



TIPPY GNU

THE LOGIC OF LIFE & DEATH

HOW TO LIVE YOUR LIFE BY
RESOLVING THE DEEP
MYSTERIES OF THE HERE AND
HEREAFTER

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LOGIC
OF
LIFE
&
DEATH**

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Deep Mysteries of the here and hereafter**

Tippy Gnu

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INTRODUCTION

THE DEEP MYSTERIES of life and death can leave you feeling confused. It's hard to know how to direct your life when you're unsure how to answer questions like, "What is life? How does your mind work? Is there life after death? What is the other side like?"

The key to knowing how to direct your life lies in knowing how to answer the deep metaphysical questions about it. This is why there are so many religions in our world. People use these institutions to help them resolve the Deep Mysteries. They know that by resolving these mysteries they'll find guidance on how to live their lives.

Religious leaders often provide answers by using an air of authority, an appeal to faith, and a reference to perdition. None of these answers use the scientific method to establish proof. And careful analysis almost always reveals inconsistencies in their logic.

In fact the realm of the metaphysical is unknowable to us humans. Not even the most sophisticated science can penetrate its veil. No one can reliably guarantee that their answers to the Deep Mysteries are accurate.

So if these answers are unknowable, how do you find the guidance you need for how to live your life?

I believe the best approach available is to resolve the Deep Mysteries using logic. Logic by itself cannot prove anything scientifically. But it can provide a multitude of answers that make sense and that are consistent with each other.

The more sense they make, and the more consistent they are, the more capable you are of figuring out how to live your life.

So I explore the Deep Mysteries of life and death utilizing logic. My purpose is to provide you with carefully thought out and carefully analyzed answers to matters metaphysical.

Then it will be up to you to believe my answers or not. I present them in a manner intended to make sense, and intended to give you the guidance you need, to know how to live your life.

But I don't tell you specifically how to live. My advice is kept very general, respecting your autonomy, and recognizing that you know much better than me what is best for you.

The Deep Mysteries of life and death may elude science. But I have discovered that they do not elude the philosophy of logic. Turn the pages and discover for yourself.

Life and death may never seem the same to you again.

PART 1:

THE
LOGIC
OF
LIFE

HOW SHOULD YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE?

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

THIS IS A QUESTION you have to face every moment of every day. “How should you live your life?” It doesn’t matter what you’re doing—whether it’s a small task or large endeavor. Everything you do is based on a decision concerning how you should live your life.

Go to work or stay home: Do you prefer to live your life by being productive and sharing your creativity with others? Or do you prefer to avoid the pressures and stress of the workplace, that seem to dehumanize you?

Get married or stay single: Are you wanting to live your life committed to one special person? Or would you rather live independent and free from having to accommodate someone else in your home?

Commit a crime or obey the law: Are you wanting to resist the restrictive rules of society? Or do you prefer to be accepted and trusted by the established institutions of your community?

These or any other question you may face are all derived from the one ultimate question, “How should you live your life?”

So this ultimate question is of absolute importance. And the way you answer any other question will influence how you do live your life.

DANGER IN THE ANSWERS

This ultimate question of questions has been answered in many, many different ways, in every church sermon, every sacred book, every self-help book, every law passed, and every piece of advice you have ever received. The world is awash in answers to this question. And the answers often draw ire.

Don’t you really get ticked off when someone tells you how to live your life? And consider how many fights have developed between two people when one has tried to control the life of the other in some way.

Politics and government, and all the disputes that accompany them, are entirely based on people telling people how they should live their lives. And every war that has ever been fought began when one country tried to

tell another country what to do. Telling others how to live their lives can lead to rankled emotions, strained relations, and even violence.

This is because we all have a powerful need for autonomy—to exercise our innate freedom to live our own lives as we choose. We as individuals know best how to make ourselves happy. And so we defend our personal freedom with zeal.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

I value individual freedom. So the purpose of this book is not to ask you to surrender your autonomy or lock you into one specific way for living your life. Instead I'm going to give you advice that is limited to broad general suggestions.

I'm just going to tell you how life and death work (according to my logic), and suggest some very general methods you can employ to make life and death work better for you. Then you'll make your decision whether or not to believe me. And even if you do believe me, I will have no specific prescriptions for how you should act on your newfound beliefs. I'm leaving that all up to you.

It won't be hard. I think you're pretty good at figuring out how to live your own life.

But I hope that the beliefs and philosophies presented in this book will give you inspiration. And I hope this will help you find ways to derive more enjoyment and success from your life than whatever you're getting now.

One day you're going to kick the bucket. Living your life can also involve preparing for death. And if there is life after death, you'll be real glad you made those preparations.

So one of the Deep Mysteries this book addresses is how to prepare for death. If you make preparations that you feel confident with, you'll have some assurance of safety when you ponder your own inevitable demise.

A LOGICAL APPROACH

I'm approaching the subjects of life and death with logic. So let's use logic to look at the first question I've asked:

How should you live your life?

Your ability to follow my logic can be helped if you understand what I mean when I use the word "you" in the question.

More specifically, you need to know the answer to the following question:

Just exactly who are “you” anyway?

WHO ARE YOU?

HAVE YOU EVER ASKED YOURSELF, “Who am I, really?” Self-identity is a haunting mystery. It prompts one of the most elusive questions we human beings ask ourselves.

