

E – Evaluating Endeavors

Dear: When I'm walking, what I review for 'E' is:

E – Evaluating Endeavors. My endeavors: to add to this collective consciousness and to enjoy EUGENE'S (Existing, Understanding, Gaining control, Exploration, New Experiences, Survival signals), with a little style!

In this chapter, I'll try to explain what I mean by the above, but before doing so, I want to make some general comments about evaluations.

My most general comment is this: if I were required to reduce this entire book to a single word, a single word that would convey the essence of my entire message to you, then although in an earlier draft of this book I thought that the single word would be 'Think!', yet upon re-evaluation of my thoughts, I'm now certain it would be: **Evaluate!**

By 'evaluate', I mean the same as my dictionary's definition:

1. to find the value or amount of, 2. to judge or determine the worth or quality of; appraise, 3. to find the numerical value of; express in numbers.

In this chapter, I want to dig deeper into ways to "Evaluate Endeavors", where my meaning for 'endeavor' is the same as my dictionary's: "an attempt to achieve some goal."

In an earlier chapter, I tried to show you how to evaluate your prime goals (your trio of survival or "thrival" goals: of yourself, your family, and your values); in this chapter, I'll begin to address how to evaluate your "thousand and one" other goals. Thereby, I'll be trying to show you a little more of what I meant in the previous chapter when I wrote: *For difficult decisions, dig into goals and values, feelings and instincts, and premisses, options, priorities, and probabilities.* In particular, in this chapter the emphasis will be on evaluating goals and values. In subsequent chapters I'll try to show you more about evaluating the other items in that list, i.e., feelings and instincts, and premisses, options, priorities, and probabilities.

If all that sounds too general or too "theoretical", let me return to an example that I mentioned in the previous chapter, where I wrote:

For example, Dear, imagine that you're in college and someone asks you if you'd like to join a group for a weekend ski trip. Imagine some of your thoughts as you struggle with your decision:

“A ski trip would be fun, but given the weather, it could be dangerous... It would be expensive, yet there's a chance for romance... But I'm not that good a skier, and I might look silly on the slopes... Besides, this weekend I really should study, especially because, if I could impress a certain someone with good grades, then maybe... But 'you're only young once'... Yet, there will be more appropriate times, in the future, when I can ski, and!”

So what do you decide? You decide to flip a coin!

Actually, and as I mentioned before, flipping a coin to make a decision can sometimes be not-a-bad way to make a decision that's “too close to call”, because when a decision is “too close to call”, it usually means that it won't matter much which option you choose. But sometimes you can make the decision even better if you *ex post facto* decide whether to take “the best two out of three” coin tosses, or “best three out of five”, or... with your choice delayed until the stupid gods of probability get it right! That is, in reality and possibly unknown to your left-brain's analysis capabilities, your right brain has “decided” what it wants.

Rather than flipping a coin, however, better “decision making processes” are available – although as I'll be showing you, the associated analysis for some decisions can be horrendous. To begin to illustrate, I'll outline a case simpler than for your decision about the proposed ski trip.

EVALUATING EXPECTED VALUES

Thus, suppose you wanted to decide whether you should wear your new suede jacket today. You hope to impress a certain someone, and you thought that you'd look “real cool” (or whatever the expression is used by today's teenagers!) if you wore your new jacket. But you heard that there's a chance of rain today, you're worried that you'd damage your jacket if it gets wet, it's really too warm to be wearing a leather jacket, and you could end up looking definitely “uncool”, sweating away in your suede jacket, while being mad at yourself for ruining it in the rain. So, how do you decide?

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Well, whereas it's hard to compare apples and oranges, then like it or not, for comparison purposes, you'll need to find and then use a "common denominator". Usually the best available choice is some measure of relative economic value, as mercenary as that might seem. To illustrate, let me just "pull some numbers out of my hat" – feel free to adjust the numbers as you see fit, and then redo the calculation using your own numbers.

Suppose, then, that your suede jacket (which could be ruined in the rain) is worth \$100 to you, that there's a 30% chance of rain, that there's a 40% chance that you'll get caught outside when it's raining, and further, that there's a 50% chance that, if you're caught in the rain, it would ruin your jacket. Further, suppose that this instance of "looking real cool" is worth \$1,000 to you and that there's a 10% chance that "the certain someone" will also think that you would look "real cool" in your suede jacket. And on the other hand, suppose it would be worth \$500 to you not to look foolish, looking definitely "uncool", sweating away in your ruined jacket. Then what should you do?

Well, what all people almost invariably do (if they have "the smarts" to work out the details!) is chose the option that has the highest potential return; that is, the option with the highest "utility" or the highest "expected value", where again (as introduced in Chapter C1), the expected value (or the utility) is the value multiplied by its probability of realization. Thus, in this case (using negative numbers to express loss and positive numbers to express gain) the components of the expected value of your wearing your suede jacket are as follows:

Expected value of ruining your jacket = - \$100 x 30% x 40% x 50% = - \$6,¹
 Expected value of "looking cool" = \$1,000 x 10% = + \$100, and
 Expected value of looking foolish = - \$500 x 30% x 40% x 50% = - \$30

And thus (for those numbers!) the answer to the "\$64 dollar question" is that you should go ahead and wear your jacket (taking care as best you can not to get it wet!), because the net expected value of doing so is $\$(-6 + 100 - 30) = + \$64 !$

¹ Dear: As a first approximation, I treated those events as independent, and therefore, I just multiplied their probabilities to get the probability of the joint event. Thereby, I'm assuming that if it rains (30% probability), then you would need to make a decision (with an assumed 40% chance of success) of whether to seek shelter, and the assumption is that there's a 50% chance that even if you get your jacket soaked, it won't be ruined. In a later chapter (Ih), I'll comment on cases in which events aren't independent.

When you're older (!), however, when as Einstein said, “Once you can accept the universe as matter expanding into nothing that is something, [then] wearing stripes with plaid comes easy”, then you'll probably reduce the value of “looking cool” to be somewhere around \$1 and the value of “looking foolish” to be even less – and therefore, you'll carry an umbrella, wear a rain coat, and take better care of your clothes!

At any rate, perhaps you see from the above illustration why I didn't want to examine the more complicated decision about the proposed ski trip. In that case, to evaluate the expected value to you of your going on the trip, estimates would be needed for probabilities of accidents on the ski slope (and on the drive), for chances of “romance on the trip”, for the possibility that a “certain someone” would be impressed with your grades, for the probability and amount of changes in your grades because of failure to study more, and so on.

