It’s obvious” – and I would agree, it is “obvious” that the world is flat, if only a limited data set is considered (i.e., the usual view of the world that everyone sees every day).

- In “modern” times, almost everyone holds the opinion that God exists. If you ask them why they hold that opinion, many would respond “It’s obvious; it’s totally logical: something must have made this universe, that something is God” – and I would agree that this idea is “totally logical”, provided you accept the premiss that something separate from the universe made the universe, rather than admit the possibility (which appears to be correct) that the universe made itself (e.g., *via* a symmetry-breaking fluctuation in an original total void).
- Throughout time, most people (as well as dolphins!) have held the opinion that the best way to live one’s life is to pursue their dual survival goals (of ourselves and those with the same genes). If you ask them (at least the people!) why they hold that opinion, they’d probably respond something similar to: “It’s obvious; what goes around, comes around” – and before you conclude something similar to: “Phooey – I say that a better goal is to become the world’s best bank robber and then become a ‘hit-man’ for the Mafia”, then I’d urge you to check how people reached their opinion.

Again, Dear, before you charge off with your own opinion, please pause to evaluate the bases for other people’s opinions. The important point is not that one is dealing “just” with an opinion, it’s to determine on what the opinion is based. Thus, reconsider:

- The opinion that the world is flat is based on a limited data set that has subsequently been found to be inadequate;
- The opinion that there are any gods is based on an insecure premiss and indoctrination from clerics who have a vested interest in your adopting their opinion (i.e., they get your money!); whereas
- The opinion that the “best” purpose to pursue is helping humanity (which of course also normally requires your own survival) is derived from a huge number of people during many thousands of years performing independent experiments (seeking to identify the best goals to pursue) and includes results from those experiments in which people (such as criminals and dictators) chose alternative goals.

Let me comment further on that last point, by listing some examples.

- If you were a hunter during the hunter-gatherer stage of human development and didn't share the meat when your hunt was successful, then next time you went hunting but were unsuccessful, you'd quickly learn the consequences of not sharing. Assuming that no clerics became involved, screwing up the thoughts of members of the tribe (with nonsense such as "forgive those who trespass against you", and "it's better to give than receive"), then the other members of the tribe would refuse to share their meat with you. Thereby, you'd quickly learn the importance of sharing, the value to you of helping others, and thereby the meaning of the rule: "What you send around, comes back around."
- Similarly, if you were a farmer or a herdsman during and after the agricultural revolution and didn't help your neighbor when his land is flooded, or his field is burned, or his cattle die of some disease, then (again provided no clerics screwed-up the clear thoughts of members of the community) it probably wouldn't take you long to learn the consequences of your "anti-social" behavior, when similar calamities hit you: "What goes around, comes around."
- And similarly, Dear, in modern times: those who decide to abandon "community wisdom" about helping others, for example, those who decide to make money by selling drugs to children, or robbing banks, or by becoming "hit-men" for the Mafia, should be prepared for commensurate reaction from the people they harm. With the help of our justice system, we try to teach them (and more importantly, through example, teach others) the meaning of "reciprocity".

Let me put it another way, by putting the onus on you. Dear: I and many other people hold the opinions that total energy is always conserved and that the best goal to pursue is to help humanity. We reached these conclusions by considering a substantial amount of data, formulating testable hypotheses, and repeatedly finding confirmations of our predictions. You propose alternatives. Good for you. It's always interesting to hear other people's opinions. Show me your data.

Meanwhile, though, of course I agree with critics who claim that it's not necessary to pursue the goal of helping humanity. The current huge number of people in prison (and the probably even larger number who belong there) suggests that there's validity in the statement that people can pursue whatever goals they desire. But whereas humans (similar to dolphins) are

“social animals”, then those who desire to participate in society, must honor the “social contract” (established by our DNA) of helping others.

For example, Dear, someone can reject this social contract and choose to become a thief, but to be consistent, the thief would need to severely constrain his actions. Thus, to be consistent, he can't walk into a bank (a social institution) in shoes (constructed by other people), pull out a gun (invented by other people), demand money (a symbol of productivity and of honor and trust among the people), and drive off in a car (designed, developed, and constructed by other people). That is, he hasn't rejected society – he just plans to prey on it. If he decides to reject the social contract and become a thief, then to be consistent with rejecting society, he would need to restrict his thievery to robbing birds' nests or similar. Instead, if he chooses to prey on society, then society will do its best to show him “What goes around, comes around.”

That is, Dear, people obviously aren't required to abide by the purpose programmed by our DNA and promoted by all societies. You can become a hermit (similar to how Howard Hughes became), you can become a parasite (such as member of the Mafia or a member of some clergy, living off the productivity of other people), you can join some racist or other “in group” and be “loyal” only to other members of the group (such as any of many religious groups), and you might be able to become a dictator of some group, doing whatever you want (assuming that you don't want to help humanity). But a major problem with all such choices is that, eventually, the people (who suffer as you pursue your goals) will be able to terminate your excesses.

As a summary of what is probably all totally obvious to you, Dear, let me put it this way. Your prime goal, as an individual, is to help yourself. As a member of the human family, in addition, your goal is to help others – not, however, as a cost to you, but as a benefit (i.e., the benefits you accrue from being a member of society). So long as you profit from the use of spoons and quilts and the products of quantum mechanics, then as Shin-eqi-unninni wrote, to be consistent you must

Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given. Be moderate as you flee for survival in a boat that has no place for riches.

Again, Dear, I apologize for writing stuff that, no doubt, is totally obvious to you. Yet, there's one other obvious point that I should try to make – because it's so obvious it can easily be overlooked! It relates to the question, which you might have: What's the best way to help humanity?