MAXIMUM ISOLATION

Imagine traveling to the edge of the universe, and then going beyond. Suppose you could find a place in space where there is complete darkness. A place where not even starlight could reach you. Suppose, in fact, that nothing could reach you to influence your mind. Let’s call this place Maximum Isolation.

When you’re in Maximum Isolation, nothing can contact you, and no other being can communicate with you. You’re left alone with only your own mind for company. Now suppose you’ve been in this isolation for so long that all memory of having been anywhere else has completely faded away. So in this state of complete isolation and blank memory, who exactly are you? What do you consist of?

All you would have under this circumstance is your own mind. But your mind is nothing when it has no memories, and when there are no outside stimuli to influence it. This is because your mind is what it is consciously aware of. If your mind is consciously aware of nothing, then your mind is nothing. Something must be contained within your mind, in the form of awareness, before your mind can be anything.

If your mind becomes aware of something, then your mind becomes the awareness of that thing. It cannot know for sure that the thing it is aware of truly exists. But it can know that it is aware of it.

This means that your mind is the awareness of things it perceives. And since your mind is the only thing you truly possess, your mind is you. And since your mind is you, then you are the awareness of the things you perceive.

It’s impossible to be anything else other than this awareness. So in Maximum Isolation, where you are aware of nothing, you are nothing. Because you perceive nothing. Maximum Isolation is zero; it is a state of non-existence.

THE BEGINNING OF CREATION

Now imagine moving away from Maximum Isolation to a place where starlight can reach you, and your mind is able to detect the starlight. Now your mind would be influenced by light, and would be able to form a perception of light. Not only that, but your mind would be able to detect a contrast. It would know that darkness exists, because it would realize that where there is no light, there is darkness. And so your mind would contain two perceptions: that of light and that of darkness. And therefore that would become your self-identity. You would be the awareness of light and darkness.

But something else would be contained within your mind. For your mind has an innate ability to be creative. All your mind needs is two perceptions in order for its creativity to be able to function. The mind of any being will take two perceptions and combine them to create a third perception. The perception may be imaginary, and purely conceptual in form. But if your mind is aware of this imaginary conceptual form, then it perceives it.

So here you are in this initial situation where your mind has formed the perception of light and darkness. Your creativity would now automatically combine these two perceptions to form a third perception, that I will call grayness. Grayness is a midway point between the two extremes of absolute light and absolute dark. So now, after this automatic creativity takes place, your self-identity would be that of the awareness of light, darkness, and grayness.

Not only that, but you would be aware that you created something. So your mind would also be the awareness of your own creativity.

And from here your creativity would take two of the three perceptions currently in your mind and use them to create a new perception—a new kind of grayness. And on and on it would work, creating infinitely more perceptions out of the perceptions it creates, corresponding to the infinite shades of gray possible between absolute light and absolute dark.

This means that your mind becomes capable of infinite creativity as soon as it has available two perceptions for the beginning of the creative process. And this infinite creativity makes your self-identity infinite.

Thus, you are the awareness of the infinite creativity that is constantly going on in your mind.

THE MANY ASPECTS OF YOU

Your mind also has the capacity for remembering perceptions it creates. The awareness of remembered perceptions is also part of you, for as long as you retain such perceptions in your memory.

Your mind even has the capacity to be aware that it is aware. And so you are also the awareness of awareness.

Your awareness is constantly shifting around, moving at lightning-fast speed amongst all of the sensations you perceive, and amongst all of the perceptions stored in your memory. It never stays in one place for longer than an instant. As it moves around at such a high rate of speed, all of the things you are aware of coalesce into one single impression of the present moment you are in. This is very similar to the way motion pictures work. Motion pictures consist of many still photos that flicker rapidly before your eye, giving you the impression of action.

Like motion pictures, your awareness consists of many still moments of perception coming from your senses and current memory, that give you the impression of a continuous flow of the present moment, where all of your senses and current memory are integrated together to form consciousness. And your awareness of what you are conscious of in the present moment is an aspect of who you are.

You are the awareness of what you are conscious of.

Your mind can return to a perception repeatedly, because your mind is also capable of conscious direction. You can consciously will your mind to shift its awareness more frequently to one perception than to others. This is how your mind focuses. This ability to focus means that you are the awareness of conscious direction, and you are the awareness of what your mind focuses on.

And so you are many, many things. You are the awareness of all the perceptions that outside stimuli, such as light and darkness, have inspired in your mind. You are the awareness of your own creativity. You are the awareness of the perceptions your own mind creates. You are the awareness of the perceptions you have memorized. You are the awareness of your awareness. You are the awareness of what you are conscious of. You are the awareness of conscious direction. And you are the awareness of whatever you are focused on.

And you are more than just these things . . .

YOU ARE THE AWARENESS OF THE MATRIX

In our Maximum Isolation situation that we have imagined, you have only come into contact with starlight. Now, suppose you come into contact with other living beings. And suppose they communicate with

you, and you with them. Now they are sharing their perceptions with you, and you are sharing your perceptions with them. You are taking their perceptions, combining them with your own, and creating new perceptions that are more exotic than you could come up with on your own.

So your whole life experience becomes enriched far beyond what you can do for yourself as a single living being. This is because you now have available to you the perceptions created by other minds. Your infinite self-identity expands exponentially when exposed to other minds. You become not just the awareness of what you have created for your own mind. You also become the awareness of what others have created for their minds, that they have shared with you. And you become the awareness of the new perceptions you create from those that others have shared with you. And so you become the awareness of mutually created perceptions that originate from mutual interaction with the minds of others.