Moreover, such evaluations for your decision about going on a ski trip are trivial compared with evaluations for decisions in which your goals aren't so clear. In the cases mentioned above (dealing with your suede jacket and with a possible ski trip), not only were the goals that you were pursuing relatively clear, but (to be blunt!) they were all relatively trivial: in spite of your feelings at the time, damaging your suede jacket, impressing a certain someone, etc., probably wouldn't have any long-term consequences of much significance. In contrast, there are other decisions that you'll need to make in which your goals will not be so clear and the consequences will be much more significant. To make such decisions, you'll need to dig much deeper.

DIGGING FOR EVALUATIONS

For example, sometime in your life you may find yourself wanting to decide if you really do “believe” in the existence of “God”. If so, you'll need to dig into your emotions, certainly you should dig into all relevant data, but what may cause you the most difficulty is digging out your goals and evaluating how your decision will impact your goals. I'll go into details in later chapters, but for now, consider some of the questions that you might ask yourself:

- I want to live openly, honestly, and truthfully, but by saying that I believe in God, am I being open, honest, and truthful with myself?

- I don't mind people being role models, but do I want to live a role that others define for me?
- One of my goals is to do as my mother desires, but what about the goal of doing what I desire?
- Certainly I want to have friends, but should the prime condition of "friendship" be similar "beliefs"?
- Sometimes it's desirable to live in a structured environment, but what then of freedom?
- I don't mind paying "membership dues", but by belonging to my Church, do I receive value commensurate with 10% of my income?
- Certainly I would like to live forever, but is that a realistic goal?

Of course, the above list doesn't exhaust the list of questions that you might address, but when you did finish the list of questions, then the work would begin! That is, then you'd need to put your goals in priority, try to see how your decision would impact each goal, estimate the probability of each impact, add the result, divide by 27, and then...

And if you're wondering, "Where the devil did the 27 come from?" it's my way of giving up! That is, Dear, maybe even more difficult than evaluating goals and judging how they will be impacted by decisions is trying to demonstrate general principles for doing the same thing! As you'll see, in general it's very difficult to discern general principles. But maybe I can at least show you some procedures that I've found useful, in turn derived from evaluating my own goals and how they have been impacted by some of the million-or-more decisions that I've had to make during my life. From these, perhaps you'll be able to identify some procedures that might be useful also for you.

As well, you could also learn from the experiences of others. For example, if you decide to evaluate your decision to belong to the Mormon Church, you may want to search on the internet using "search words" such as "ex-Mormon" or "recovering Mormons" or "testimonies of ex-Mormons". Thereby, you'll find literally thousands of such "testimonies", in which people describe reasons why they decided to abandon Mormonism, some then deciding to join other religions or to become Humanists. Upon reading many such stories, what I found quite interesting is how so many people

made their decisions to quit Mormonism, not after a thorough evaluation of their own goals, but usually because of a single “quirk” in the Mormon system of beliefs. This single quirk then caused their entire “belief system” to collapse, like the fabled “last straw that broke the camel’s back”.

The specific quirks or “last straws”, critical for different people, were extremely varied, from archeological data showing how the Americas were first populated, to concern about how the Church changed its views about polygamy or about Negroes, from the police record that showed Joseph Smith was arrested for fraud, to details about his fraudulent “translation” of “the Book of Abraham”, from details about how the renegade Baptist priest Sidney Rigdon concocted the Book of Mormon, to details about how the Church spends the members’ money, and from Mormon claims about life after death, to the Church’s meddling in the lives of its members. Then, as you can find on the internet, after the ex-members refused to carry some “last straw”, they dumped the entire cargo.

Yet, although data obviously support the contention that some decisions can be made by loading on the last straw that breaks the camel’s back, I would encourage you to avoid making decisions in such a manner. As another example, if sometime in the future you’re trying to decide if you should divorce your spouse, then don’t delay the decision until the last straw has been loaded. While things are still going “tolerably well”, as calmly and coolly and collectedly as you can, evaluate your goals and put them in priority, dig out your emotions and values, evaluate all relevant data, and then decide – with your (tentative) decision possibly being “just” to collect and evaluate additional data.

EVALUATING GOALS

But I’m jumping away ahead of myself: not only have I imagined your abandoning Mormonism; I have you married and considering divorce! Instead of your addressing such difficult decisions now, what I want you to do is consider some general features of any difficult decision. Any such decision will (by definition) influence the probability of your attaining your goals, and therefore, one of the first steps you should undertake is to evaluate your goals – and put them in priority.

At the outset, though, you should be aware that many such evaluations are somewhat silly, because they’re almost circular, and many such attempts to

* Go to other chapters *via*

put your goals in priority are almost a waste of time, because your priorities continuously change. For example, Dear, please do something for me, right now: hold your breath until you can identify your top priority goal. Okay: now that your top priority goal is satisfied (by getting some air!), what's your top priority goal now?! That is, obviously our goals change.

Similarly, it's easy to see that evaluating goals is almost circular. For example, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter and will go into detail in later chapters, our values generally have meaning only relative to our dual survival goals (of ourselves and our families, whatever extent we recognize for our families). Further, as I'll explain in detail in later chapters: a major purpose of our reasoning is "just" to promote our goals, our emotions are just signals telling us how much (or how little) progress we're making toward our goals, and our instincts just define our dual, primitive goals of survival (or ourselves and our families). Therefore, when we "evaluate" our instincts, emotions, reasoning, and values, then generally, we're just evaluating our goals.

But, then, how are we to evaluate our goals? Against what "standard" are we to make our measurements? If you don't mind chasing words in a circle, ask yourself: "What's the goal of my goals?" And if that question doesn't get you "running around in a mental circle", then try: "What's the goal of living?"

If you try to answer such "mind teasers", I expect that you'll be astounded by the answer. If you'll give such questions some thought, I expect that you'll find that neither life nor such questions are "circular"; you won't end up "chasing your own tail". That is, as I'll discuss in more detail in later chapters, I expect that you'll conclude that the goal of all life – and the goal of all our goals – is to continue living! The goal of life is to live!

But, maybe you won't agree with that conclusion. If so, then good (!) – because you would then be displaying what is perhaps the most important trait of any adult: skepticism. For example, Dear, you may be thinking: "Phooey! The goal of living isn't to live; it's to be happy, to have fun, to pursue pleasure, to enjoy!" I agree. As an alternative, you may be thinking: "Phooey! The goal of living isn't to live; it's to become worthy of eternal life!" With that, I disagree.