What's totally obvious, from an enormous amount of data, is the following. Based on the huge number of people that are now living in this poor old world, the conclusion is abundantly clear that the human DNA molecule doesn't need much help from any more individuals to insure its survival! You might then conclude: “Well, then, if the DNA molecule doesn't need my help to insure its survival, I'll just focus on my own!” But, Dear, I hope that you would reject such a conclusion, for many reasons.

First, it's the same mistake made by the dinosaurs. Their population, too, was apparently large, but they obviously didn't have sufficient intelligence to foresee the dangers to their continued existence from an asteroid colliding with the Earth. In contrast, now that the DNA molecule has developed at least some hosts (such as you!) with sufficient intelligence to do more than just breed, it's counting on you to use your brain as best you can to ensure its survival: not just to determine how to confront dangers from incoming asteroids, move it to another planetary system before our Sun engulfs the Earth, and maybe move to another galaxy before Andromeda hits ours, but solve many other problems as well. You can create your own list of such problems, Dear, but when you do, don't forget the dangers from a virus that's multi-times worse than AIDS, such as could be released during germ warfare, in turn caused by groups of stupid clerics advocating conflicting “scientific” views of the universe, all developed by Ancient Egyptian and Persian priests!

Second, Dear, please don't forget that at least some human minds are now capable of doing more than just follow the “programming” in their genes; the human brain has developed to such an amazing extent that it can question the “wisdom” of the DNA's methods for pursuing its goal of survival. Granted that the DNA's programming has been enormously effective (as can be verified by counting the number of its hosts that are now alive!), but Mother Nature's ways are quite brutal (and, in many ways, quite dumb): she seeks the survival of every species' genes by populating its “ecological niche” to the limit of the environment's capacity, finally constrained only by starvation or by some similar environmental constraint (set by availability of water, land, or some other resource).

Similar is true for non-thinking humans (such as the Pope, and his criminal colleagues, and similar “fundamentalists” in this country): they promote “popping out babies” until there’s standing room only. Instead of this option, Dear, the human social contract requires that human intelligence take over from the DNA molecule to rewrite “the programming”, not only specifying more reasonable constraints on human population than those dictated by the environment but also specifying ways to protect and even enhance the environment (and all forms of life).

And thus third and finally, Dear, maybe you are beginning to see why I’ve frequently written (without justification) that our prime goals should be not just our own survival and the survival of our extended families (even if the extent of these families is out to all life forms), but that our prime goal should be to help intelligence continue and to expand. Of course this goal necessarily contains the goal of our own survival (for it’s rather hard to help humanity if you’re dead!), but what I want to emphasize is the need to focus on helping expand human intelligence. If we don’t, then quite possibly we’ll end up going down the same path as the dinosaurs did.

Let me try to make my point starting from a different direction. Dear: of course there are many ways that you can help humanity, and I thank all those who have contributed in so many ways. Many people help to reduce pain and suffering, increase liberty and justice, promote peace, and so on. Other people have also made wonderful contributions to our enjoyment of life (I’m thinking of Audrey Hepburn, John Lennon, Elvis Presley, and many other entertainers). But then, think of those people who have increased our awareness of our lives (such as Shin-eqi-uninni, Homer, Shakespeare, and many others), who have increased our awareness of this universe (such as Aristotle, Euclid, Archimedes, Galileo, Newton, Maxwell, Plank, Einstein, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Dirac, and so on), and who have eased our burdens and reduced our limitations (inventing clothes, tools, agriculture, wheels, engines, cars, aircraft, and so on). Given all such accomplishments, the question posed to you is: how might you best contribute?

Now, Dear, of course, I can’t answer that question for you, but when you do try to answer it yourself, when you consider what goals you want to pursue, I hope that you consider the following. From among all the goals that you could choose (both in harmony and in conflict with your DNA programming, and both for your own satisfaction and for the benefit of

humanity), seek to identify those goals that you expect would enable you to help contribute most to humanity.

If you have tremendous talent in a certain area (as I know you do, in many areas, but then, I'm a rather biased observer), then maybe you should pursue developing that talent. For example, if you can entertain even better than Audrey Hepburn or Elvis Presley, then a lot of people will gain great enjoyment from your contributions. But then, Dear, consider also the value to humanity of being entertained *versus*, for example, the value of not being annihilated by an asteroid or being wiped out by a killer virus. Therefore, Dear, even if you're not another Einstein (although I'm not suggesting that you're not!), you could contribute enormously more by defeating a killer virus, or helping to stop an asteroid from hitting the Earth, or... than by writing or performing a "top ten" musical hit.

Therefore, Dear, when considering what goals to pursue, please incorporate evaluations of both your capabilities and your potential contributions – and at least consider my opinion that the most important contribution that anyone can make it to help intelligence expand. Bertrand Russell said it better:

A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time toward a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.

Meanwhile, though, of course you can't be expected, now, to see where you might contribute most, but then, kid, "first things first". Whether you appreciate it or not, you're still just a kid! So, first get as much education as you can, to learn what intelligence has already produced. Then, eventually, I'm sure you'll see where you can contribute: you can become a teacher to help more children learn, you can become a researcher to expand the frontiers of knowledge in some field, you can write a poem or a novel that conveys intelligence to more people, you can become a politician to steer the people more wisely, and who knows, in your old age, you might even deteriorate to becoming a philosopher, capable of steering the world away from its religious suicide.

But before embarking on all that, may I suggest that you get some more exercise. After all, first things first: first, you need to ensure your own survival.