And so you are not just the awareness of you. You are also the awareness of others.

There are countless living beings in our universe that we share perceptions with. All living beings interact and communicate with each other in a complex matrix that gives rise to creativity far exceeding what any one living being can create alone. You are the awareness of that matrix. This is because you are the awareness of whatever your mind contains. As long as your mind has access to that matrix, your mind contains that matrix. And that makes your awareness of your own mind, and your awareness of the matrix, one and the same.

YOU ARE IMPERMANENT

Now, you have a name that you have applied to yourself. Let's say it's John Smith. But what you have really done is applied your name to the perceptions you have experienced in life. You say to yourself, "I, John Smith, have experienced this. I, John Smith, remember that." But you are not really John Smith. You are actually the awareness of experiences and memories that you have applied a name to.

These experiences and memories are constantly changing, with the constant creativity going on in your own mind and in the universe. Therefore your awareness is constantly changing. You are not the being you were a moment ago. And you will not be the same being a moment from now. You are constantly dying and being reborn every moment. "John Smith" gets a new definition, each and every passing moment of every day.

And so you are also impermanent. You are never the same being from one moment to the next.

YOU ARE WHAT YOUR MIND CONTAINS

And so, who are you?

You are what your mind contains. You are the awareness of an infinite array of perceptions that are constantly changing, within a vast matrix of infinite creativity.

WHAT IS LIFE?

YOU NOW KNOW who “you” are, which partly helps in understanding the ultimate question of questions, “How should you live your life?” That was the purpose of the last chapter. But it also helps to know what I mean by the word “life,” before the full question can be logically answered. That is the purpose of this chapter.

LIFE IS CHANGE

Life is change. Nothing living is permanent. And anything that is impermanent is alive. All things change. And therefore, all things are alive.

Alive does not necessarily mean something has mental awareness. Mental awareness is only found in sentient things. But insentient things, such as minerals, liquids, and gases, are alive too. They are alive in the sense that they change.

So since everything changes, you cannot escape life. Life is everywhere you go. Even dead bodies are alive. They are slowly decomposing. In a state of decay. Changing from the way they were composed when they were occupied by conscious awareness. Therefore they are alive in their own way, too.

Imagine if everything stayed the same. The world would be frozen. Nothing would move or change in any way. Nothing would be alive. That is death.

And so you see, death is impossible. At least in the context that it is impossible to make everything stay the same. Therefore nothing is dead and nothing can be dead. There can only be life.

As for your life—your life consists of conscious awareness of change. And because there is nothing you can be aware of that does not change, it is logical to define your life as being the conscious awareness of change.

DEGREE OF CHANGE DETERMINES
AMOUNT OF LIFE AVAILABLE

Even the amount of life is subject to change. Sometimes things change a small amount. Other times things change a large amount. The degree of change determines the amount of life that is available at any given moment.

But the amount of change in your external environment is somewhat independent of the amount of change you actually experience within the awareness of your mind. You can be aware of small degrees of change, and you can be aware of large degrees of change, depending upon how you use the focus of your awareness. Therefore, sometimes you have less life and sometimes you have more life, depending upon how much change your mind's focus has made you aware of.

CREATIVITY CAUSES LIFE

You can also affect the degree of change by being creative. I showed you in the last chapter that your mind is creative whenever it combines perceptions to create new perceptions, such as by combining the perceptions of light and dark to create grayness. But the actual process of creativity is more involved. Because actually your mind is creative whenever you think, say or do anything. Everything you think, say or do creates new perceptions, which causes some degree of change in your world.

New perceptions can be very different or very similar to perceptions already stored in your memory. The more different they are, the more unique they are. And the more unique they are, the more change they cause.

And the more of this change you're aware of, the more life you have. This means you can affect the amount of life you have by affecting the amount of creativity and consequent change you produce. The more creative you are, the more life you have. The less creative you are, the less life you have.

Therefore creativity causes life.

SOCIAL INTERACTION CAUSES LIFE

When your mind interacts with the minds of others, you become aware of the perceptions that they have created. This adds to your life, because the perceptions derived from others increases the amount of change that you're aware of. The more you interact with others, the more new perceptions you become aware of, and therefore the more change you become aware of.

And so, social interaction increases the amount of change that you're aware of. This increases the amount of life you have for yourself. And this means that the amount of life you have depends partly upon the amount of social interaction you have.

A SUMMARY OF CREATIVITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

We can sum this up by saying that creativity causes change, and change is life. Therefore, creativity causes life. Social interaction also creates change, and change is life. Therefore, social interaction causes life. The more creativity and social interaction you have, the more life you have. And the less creativity and social interaction you have, the less life you have.

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION REFRAMED

Let's now return to the ultimate question of questions, "How should you live your life?"

In the last chapter we determined that "you" are the awareness of an infinite array of perceptions that are constantly changing, within a vast matrix of infinite creativity. And in this chapter we have determined that "life" is change. More specifically, we have determined that your life is the conscious awareness of change. And we have also determined that the amount of life you have is affected by the amount of creativity and social interaction you engage in.

So let's reframe the question to reflect what we mean by the words "you" and "life." Let us now say that the ultimate question of questions is:

How should you—the awareness of an infinite array of perceptions that are constantly changing, within a vast matrix of infinite creativity—determine what changes you will be consciously aware of?