But in either case, Dear, you should dig deeper. Where did you get the idea that the goal of life is to gain eternal life? Did you reach that idea on your own or did your parents indoctrinate you with the idea ever since you were a baby. What are your own thoughts? Which thoughts are yours and which are someone else's? Or if you concluded that the goal of life is “to be happy, to have fun, to pursue pleasure, to enjoy”, then where did that idea come from? Is it your own?

That is, Dear, although I applaud skepticism, skepticism, alone, is sterile: skepticism should be used like a shovel to dig out understanding. As I tried to illustrate in **B**, you can try to dig out this understanding on your own, from your own mind, but also (or “and also”) you can try to dig out this understanding from the ideas expressed by others.

Let me show you some examples of thoughts about goals expressed by others, including some of the most brilliant people who ever lived, such as Aristotle, Epicurus, Spinoza, and even Maslow – whose IQ was measured to be a mere 195! In each case, I'll also show you some of the major mistakes they made. Thereby, you might conclude that, trying to see what others have thought about goals is rather silly! Yet, on one hand, I expect that you'll agree that such people recorded some valuable ideas, and on the other hand, maybe you'll then gain more confidence in listening to the advice of the most brilliant person you'll ever have a chance to know, namely, you – if only you'll become sufficiently attentive to yourself!

ARISTOTLE'S IDEAS ABOUT GOALS

There's no doubt that Aristotle was one of the most brilliant people who ever lived; as I'll show you in later chapters, he was also one of the most productive. He lived in Ancient Greece from 384 to 322 BCE; his teacher was Plato, whose teacher, in turn, was Socrates. As I'll show you in later chapters, Socrates was amazing: he made major progress understanding what understanding means and how to gain it (*via* what's now called “the Socratic method” or “critical thinking”). As I'll also show you in later chapters, Socrates' student, Plato, was a real “nut cake”: a dreamer (“a mystic”) whose thoughts (many of which were probably borrowed from Egyptian and Mesopotamian priests) polluted the minds of the majority of people in Western and Mid-Eastern societies for more than 2,000 years (*via* Christianity and Islam).

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In contrast, Plato's student, Aristotle, was in the main, a realist. Although he made major errors (as I'll show you in later chapters), he created the foundations of logic and biology, and he corrected major errors in Plato's ideas in philosophy, government, and ethics. In one of his two books on ethics (which I'll reference in a later chapter and will suggest that you read), Aristotle tried to discern the prime goal of all humans:

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake... and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else... clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?

After much writing, Aristotle then concluded that the goal of humans was to be happy:

Happiness, then, is something final and self sufficient, and is the end of action.

But then, characteristically, Aristotle dug deeper, trying to understand what is meant by 'happiness':

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is, is still desired. This might be given if we could ascertain the function of man.

He then extensively pursued the "proper function" of man, examining what was "virtuous" for humans (where by 'virtue' he meant what is consistent with one's "nature"):

If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us... That which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else *is* man. This life [according to reason], therefore, is also the happiest...

Now, as much as I admire Aristotle, and as much as I agree with him that happiness or pleasure is one of the prime goals of all humans, yet as I will repeatedly try to show you in this book, he erred by concluding, that "the life according to reason is best and pleasantest". My conclusion (using his analogy to an archer) is that Aristotle missed the mark by confusing the target with his equipment: one's mind is the bow, reason is the arrow, but the goal of life, the mark, he failed to identify – save only the goal that he

incorrectly described as a “platitude”, i.e., to be happy. Furthermore, Dear, although it will take me much of this book to show you what I mean, not only did Aristotle “miss the mark”, in the process he damaged the lives of literally billions of people by his poor marksmanship.

Actually, there are hints that Aristotle saw that he had “missed the mark”. Thus, to his conclusions that “happiness is the chief good “ and that “life according to reason is best” he added:

[Happiness] needs... external goods as well; for it is impossible (or not easy) to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the luster from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, [etc.]... and perhaps a man would be still less likely [to be happy] if he... had lost good children... Happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition.

In part, what Aristotle seems to be attempting to see is that pleasures are signals informing us of our success in pursuing our trio of survival goals. But there are two other aspects that he failed to see – which I’ll spend much of this book trying to explain to you.

To get a first glimpse at one of the ideas that Aristotle missed, notice that he wrote “Happiness needs... external goods as well; for it is impossible (or not easy) to do noble acts without the proper equipment.” Obvious questions that then arise include: What are these “noble acts”? Why are you talking about “noble acts”? Aren’t you talking about happiness? What do “noble acts” have to do with happiness? Do you mean that we have a sense of values and that preserving and promoting these values is important for our happiness? Are there cases in which the survival of our values becomes our most important goal? Then, in general, do we have three “prime goals”, the survival of ourselves, our extended families, and our values?

Later in this chapter, I’ll address the above questions, but while I’m here, let me turn to Aristotle’s more significant error: his recommendation that we rely on reason. Let me start by trying to state my conclusion as explicitly as I can: Dear, please always use your reasoning powers to the best of your abilities; there is no doubt, as Aristotle said, that reason more than anything else distinguishes humans from other forms of life; but, Dear, please always rely more on data than on reason. Stated differently (and to be explained in detail later in this book), rely on the scientific method: observe, analyze the

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data, reason, hypothesize, predict, test the predictions, observe, analyze the data, and so on, without end.

Dear, relying on reason is like tightrope walking – on a greased high wire, without a net! The lives of literally billions of people have been horribly damaged by high-wire stunts in reasoning. Perfect examples are given by the master of reasoning, himself – Aristotle – who with sound reasoning “proved” the existence of God and “justified” the institution of slavery. The two monstrous dangers of reliance on the high-wire act of reasoning are 1) that it’s so amazingly easy to make a slip (as Aristotle illustrated in his “proof” of God) and 2) that it’s so common to start from unreliable premisses (as Aristotle did, as I’ll show you later, in his “justification” of slavery). The only known way to remedy such errors in reasoning is to observe, analyze the data, reason, hypothesize, predict, test, observe, analyze the data, and so on, without end, i.e., to use the scientific method.

As a simple but important example, evaluate some of your own data. Thus, Aristotle concluded that “[the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man.](#)” Meanwhile, you have data for how you felt when you lived “according to reason”; you also have data for when, for example, you lived “according to love”. For example, when were you happier: when your teacher gave you an ‘A’ on a math exam (praising you for your reasoning abilities) or when a “certain someone” showed you signs of love? Or as another example, consider why some people join religions: because religions provide a “life according to reason” or because they offer a “life of love”? Then, Dear, what do your data suggest: is the more fundamental goal and the source of greater happiness reason or love?