You may already have an answer to this question. But I believe you can improve your answer when the deeper mysteries of life and death are understood. These mysteries will be explored in the chapters that follow.

HOW DOES YOUR MIND WORK?

AWARENESS SHIFTS QUICKLY

YOUR MIND can only be aware of one perception at a time. There's no such thing as omniscience. You cannot know all things at one time. In fact you can't even know more than one thing at a time.

This is borne out by logic. It's logical that you can't physically be in more than one place at a time. It's also logical to say that your mind is connected to your body. Therefore if your mind could be in more than one place at a time, then so could your body.

Consider that it's impossible to think more than one thought at a time. Try thinking two thoughts at once without moving your focus back and forth, and you'll see this for yourself. Because this is impossible, it's logical to conclude that the point of your awareness cannot be in more than one spot at a time.

Instead your mind's awareness has to shift from one perception to another in order to be aware of all the things going on in its environment.

So while you're aware of something you're seeing, you're unable to be aware of any sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, emotions or thoughts. But when your awareness shifts to sounds, you become blind. You can no longer be aware of what you're seeing. And you continue to be unaware of smells, tastes, physical sensations, emotions and thoughts. Whatever sense you are aware of at any given moment is the only sense you can be aware of. Your awareness must shift to a particular sense in order for you to perceive that sense.

Fortunately awareness shifts very quickly. In fact you cannot be aware of one perception for any longer than an instant. Your awareness constantly shifts from one perception to another at lightning-fast speed, and it's this rapid speed that can fool you. Awareness shifts so quickly it gives you the illusion that you're aware of many things at once.

Suppose you're observing the inside of a house. Your mind will be aware of all of the things you see in the room of the house you're in. You'll be aware of any people, the furniture, the walls, the ceiling, floor, the windows, and anything you can see through the windows.

You'll also be aware of sounds in the room, as well as sounds coming from elsewhere. There may be sounds of voices talking, or footsteps, or passing traffic, or maybe the wind.

You'll be aware of smells in the house.

If you're eating something, you'll be aware of the taste of the food.

You'll also be aware of physical sensations. If you're standing it will be the feeling of your feet on the floor, and any other physical sensations associated with the standing posture. Or if you're sitting it will be the feeling of your body as it reclines against the surface of a chair.

And you'll be aware of your emotions and thoughts arising in your mind.

You'll be aware of all of these things: visual scenes, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, emotions and thoughts. And it will seem to you like you're aware of them all at once. But this is just an illusion. Your mind will actually be darting from one thing to another at lightning-fast speed. Your awareness will move so fast, it will connect all of these things together into one overall comprehensive experience of the house you're in.

AWARENESS OF CHANGE

Your mind will also be aware of change. This is because everything in the house will be changing. Therefore, every time your mind shifts back to something it was aware of before, it will be somewhat different.

For instance, the people might move about to different locations in the house. Or they might change their posture, or change the actions they are engaging in. The furniture will change. The change will probably be imperceptible. But if somebody moves a piece of furniture, or sets something upon it, the change will be more significant. The walls will change, either in an imperceptible way or perhaps you'll notice shifting shadows on the walls or something else significant. And the ceiling, floors and windows will change in some slight or significant degree.

Changes will occur in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical sensations. And your emotions and thoughts will also change, moving from one feeling to another, and one concept to another.

All of these changes will result in your mind being aware of change, as it shifts its awareness about. Change is life. So for as long as your mind shifts its awareness about from one thing to another in the house, it will experience life in the house.

CHANGE = LIFE = ENJOYMENT

Let's now step outside the house for a moment and consider the following theory about life:

Life is automatically enjoyed. So the more life you have, the more enjoyment you have.

This theory is accurate because it is of utmost importance that your mind stays alive. But your mind needs motivation to stay alive. And there is no greater motivation than the motivation of enjoyment. Therefore it makes logical sense that your mind's method for staying alive would be to use the greatest motivation—enjoyment—as its motivator.

So your mind is designed in such a way that the motivation it employs to stay alive is enjoyment. And this enjoyment is produced from life itself.

Since enjoyment is produced by life, and since life is change, then it's logical to conclude that enjoyment is produced by change. Therefore whenever your mind experiences change, it automatically enjoys that change.

Or to put it another way, since life is automatically enjoyed, then change is also automatically enjoyed.

This means that change is desirable. Your mind is motivated to have as much change as possible in order to have as much enjoyment and life as possible.

Let's go back inside the house. According to the theory you've just learned, the more change your mind is aware of in the house the more you're going to enjoy being in the house. So your challenge is to become aware of as much change as possible in order for you to enjoy your stay in the house as much as possible.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

There's not much challenge to finding change. Change is always occurring. The real challenge is in making it occur in greater amounts. And it's also important to avoid change that makes further change occur in lesser amounts.

In the house scenario, suppose you're looking for a way to experience more change. So you decide to physically attack everyone in your near vicinity. Of course this will cause a lot of change initially. People may get frightened and may scream and yell. But then everyone may run out of the house and leave you alone.

Now, with no other people in the house, your mind's awareness will shift around to objects that are mostly inanimate and that will change very little. These objects will offer very little change to your mind. Soon your level of enjoyment will decrease until it reaches a level of boredom.

This is the sort of thing that happens when you're not careful about how you create change in your life. Change can be very complicated. There are factors that must be considered carefully whenever you plan ways to create change in your life. The better your planning, the more effective you will be at causing more change rather than less; and the more enjoyment you will thus have.

And so it is important to understand the factors of change.

THE FACTOR OF AWARENESS

The first factor of change is awareness. You must have awareness of change before it can bring you enjoyment. Suppose you're sitting in the house while a lot of intense action is going on behind your back. If you cannot see, hear, or feel that action, you won't be aware of it. And therefore it will bring you no enjoyment.

This makes awareness an important factor to understand when considering the factors of change.

FOCUS

But as I stated earlier in this chapter, your mind can't be aware of one thing for any longer than an instant. It's constantly shifting its awareness from one thing to another at lightning-fast speed. Your mental condition could get pretty chaotic under these circumstances if you could not exercise some level of control over the shifting.

Thankfully you do have some control. You can make your awareness shift repeatedly back to the same thing, so that you're more aware of that thing than of other things. For instance, suppose you're in the house mentioned above, and you become interested in a conversation two people are having. You can make your awareness shift to that conversation more often than it shifts to other things. You do this through a characteristic of awareness called focus.

Focus is a method that involves directing your attention to one thing. This forces your awareness to shift to that one thing more often than it shifts to other things.

For instance, when you focus your attention onto the conversation, your awareness will shift to the conversation more frequently than it will

shift to the furniture, the walls and ceiling, other sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, emotions, and rising thoughts. And this will enable you to follow the conversation.

While focusing on the conversation moves much of your awareness to it, you're still somewhat aware of other things. This is because your mind cannot stay aware of one thing for longer than an instant. So your awareness will constantly shift away from the conversation to other things in the house, and then back to the conversation. And so, while you may be strongly aware of the conversation, you will be weakly aware of other things around you.

MULTITASKING FOCUS

Therefore, focus allows your mind to be mainly aware of one thing, while somewhat aware of other things. But focus is a little more versatile than that. You can apply your focus to more than one thing at a time. This is what we often call multitasking. For instance, you can place your focus on both the conversation and on something going on outside that you can see through the window.

In this case, your mind's awareness will shift frequently to the conversation, and then to the window, more often than it shifts to extraneous things. But the amount of awareness it will give to each of these things will be less than the amount of awareness it would give if you were focused only on the conversation. This is because you'll have less awareness available to dedicate to the conversation. And because of this it will be more difficult for you to follow the conversation accurately.

The more things you focus on at once, the less awareness you'll have of each of those things. Not only that, but you'll also have less awareness of extraneous things you're not trying to focus on.

Focus, therefore, displaces your awareness. It increases your awareness of some things by reducing your awareness of other things. This is a *very* important concept to remember. As you continue reading, you'll discover that this displacement-effect of focus plays an essential role in your ability to experience enjoyment.

STRENGTH OF FOCUS

You can change the strength of your focus. If you increase your focus on something you'll increase your awareness of it proportional to the amount of increased focus placed on it. And at the same time you'll reduce your awareness of other things by the same amount. Your

awareness of the thing you're focused on will increase because your awareness will begin to shift to it more often.

For instance, if you're moderately focused on the conversation, and then increase this to a very strong focus, your awareness of the conversation will become very strong, shifting to it much more frequently than before. Meanwhile your awareness of other things will grow very weak, to the point where you will become barely aware of your other surroundings. This will make it very easy for other things to go unnoticed. For example, it will be very easy for someone to sneak up behind you and surprise you.

THE TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF AWARENESS

We can sum this up by saying that awareness has two characteristics, as follows:

1. It shifts from one thing to another at lightning-fast speed, never remaining on one thing for longer than an instant.
2. It can be focused, so that it will shift more frequently to one thing and less frequently to other things. The stronger the focus, the more frequently it will shift to the thing it is focused on, and the less frequently it will shift to other things.

THE FACTOR OF STIMULUS

The second factor of change is stimulus. The experience of change requires more than just awareness. Something within your environment must stimulate your senses before your mind can become aware of it. The something that changes is called the stimulus.

Like awareness, a stimulus also comes with two characteristics. These are:

1. Strength.
2. Uniqueness.

STRENGTH

A stimulus must attract your awareness to it before you can become aware of it. And the stronger a stimulus is, the more likely you are to become aware of it. In the house example, if you're sitting in the living room and a pin drops in a distant bedroom, you will not become aware of

that stimulus. This is because the pin will produce a very faint noise that your ear will not be able to detect.

But if an avalanche of pots and pans falls out of a kitchen cupboard, the loud noise it produces will make you instantly aware of that stimulus.

Therefore the stronger the stimulus, the more likely you are to become aware of it.

A STRONG STIMULUS CAN CONTROL FOCUS

But a strong stimulus can also take command of your focus, and distract it from where you've been directing it.

Suppose you're reading a newspaper when the avalanche of pots and pans falls from the kitchen cupboard. The loud clatter, clanging and clamor you suddenly hear will grab control of your focus and distract it from the newspaper. The stimulus of the noise will be so powerful, you'll momentarily find yourself unable to focus on your reading. Instead the focus of your awareness will be forcibly and involuntarily directed away from the newspaper and onto the noise.

So a strong stimulus can take control of your focus from your conscious will.

Thus the more powerful a stimulus is, the more influence it will have on where you place the focus of your awareness.