EPICURUS’S IDEAS ABOUT GOALS

But, Dear, you must dig deeper. If one of your goals is to give and receive love, you’ll not understand this goal until you understand love. In turn, though, understanding love requires a lot of digging, and I want to delay this digging until a later chapter (namely, **L**, which deals with love). For now, let me set the digging aside, leave you with some skepticism of Aristotle’s conclusion, and turn to trying to uncover understanding about goals dug up by other brilliant people, starting with the Greek philosopher Epicurus who lived from 341 to 270 BCE (i.e., he was 19 years old when Aristotle died).

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Had he not been maligned and his ideas misrepresented by Greek, Jewish, and Christian clerics, Epicurus might today be widely recognized as the West's Buddha or Confucius. His philosophy (details of which I'll provide in later chapters) was the pinnacle of achievement in Ancient Greek thought, resting on the mountainous achievements of philosophers from Thales through Democritus to Aristotle. As Thomas Jefferson (no friend of the clerics of any religion) wrote in a 1819 letter to William Short:

I... am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us...

Notice that Jefferson added the parenthetical remark "(not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus". It was his response to clerical misrepresentations of Epicurus' ideas. In turn, the clerics attacked (and continue to attack) the ideas of Epicurus, not for the reasons they claim (which I'll get to), but because, similar to Confucius and the Buddha, Epicurus dismissed ideas about "life after death" as being idle and useless speculations, thereby threatening the clerics' livelihood.

Epicurus saw that Aristotle had erred by dismissing happiness or pleasure as the principal "good". Consistently, there's little doubt that Jefferson was reflecting Epicurus' ideas when, in the description of human goals in the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson included the phrase "pursuit of happiness." Further, Epicurus was not (as the clerics contend) a "hedonist" (in the sense of being devoted to the pursuit of sensual pleasure) – nor was Jefferson – for as Epicurus wrote in his letter to Menoeceus (which I'll reference and investigate in more detail in a later chapter):

...since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but will often pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And often we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure. While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure should be chosen, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil, and the evil, on the contrary, as a good...

When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, *as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation* [italics added]. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not

an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual lust, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, *searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance* [italics added], and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul...

Notice two particular ideas in the above quotation:

- 1) That Epicurus incurred the wrath of the clerics with his comment “banishing those beliefs [such as belief in an afterlife] through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul” – and therefore his response to the clerical critics: “we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or willful misrepresentation.”
- 2) That Epicurus saw the resulting difficulties in making decisions, choosing among goals. Thus, “while... all pleasure... is good, not all pleasure should be chosen... It is, however by measuring one against another... that all matters must be judged... [through] sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice...”

As brilliant as Epicurus undoubtedly was, however, unfortunately he seemed to miss a critical idea. I’ll describe this idea in detail in later chapters (starting in the two **H** chapters, dealing with Happiness and Hope); here, I’ll try to summarize in a single paragraph.

Actually, happiness (or pleasure) is an inappropriate goal, because happiness is “merely” a right-brain “signal” telling us that we’re making progress toward some goal. This was well summarized in a line (referenced later and here paraphrased): “Forget about the pursuit of happiness; focus on the happiness of pursuit.” A major problem is that “happiness signals” can be terribly misleading, telling us that we’re making progress toward some goal (e.g., gaining eternal life), whereas in reality we’re not (e.g., because it’s an illusionary goal). Therefore, choosing happiness as a goal can be as foolish as seeking happiness from a drug such as heroin. Instead, the critical need is to understand and evaluate one’s goals – as partially seen by Spinoza.

SPINOZA’S IDEAS ABOUT GOALS

Spinoza was another who was absolutely brilliant. Indicative of his brilliance is Einstein’s “offhand” remark that his god wouldn’t be the god of the Bible but closer to Spinoza’s, a remark that I’ll address in a later chapter. Spinoza lived from 1632 to 1677 in The Netherlands. He was of Jewish ancestry (as was Einstein), but because he rejected the God of the Bible (as

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did Einstein), he was “ex-communicated” (i.e., kicked out!) from Judaism, with the notorious “proclamation” posted on an Amsterdam synagogue:

The Lord blot out his [Spinoza's] name under heaven. The Lord set him apart for destruction from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of the Law [i.e., the Old Testament]... There shall no man speak to him, no man write to him, no man show him any kindness, no man stay under the same roof with him, no man come nigh him.

And actually, in a way, no man has ever “come nigh him”, though many brilliant people (such as Einstein, George Santayana, Bertrand Russell, and many others) have certainly tried, and thereby, certainly the Lord was unsuccessful if he tried to “blot out his name under heaven”!

Someday, Dear, you should look at what Spinoza wrote. And I wrote that you should only “look” at what he wrote, because few people can read his books: hundreds of pages of proposition/ theorem/ proof/ lemma/ corollary... seemingly trying to turn philosophy and psychology into algebra and geometry! In particular, in his book on ethics (Part III), in his “Proof” to his “Proposition LVII”, he states:

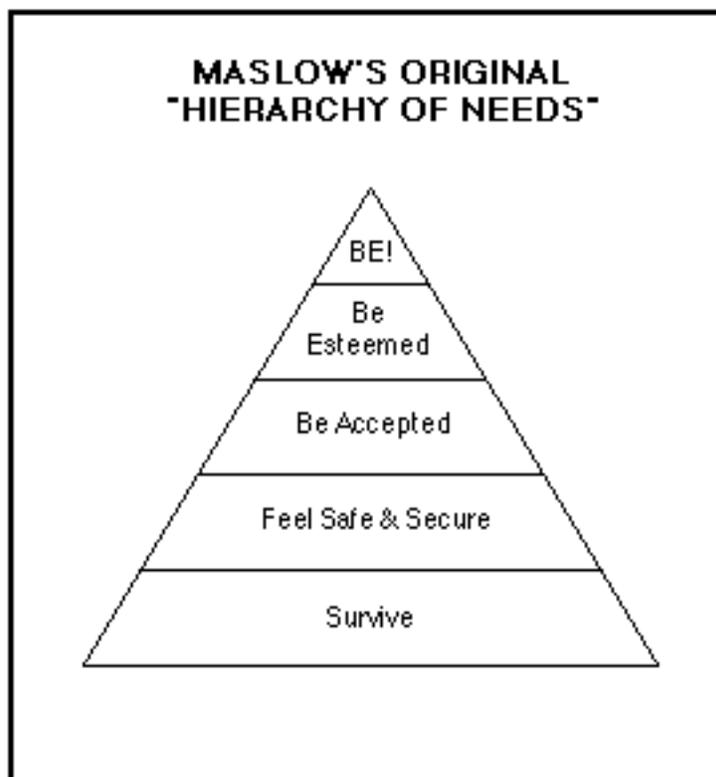
Pleasure and pain... are states or passions whereby every man's power or endeavor to persist in his being is increased or diminished, helped or hindered.