This amount of influence can range from very weak to very strong, depending on how powerful the stimulus is. For instance, suppose while you're sitting in the living room reading the newspaper, someone comes up from behind and begins to gently massage your neck and shoulders. This massage will cause stimuli to arise from the nerve endings in your neck and shoulders. But the stimuli will be weak to moderate in strength, due to the fact that the massage is gentle, and not rough.

The focus of your awareness will be drawn to the massage-produced stimuli. But the draw will not be powerful enough to wrest away control of your focus. So you'll still be able to focus some of your awareness on the newspaper, and read it with comprehension. And in fact you'll be able to resist the draw of the stimuli by forcing as much focus as you can onto the newspaper. If you resist in this manner you'll be able to reduce the amount of awareness that is being drawn to your neck and shoulders. This, in turn, will reduce the amount of enjoyment you're receiving from the massage. But it will also increase the amount of enjoyment you can receive from reading the newspaper.

But suppose the masseuse behind you decides she wants to get your attention. And suppose her plan to get your attention is to change the

massage from gentle to rough. So now she starts grabbing and yanking the muscles in your neck and shoulders with rough abandon. This will likely produce stimuli so powerful it will be impossible to resist. You'll find yourself unable to concentrate on your reading. Instead your awareness will be forced to focus on the stimuli arising from the rough massage.

We can summarize by saying that different stimuli come with different degrees of strength. And the stronger a stimulus is, the more ability it has to take control of your focus.

UNIQUENESS

The second characteristic of a stimulus is uniqueness. The more unique a stimulus is, the more change it makes you aware of. And the less unique it is, the less change it makes you aware of.

Novelty makes things unique. When you buy something you've never owned before it will have a novel effect on you. At first you'll feel intrigued and excited. You'll derive great enjoyment from the new item, and will want to use it often. But over time the new item will become more and more familiar to you and thus, less and less unique. The novelty effect will wear off. And then the decreased uniqueness of the item will cause it to produce less change and enjoyment when you use it.

We can summarize this by saying that the less familiar you are with something the more unique and enjoyable it will be, and the more familiar you are with something, the less unique and enjoyable it will be.

ALL THINGS ARE UNIQUE

No two stimuli are exactly the same. For instance, the sight of a bare, blank wall is different from any other bare, blank wall, even if that difference is ever-so-slight.

And every breath you take is unique, if simply because you take each new breath at different points in time, and are ever-so-slightly older when you take a new breath. No matter what the stimuli are, no two stimuli are ever exactly alike. They can be very similar—offering very low levels of uniqueness and change between them—but they can never be exactly the same.

This means that any stimulus you become aware of will always bring a certain amount of change, life and enjoyment to you. And this means that life cannot be avoided. You'll always be aware of uniqueness, and the

change that it brings. Therefore you'll always have life. And you'll always experience some level of enjoyment.

But the amount of change, life and enjoyment you're aware of can fluctuate. The more unique the stimulus is that you are aware of, the more change, life and enjoyment you'll experience.

THE TWO FACTORS OF UNIQUENESS

Since level of uniqueness plays such an important role in level of enjoyment, it's important to understand what affects that level.

There are two factors that affect the uniqueness level of a stimulus, as follows:

1. Degree of memory (recent and distant).
2. Degree of Immediate Familiarity (IMF).

DEGREE OF MEMORY

The weaker your memory is of something, the more unique it will be to you. For instance, if you watch a movie that you last saw many years ago, you're more likely to enjoy it than if you had seen it just a few days ago. This is because your degree of memory plays an important role in your perception of uniqueness. The less you're able to remember something, the more unique it will be to you, and vice-versa.

RECENT MEMORY TENDS TO BE STRONGER

The more recent your memory of something, the stronger your memory of it tends to be.

But a distant weak memory can strengthen when it becomes a recent memory. For example suppose you eat your favorite meal only once per year. Your memory of the taste of that meal will be distant every time you eat it. Therefore you'll find the taste very unique and enjoyable. But if you eat your favorite meal every single day, your memory of the taste will become recent and strong. And this will bring a low level of uniqueness and enjoyment to the taste. You'll grow tired of this meal, and it will cease to be your favorite meal.

When you take a vacation you probably enjoy visiting places you have not been to for a long time, more than you enjoy visiting places you've recently been to (all other things being equal). Again, uniqueness is higher with distant memories than it is for recent memories.

NOSTALGIA

One advantage of distant memories is that they can stimulate other distant memories. This causes a feeling of nostalgia. Nostalgia occurs when weak memories that were once strong are stimulated.

For instance, suppose you have not visited your childhood home in many years. Most of your many memories associated with it will be weak, even though they were quite strong many years before. But when you finally pay it a visit, the very sight of your old home will likely stimulate a flood of old memories. All of these old memories will be weak, and therefore very unique to you. This uniqueness will bring change to your experience, and thus cause an enjoyable feeling. And this enjoyable feeling is what we refer to as nostalgia.

DEGREE OF IMMEDIATE FAMILIARITY (IMF)

Degree of memory is one factor in determining a stimulus' level of uniqueness. The other factor is your degree of Immediate Familiarity. (Immediate Familiarity is a concept I use frequently in this book, so for the sake of convenience I will hereafter refer to it as IMF).

Your degree of IMF is related closely to recent memory. Remember that a recent memory tends to be stronger than a distant memory. IMF is the most recent memory you can possibly have of something. Therefore, IMF provides you with the strongest memory you can possibly have of a stimulus.