Thereby, Spinoza dug deeper and found more about human goals than did Aristotle and Epicurus: he saw that pleasures are just “survival signals”, telling us that we're succeeding in our goal to “persist in [our] being”. But Spinoza, too, didn't dig deep enough. If our happiness or pleasures are just signals telling us that we're persisting in our being, then why am I pleased, for example, when my grandchild gets an ‘A’ in math? Why would I willingly risk my life to save my grandchild? Why would I willingly risk my life to defeat another Hitler? That is, again, we have a trio of survival goals (of ourselves, our extended families, and our values), and we receive “pleasure signals” when we think that we're make progress toward any of these goals – provided that, simultaneously, we don't “retrogress” too much on some goals while making progress toward others.

MASLOW'S IDEAS ABOUT GOALS

More recently, Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) saw it more clearly. He was born in Brooklyn to uneducated Jewish immigrants from Russia, who then applied more than normal pressure on him to study. Until he was in his early twenties, he floundered (as did Einstein), pursuing the goal (defined by his parents) to become a lawyer. Eventually, though, he set his own goal – and you have been (and will continue to be) influenced by what he uncovered.

Here, I'll try to show you only a brief summary of what Maslow uncovered about human 'needs' or 'motivations' or 'goals'. If you want more details, type "Maslow's hierarchy of needs" in a good internet search engine and you'll get tens of thousands of hits! Below is a sketch of Maslow's original "hierarchy of needs", drawn in the form of a pyramid.



In his hierarchy, five "levels" were identified, whose identification I've abbreviated in the sketch. As you can find on the internet (e.g., below I've quoted from www.wynja.com/personality/needs.html) or as you can find in

almost any elementary psychology book, more complete descriptions of these five levels (starting at the bottom level) usually include the following.

1. *Basic survival (or physiological) needs* (such as air, water, food, elimination of wastes...). In his book *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow wrote:

It seems impossible as well as useless to make any list of fundamental physiological needs, for they can come to almost any number... depending on the degree of specificity of description.

If you would like to consider more items in such a list, Dear, think about what infants demand.

2. *Safety needs*. In his book, Maslow wrote:

If the physiological needs are relatively well gratified, there then emerges a new set of needs, which we may categorize roughly as the safety needs (security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos; need for structure, order, law, and limits; strength in the protector; and so on).

Again, Dear, if you would like to consider more items in this list, then think about what young children seek.

3. *Acceptance needs*. Maslow wrote:

If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs... The love needs involve giving and receiving affection. When they are unsatisfied, a person will feel keenly the absence of friends, mate, or children. Such a person will hunger for relations with people in general – for a place in the group or family – and will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal... The pangs of loneliness, ostracism, rejection, friendliness, and rootlessness are preeminent.

And again, Dear, if you would like to consider these needs in more detail, think about what drives so many teenagers.

4. *Esteem needs*. Maslow wrote:

All people in our society (with a few pathological exceptions) have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others. These needs may therefore be classified into subsidiary sets. These are, first, the desire for strength,

achievement, adequacy, mastery, and competence, confidence in the face of the world, and independence and freedom. Second, we have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige... status, fame, and glory, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, or appreciation.

If you'll think about it, Dear, I expect that you'll see that these "esteem needs" motivate most adults.

5. "*Being*" or "*Self-actualization*" needs. Maslow wrote:

Even if [the first four] needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what he or she, individually, is fitted for... if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What humans *can* be, they *must* be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization.

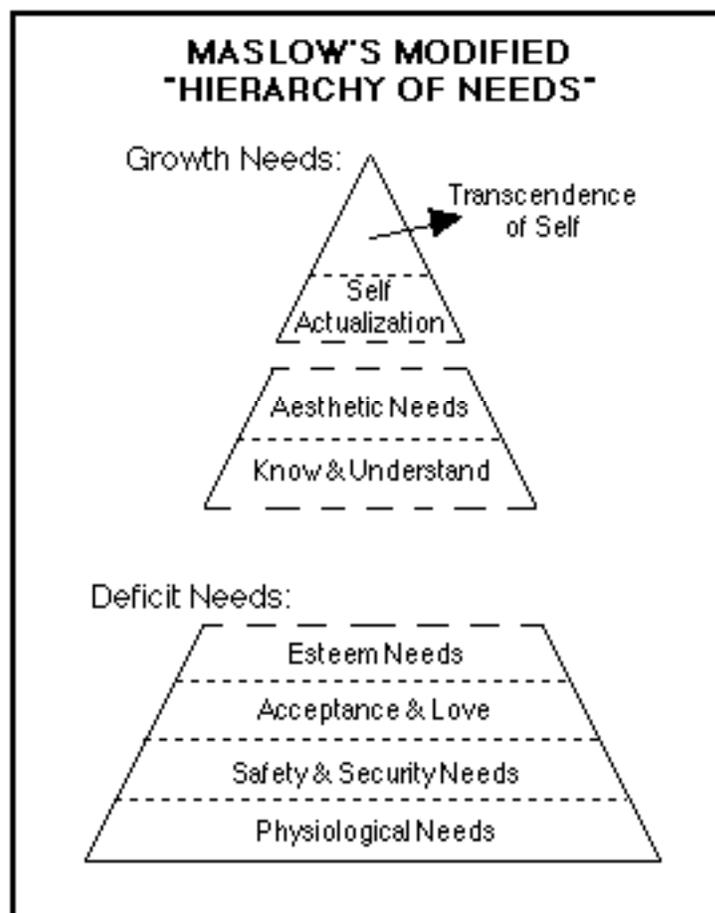
As you can find at www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/maslow.html, Dr. Boeree gives Maslow's list of "needs" that are characteristic of people who are "self-actualized": "truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, transcendence of opposites, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection and necessity, completion, justice and order, simplicity, environmental richness, effortlessness, playfulness, self sufficiency, and meaningfulness."

Now, Dear, if you think that, in general, Maslow was "on to something" with the above scheme, then you're not alone. If you want to see how his findings have influenced and will continue to influence you, then add to the search words "Maslow's hierarchy of needs" additional descriptors such as + "educational methods" or + "consumer choices" or + "management techniques". That is, educators, sales people, and others use knowledge of Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" (or goals) to influence your learning and your consumption. For example, think about some "advertising campaigns" to which you've been subjected (attempting to motivate you to buy something, e.g., for your health, for your financial security, for your desire to belong, for your goal for esteem, or "to be all you can be"). Further, if ever you get a job at a large company, you'll probably find that your boss has been at least exposed to Maslow's ideas, as a part of your employer's desire to motivate you to be "more productive".

In fact, if you'll pause to consider your own experiences, I expect that you'll see how most religious organizations gain "commitments" from their members by manipulating the same motivations, especially those at the

lowest level of the “pyramid”: food, clothing, shelter... safety and security, belonging to a group, with love and affection, and recognition and esteem (the latter especially for men, especially in male-chauvinist religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism). Yet, as I’ll show you in more detail later, all organized religions fail to permit (or even refuse to permit!) their members to become all that they’re capable of becoming.

On the other hand, if you think that Maslow’s scheme could be improved, then again you’re not alone. In fact, in his later studies, Maslow modified his “hierarchy of needs” as shown in the sketch below.



In this modified scheme, notice the addition of three more “growth needs”. The difference between “growth needs” (at the top of his revised pyramid) and “deficit needs”, as defined by Maslow, is in priority. For example, if you have a deficit of food, security, love, or esteem, then you’ll normally set aside your “growth needs” until these “deficit needs” are satisfied. The three “growth needs” added to his pyramid are: 1) to know and understand, 2)

aesthetic needs, and 3) “transcendence of self”. By this need for “transcendence of self”, Maslow recognized the growth need, displayed by many humans, to try to help others (e.g., your desire to help others, “transcending” your desire to help just yourself).

And if, Dear, you are again generally satisfied with Maslow’s scheme, but you remain skeptical, then good – because his scheme has a great many limitations. I won’t list all such limitations that have been identified (you can find many of these on the internet), but here are a few:

- First and foremost, the database that supports Maslow’s scheme is quite limited. He hypothesized his hierarchy of four “deficit needs” from his observations of monkeys (plus, undoubtedly, from his own “common-sense” knowledge of humans). He then added the “self-actualization need” after reading biographies of “self actualized” people [including Spinoza, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and the philosopher and psychologist William James (who had developed his own theories about human motivation, about 50 years before Maslow)] and after interviewing still other people, including Einstein. But in total, that’s a very limited data set from which to generalize about “all people”!
- One result of this “data deficiency” is that Maslow’s resulting hierarchy has been found to be embarrassingly “culturally specific”. For example, as you can find on the internet, studies of Chinese people show that the “deficit need” of “belonging” (to family or other group) is a fundamental need, stronger than many “physiological needs” or “safety and security needs”. As another example, many people (even groups of people, such as monks and nuns) will purposefully forgo many physiological needs (food, warmth, shelter...) and even safety and security needs, leading an “aesthetic life” to pursue some goal considered to be higher in priority.
- And along the same line is the huge quantity of data that demonstrate people will choose some value as their highest goal, disregarding all other “needs” – not only the grandfather who would jump into the river to save his grandchild, but the artist who buys art-supplies rather than food, and Muslim extremists who tie explosives around their waists to die for the “Jihad” (i.e., “holy war”).
- Further, Maslow’s hierarchy overlooks what enormously complicates the “motivations” of many people: by having “more basic needs” withheld (including food, love, membership in some group, esteem, etc.) people have been “indoctrinated” to play various “roles” (e.g., “if you want dinner, then...”, “a good girl would...”, “in our religion, we believe...”). As a result, as I’ll address in later chapters, many if not most people wear a huge number of “masks”, which in many cases are extremely difficult to remove and which conceal even to themselves the “true nature” of their motivations. For example, Dear, I expect that it will be difficult for you to fully appreciate why one of your highest priority goals is to show love and respect for the Lord Jesus Christ.

More generally, there is the following serious limitation of any such general “hierarchy of needs” or “hierarchy of goals”: even if such a scheme were “perfect”, it would be “correct” only for the “general person”; you, however, are unique!

Therefore, Dear, if you will consider the limitations of such ideas by such brilliant people as Aristotle, Epicurus, Spinoza, and Maslow (as well as others), then I hope you’ll become encouraged! “Encouraged” because you have available to you the most brilliant and most knowledgeable person in the world to help you identify the priorities for your goals: you! “All” you need to do is take the time and make the effort to “listen to yourself”, assemble your own Board of Governors, and evaluate their goals.

IDEAS FOR YOUR EVALUATION OF YOUR GOALS

That is, Dear, neither I nor anyone else will ever be able to identify for you the priorities for your goals. There is only one person who knows you (or will ever know you) well enough, namely, you. Every experience of your life has influenced you in a unique way; from all such unique experiences, you have established your priorities – and only you will ever know what these are. Therefore, Dear, all I can do is show you what I do for me, but thereby, maybe you can glean some ideas that are useful also for you.

In that spirit, let me show you what I do. That is, Dear, I show you the following not because I expect that the same is “right” for you, but because, by showing you what I do, maybe you’ll be able to discern what’s right for you. Thus, as I tried to show you in **B**, data suggest to me that all humans pursue their trio of survival goals (of themselves, their extended families, and their values). Where people differ is in our choices of values – and let me add that a prime goal of this book will be to try to show you how I think all humans could make progress by evaluating their “value choices”. If I then restate my resulting goals, as defined by my Board of Governors (“Body”, “Left Brain”, “Right Brain”, and “Universe”), in the form of “Maslow’s pyramid”, the result is as sketched below.



But although the above may summarize my understanding of my goals, actually, it's not what I review when I'm walking. As I mentioned in **B**, I started digging to try to understand my goals, by:

making two huge lists, one of everything that made me happy (gave me pleasure) and the other of everything that made me sad (caused me pain). Dear, I encourage you to do the same for you. I then tried to understand (analyze) what it was in each that caused me pleasure or pain. The result... was very simple: I was happy when I was receiving "feedback signals" that I was surviving; sad, otherwise.

As in **B**, Dear, I again encourage you to create a similar list for yourself. Here, let me show you some details of my resulting list – an outline of which I review with 'E' when I'm walking.