IMF is the awareness of your current experience. You've already learned that awareness never lingers in one spot for any longer than a brief instant. Instead, it constantly shifts from one thing to another, amongst visual scenes, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, emotions and thoughts.

Every stimulus that your awareness shifts to becomes part of your IMF. And the more often your awareness shifts to any one stimulus, the greater degree of IMF you will have of that stimulus.

Focus occurs when your awareness shifts more often to one thing than to other things. So the stimuli that your awareness is focused on tend to cause higher IMF than do stimuli in your background awareness. Therefore the things you're focused on will be less unique to your experience than the things you're not focused on.

The higher the degree of IMF you have of something, the less unique it will be to you. Therefore the higher your IMF, the less change and enjoyment you will experience.

DURATION OF FOCUS INCREASES IMF

IMF increases the longer you remain focused on a stimulus. So the longer you're focused on something, the less change and enjoyment you'll have.

For instance suppose you're focused on a painting hanging on the wall of your house. The longer you remain focused on that painting the more familiar you'll become with it. At first you'll notice certain details, and you'll continue to notice new details for awhile. This will prevent your IMF with the painting from growing quickly.

But after awhile you'll run out of new details to notice and will have to return your focus to the details you've already noticed. And this will increase the growth of your IMF. The stronger your IMF grows the less unique the painting will become. And this will lead you to gradually lose interest in continuing to focus on the painting. You'll want to turn your attention to something different and more unique.

DETAIL SLOWS THE GROWTH OF IMF

The more detail you're focused on, the longer it takes for your IMF to grow strong. This is because the more details there are, the more uniqueness is available for your mind to grow familiar with. In the painting example above, the more details in the painting, the more uniqueness is available for your awareness to shift around to.

SIMILARITY OF DETAIL QUICKENS GROWTH OF IMF

But while detail slows the growth of your IMF, similarity of detail will quicken it. When there are many details that are very similar to each other, you'll grow familiar with each detail more quickly than if the details were very different from each other. This is because any given detail will remind you of any other given detail in your area of focus, reducing the amount of uniqueness within each detail. This reduced uniqueness will strengthen your immediate memory, increasing your IMF of each detail.

For instance, if you took the above-mentioned painting off its hook and stared at the blank wall behind it, the uniqueness and enjoyment of your experience would decline significantly. Assuming that the wall is

painted in one solid color, all of the details of the blank wall would be very similar to each other. Certainly you're likely to notice a brush stroke here, and a smudge there, and so forth. But these details will look so similar to other details on the blank wall, that your IMF of each detail will grow very rapidly. In just a very short time the uniqueness of what you see will likely decline to such a point that you'll find yourself feeling bored.

OPTIMAL FOCUS

We've established that increasing your strength of focus on a stimulus increases your IMF of that stimulus. And this decreases its uniqueness. Logically this implies that if you weaken your focus on a stimulus you'll decrease your IMF of that stimulus, thus increasing its uniqueness. So it would seem that weakening your focus can produce more enjoyment for you.

This, in turn, implies that if you weaken your focus to a point where you're barely aware of a stimulus, that stimulus will be much more unique and enjoyable to your experience than if you were to place strong focus on it.

But the problem with this implication is that the weaker your focus is on something, the less awareness you'll have of it. So if you're barely aware of something that is very unique, you'll derive very little change and enjoyment from it, due to the bare amount of awareness you'll have of it. But if you increase your focus, your IMF will increase, and its level of uniqueness will decline. And so you'll continue to have difficulty deriving change and enjoyment from it.

The solution to this problem lies in finding the optimal amount of focus to place on any given stimulus. As you increase your focus on something, your awareness of it increases. But at the same time, your IMF increases, causing its uniqueness to decline. But IMF usually increases more slowly over time than does focus. Therefore your increased awareness will initially produce more change and enjoyment than what you'll lose from a gradually increasing IMF and gradually decreasing uniqueness. So you'll experience an overall increase in change and enjoyment.

However, a critical point is eventually reached. I call this critical point, "optimal focus." After you reach optimal focus, any further strengthening of your focus will cause overall losses in change and enjoyment. This is due to a more rapidly increasing IMF that begins to build faster than gains in change and enjoyment from increased awareness.

When this happens you'll experience an overall decrease in change and enjoyment.

Any focus above the strength of optimal focus is what I call "superoptimal focus." And any focus below the strength of optimal focus is what I call "suboptimal focus." Uniqueness, change and enjoyment always decline from their level at optimal focus, the more your focus becomes superoptimal or suboptimal.

OPTIMAL FOCUS IS EASY

The process of finding your optimal focus may seem complicated in theory. But in practice it's actually quite easy. All you have to do is follow the lure of enjoyment. You may remember that your mind is motivated by enjoyment into seeking change and life. The point of optimal focus is also the point of optimal awareness of change. So your mind is lured into seeking this point of optimal focus.

All you have to do is stay sensitive to your sense of enjoyment, and follow the urging of your mind. This will naturally lead you into finding optimal focus and the maximum amount of enjoyment available at any given moment.

In fact, if you should stray into superoptimal or suboptimal focus, you'll know immediately. This is because your level of enjoyment will immediately decline. When this happens, all you'll have to do is relax and follow the urging of your mind, and you'll quickly be lured back to the point of optimal focus.

NON-OPTIMAL FOCUS IS DIFFICULT

Optimal focus is easy. But non-optimal focus is difficult. It's possible for you to keep your mind at superoptimal or suboptimal focus. But you'll have to fight the urging of your mind, and resist the temptation to seek enjoyment.