I started this list in about 1980. After I had make the original two lists (one listing what makes me happy; the other, sad), I then tried to organize the two lists of topics into various groups of similar "subjects". The result (especially for those topics that made me happy) was something that, for me,

was memorable – especially because I found that leading letters spelled out the word Eugene (the name of the city near where you used to live). By the way, I also “constructed” a corresponding “poem”, but because it’s one of my worst, I’ll not include it.

Although my resulting list of “enjoyments” didn’t show priorities, the list reminded me of what I’ve found enjoyable. Further, I should emphasize that I created this list ~30 years ago, and the identified “enjoyments” are then generally “applicable” only for when the list was created. For example, at that time, a certain grandchild wasn’t even born...! Further, at that time (common for silly humans!), I (foolishly) didn’t focus on the enjoyments that were already satisfied! If I had been hungry, then I would have emphasized eating; if lonely, then friendship; failing, success; and so on.

So, Dear, not only do I expect this list to be of little value to you, it’s now of limited value even to me (now that I am retired, have grandchildren, and so on). Nonetheless, let me show you what I created and what to this day I still remember when I’m walking:

E – Evaluating Endeavors. My endeavors: to add to this collective consciousness and to enjoy EUGENE’S (Existing, Understanding, Gaining control, Exploration, New Experiences, Survival signals), with a little style!

Now, because probably these “goals” appear to be different from those I described in **B**, maybe I should add some explanations. Foremost, please recall that I claim “only” that our trio of survival goals (of ourselves, our extended families, and our values) are our prime goals, not that they’re our only goals. Thus, in the above list are included some of my lower priority goals, in particular, some activities that I’ve found “make me happy”.

For example, when I recall *My endeavor is to add to this collective consciousness...* it both reminds me that I find pleasure in accomplishments and it stimulates me to try to accomplish more. When I was still working as a scientist, it stimulated to be as good a scientist as I was capable of being, for I felt it was my way of paying my debt to the past (to those who provided me with quilts, computers, and quantum mechanics – and spoons!). And now that I’ve retired from science, it still stimulates me to try to “add to this collective consciousness”, for example, to finish writing this book, which perhaps will help certain grandchildren as well as other youngsters.

* Go to other chapters via

<http://zenofzero.net/>

As for the rest of what I review (using the acronym EUGENE'S), I realize that much is subsumed by my trio of survival goals (for example, I enjoy “understanding” and “gaining control” because they give me signals that I’m surviving), but still, I “enjoy” listing them separately. In particular, I find it useful to remind myself of the pleasure just in “existing” (experiencing all sensory inputs), and I know that “exploration and new experiences” is a prod to remind me to “try something new”.

But in case you consider adopting something similar, Dear, I should add: When exploring for new experiences, be careful! In particular, I would call your attention to the following two summaries:

1. *Constrain dangerous experiences with reasoned care*

Thus, Dear, this book’s only advice about which I’m adamant and which I follow religiously is: stay off those damn roller coaster rides, you nut! Fun’s fun, kid, but constrain dangerous experiences with reasoned care. As for the dangerous experience of partaking in mind warping drugs, surely even a roller-coaster fanatic wouldn’t be that foolish.

2. *Constrain unreasonable emotions with experiences*

Certainly our emotions (our right-brain syntheses) can be valuable (judged relative to our dual survival goals), but left-brain analyses can discern that some of our emotions are unreasonable, maybe especially those derived from irrational fears, and these can usually be constrained *via* relevant experiences: a child’s fear of monsters under her bed, for example, can usually be allayed by examining (with the light on!) exactly what’s under her bed; an adult’s fear of certain “classes” of people (Blacks, Jews, Muslims...) can usually be allayed by getting to know and learning to enjoy the company of some of those feared, and anyone’s irrational fear of some activity (swimming, scuba diving, skiing, riding horses...) can usually be allayed by carefully engaging in such activities. On the other hand, some fears (such as riding in those crazy roller coasters) are perfectly justified and such activities should be undertaken only by crazy kids!

Meanwhile, the condition that I put on my seeking “survival signals”, namely, “with a little style”, is added just because I enjoy surviving “with a little style”! But if my Left Brain evaluates this emotion against data, the result is as follows.

PURSUING ENDEAVORS WITH A LITTLE STYLE

From our “universe of experiences” (including from our culture), we learn about and decide upon what we think is better (or best) among various options. From these, each of us reaches some conclusions about what does and what doesn’t have “style”, and what is and isn’t “honorable”. In particular, we learn that sometimes it’s better to reject a survival signal than violate our sense of honor.

Each of us must decide on these conditions for ourselves. And I have found that, looking back at how I pursued my “survival signals”, I’m more pleased if I see that I pursued them “with a little style”. And on the other side of the coin, I know the pain of pursuing “survival signals” if I abandon my values or my sense of honor – although this doesn’t mean that there isn’t pain in rejecting the survival signals, too – but we can’t have our cake and eat it too! To illustrate, let me give you a few examples.

Without giving much thought to what would be the best examples, let me first mention one that immediately comes to mind. A hundred-or-so years ago, I wanted to thank the members of my Ph.D. steering committee for the time they had spent helping me. Incidentally, one member was from China, the other was from what was then Sudan, and the third fellow – not a very kind individual – was from England, and all were teaching at an American university, judging if this Canadian should get his Ph.D. Anyway, I wanted to thank them for their time, but of course I didn’t want to thank them after my final exam: if I passed the exam, my thanks would seem superficial; if I failed, I don’t know if I would have wanted to thank them!

So, the evening before my final exam, I went to a liquor store and bought each of them an (expensive!) bottle of French champagne, wrote each the note, “No matter the outcome, thank you for your time”, and arranged that the champagne would be delivered the next evening, after my exam would have been complete. Okay, it’s minor – but that’s a little example of what I mean by “style.” Years later, I read that, for his final exam, Feynman wore a rented tuxedo! I smiled at his style.

Okay, another example. During my career I’ve encountered a number of people whom I call “tyrants”. They abused their “authority”. The old adage warns “power corrupts”, but that doesn’t mean power must corrupt (only

* Go to other chapters *via*

that it frequently does). Anyway, looking back at my career, I take some pleasure in seeing that I did what I could to remove such tyrants from their little thrones. That, alone, is some evidence of what I call “style” (not to tolerate tyrants), but also, in my efforts, I endeavored to “dethrone” such people with techniques that I considered “stylish”. For example, the “coup de grâce” that I used to remove a dictatorial Dean at one of the universities where I taught was a poem that I wrote to the University’s President. (I’ll spare you the pain of the poem, in part because I don’t know where – or even if – I have a copy!)

And let me add a sad but perhaps enlightening postscript to that story. After I delivered the poem to the President, gave it to fellow faculty members, the Dean was fired, and I had left for another job, the faculty member who was the real target of this dictatorial Dean’s manipulations, the faculty member who I had been protecting and to whom I had given a copy of the poem, used a gun to commit suicide. I don’t know why; I hope he didn’t think that I had been fired for trying to protect him; he may have thought that all he could do, with style, was to end his life. If so, he obviously had some very confused thoughts about “how to survive, with a little style.”

That sadness aside, let me mention another case. With another fellow from another laboratory, I was co-authoring a chapter of a book dealing with air pollution. The book’s editor chose us because my co-author was considered an expert with experimental aspects of the subject and I, with the theory. What the editor mustn’t have known, though, was that I had published a paper demonstrating that the experimental techniques used by my co-author (and many others) was fundamentally flawed, rendering all his data essentially worthless (or, actually, worse than useless, for at a cost to taxpayers of tens of millions of dollars, the result was pollution of the scientific literature with flawed data). As might have been expected, when we reached this subject in the writing of the chapter, we hit an impasse.

Thereupon, my co-author suggested that we have the world’s most competent fellow in the subject area be the judge of who was right. When this “judge” first responded, he concluded that I was in error – which of course was greeted with delight by my co-author. So I wrote back to this judge, explaining my theory in more detail, showing him his error, and asking him to reconsider the matter. I enclosed a check to him for \$100, inviting him to keep the money if he could prove (mathematically) that I was in error.

* Go to other chapters *via*

Maybe to some people that doesn't seem to have much style, but I thought it did (and still think it does), because it showed that I kept my sense of humor. And the judge, too, showed style: he sent the check back by return mail with the note: "You certainly have a way of catching a person's attention, but if I accepted the money, I would jeopardize my amateur status!" [And by the way, Dear, to complete the story, in about a week he wrote both of us, stating that he now understood my theory, he agreed that I was right, and therefore, that my co-author's published data were fundamentally flawed.]

And my fourth and final example (also presented here without much thought – whoops, without much style!) is another example that deals with "the darker side". In this case I experienced even worse than a tyrant (although he displayed some of that), namely, a "traitor", in that (when I was his supervisor and thought he was a friend) it was I who put the fellow in his position of administrative power, a power which he then used against me.²

I won't go into details. Let me just summarize by saying that, for about five years, he put me through hell. I came as close as I imagine that I'll ever come to contemplating killing another human – not necessarily out of revenge (although maybe some), but because I was certain that such a human should not be permitted to live to damage still other lives – as he later did. He was the kind of person who, if ever he went out on thin ice, and it cracked, and he fell in, I became convinced that I would throw him a rope. All of it!

I know that my hate for that traitor was consuming me. As the Chinese philosopher Confucius said in about 500 BCE: "Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves." But then I came across an old line (which I subsequently learned is a slightly modified version of a line written

² In an amazing pamphlet (available at <http://www.lysanderspooner.org/notreason.htm>) self-published in 1867 by Lysander Spooner, "one of the nation's most brilliant legal minds", he gave the following description of a 'traitor':

The true and legitimate meaning of the word treason, then, necessarily implies treachery, deceit, breach of faith. Without these, there can be no treason. A traitor is a betrayer – one who practices injury, while professing friendship. Benedict Arnold was a traitor, solely because, while professing friendship for the American cause, he attempted to injure it. An open enemy, however criminal in other respects, is no traitor. Neither does a man, who has once been my friend, become a traitor by becoming an enemy, if before doing me an injury, he gives me fair warning that he has become an enemy; and if he makes no unfair use of any advantage which my confidence, in the time of our friendship, had placed in his power.

by George Herbert, 1599–1633), and ever since, I’ve tried to follow this advice, which I expect is the best example that I’ll ever find of surviving “with a little style” (or, better, “with a **lot** of style”):

The best revenge is to live well.

Well, sorry, Dear, but would you please look at that line again: “The best revenge is to live well.” Herbert wrote: “Living well is the best revenge.” Please spend some time thinking about that idea. Think about what a potential enemy would seek, namely, to damage your life. Then, think about what this author is recommending how to achieve “revenge”: certainly not by killing your enemy; indeed, probably ignore him, and with your released energy, focus on living well – which is exactly the reverse of what your enemy seeks! So, you defeat your enemy, without having anything to do with him, and in the process, you enjoy your life. An absolutely brilliant strategy! A brilliant idea: “The best revenge is to live well.” Its creator has added enormously to our collective consciousness.

Now, Dear, I know that I haven’t described well what I mean by ‘style’, and maybe I shouldn’t try, because no doubt your idea of ‘style’ is different from mine – as it should be. Nonetheless, let me add a quotation showing what the mathematician, scientist, philosopher, educator Alfred Whitehead (1861–1947) wrote about ‘style’:

The sense for style... is an aesthetic sense, based on admiration for the direct attainment of a foreseen end, simply and without waste. Style in art, style in literature, style in science, style in logic, style in practical execution have fundamentally the same aesthetic qualities, namely, attainment and restraint... Style, in its finest sense, is the last acquirement of the educated mind; it is also the most useful. It pervades the whole being. The administrator with a sense for style hates waste; the engineer with a sense for style economizes his material; the artisan with a sense for style prefers good work. Style is the ultimate morality of the mind.

Meanwhile, Dear, I wouldn’t be surprised if you’re disappointed with “the style” I’ve displayed in this chapter. I’m painfully aware that I won’t have helped you much to accomplish what you’ll need to do, evaluating your own endeavors. I’ll try to do more in later chapters (in **G** and **H**, dealing with “**G**oals in this **G**ame of Life”, with “**H**appiness”, and with “**H**ope”), but first, in the next chapter (**F**, dealing with **F**eelings), I want to comment on the difficult task of digging to try to understand one’s emotions. To end this chapter, let me restate a fundamental point.

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Dear, during your life, a huge number of people will try to influence your choice of goals, including parents, teachers, clerics, employers, as well as many others throughout our society, including advertisers and politicians. I don't wish to be included in such a list of people trying to influence your choice of goals. I admit, however, that I'll try to influence your choice of values and that I'll try to show you how to "dig", so you can evaluate (and understand) your own goals. Thus, I hold the view that it's for you, not anyone else, to set your goals – but still, it'll take some effort on your part to evaluate your goals, to determine which ones are your own ideas and which belong to others.