Even though it's hard work, it's still very common for people to seek non-optimal focus. There are often practical reasons for doing this.

For instance suppose you're trying to solve a difficult problem. To do this you'll have to keep your awareness focused on thoughts related to the problem. This will cause your IMF of those thoughts to increase to the point where you enter superoptimal focus.

You'll know that you can achieve relief from this superoptimal focus by simply relaxing your mind and allowing its focus to stray from the

problem it's trying to solve. But you'll also know that this will reduce your chances of solving the problem.

So if it's important enough for you to solve the problem, then you'll fight the urging of your mind to relax, and instead you'll voluntarily choose to remain in superoptimal focus.

Another reason people commonly seek non-optimal focus is so they can forgo something pleasurable in order to accomplish something important.

For example suppose you're involved in an activity at home that you find unique and enjoyable. But then the time arrives for you to report to work at the place of your employment. But while you're at work your mind may keep returning to the activity you were engaged in at home, being lured by its memory of how enjoyable that activity was. This may interfere with your ability to get your job done. So you may have to voluntarily enter into suboptimal focus on thoughts about the home activity so that you can direct your mind's awareness on the requirements of your job.

Your conscious will is very powerful. You're not some kind of robot that automatically must seek and find the point of optimal focus. You can always resist the temptation and take your mind elsewhere. But whenever you do you'll pay a price. And that price will be found in a decline in your immediate experience of change, life and enjoyment.

It's up to you to determine whether or not that price is worth paying.

A SURVIVAL USE FOR NON-OPTIMAL FOCUS

Often the price for non-optimal focus is worth paying, due to the rewards you stand to gain in the long run. This is especially so in survival situations.

Suppose you're driving your car through scenic mountains that you've never been to before. Because they're unfamiliar, the beautiful scenery will present many opportunities for you to experience uniqueness, change and enjoyment. But suppose the mountain road is steep and twisty, with many tight curves and high cliffs you could easily drive off, if you were not careful.

You'd recognize how risky it would be for you to pay attention to the beautiful scenery around you while driving on such dangerous roads. And so you would enter both superoptimal focus and suboptimal focus. You would place superoptimal focus on the road, and on your driving, and suboptimal focus on the beautiful scenery you're passing. The high IMF you'd derive from your superoptimal focus on the road would reduce your

level of change and enjoyment, while the low awareness of the unique scenery caused by your suboptimal focus would prevent you from increasing your level of change and enjoyment.

At the same time that this non-optimal focus reduces your level of enjoyment, it would also reduce the amount of life immediately available to your mind. But on the other hand, you would be protecting the life of your body by driving carefully. Your body houses your mind. So you would perceive a long-term gain in life for your mind by sacrificing some of your mind's life in the short-term.

NON-OPTIMAL FOCUS ALLOWS CHOICE

Another use for non-optimal focus enables you to choose one form of optimal focus over another. Every moment of every day you're faced with choices. There are many stimuli in this world that vie for your attention. When you choose to place optimal focus on one stimulus, you often must reduce your focus to suboptimal on other stimuli.

For instance suppose you're watching a movie while eating popcorn. And suppose the popcorn is so delicious you want to focus more of your attention on it, so you can gain optimal enjoyment from eating it. If you do this, your focus on the movie will be reduced to suboptimal. This will reduce your awareness of the film. Even if you can follow all of the action and dialogue, you will still not be able to gain as much enjoyment from these things as you would if you were to stop eating and pay more attention to what you're watching.

This leaves you with a choice to make. Should you savor the popcorn, or should you focus more of your awareness on the movie? Your ability to choose which will get the optimal focus and which will get the suboptimal provides you with the freedom you need to find experiences that will bring you the most amount of uniqueness and enjoyment. In the case of the popcorn versus the movie, you can experiment with placing your focus on one, and then the other, until you decide which works out best.

FORCED FOCUS

But some situations give you no choice. When a stimulus is so strong that it takes command of your focus, you cannot choose to focus on something different even when you know that you would derive more enjoyment from it.

In fact any stimulus that is so strong it takes command of your focus, will also force you into superoptimal focus. And this will forcibly reduce your awareness of change and enjoyment.

This type of situation is something that living beings have had to cope with since the beginning of time. And it produces a phenomenon we refer to as pain.

Let's explore this phenomenon in the next chapter.

WHAT CAUSES PAIN?

ANYTIME A STIMULUS is so powerful it forces your mind into superoptimal focus, you'll experience a certain degree of pain. Pain ranges from mild discomfort to extreme agony. The degree of pain you experience depends upon the degree to which you're forced into superoptimal focus.

ROUTINE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FORCES SUPEROPTIMAL FOCUS

You cannot move around and perform the routine activities of life without producing physical sensations that force a certain degree of superoptimal focus. Every time you move your body you produce physical sensations in your muscles, joints, and bones. These are ordinary sensations that you feel very often, due simply to the fact that they occur every time you're engaged in physical activity.

Because you feel the sensations from routine activity so often, you have strong general memories of them. And because you feel them continuously while you're engaged in routine physical activity, your Immediate Familiarity (IMF) of these sensations quickly strengthens.

This causes you to experience a low level of uniqueness from the ordinary general sensations that arise. And this low level of uniqueness forces you to enter superoptimal focus whenever you're physically active and performing the routines of your life. The degree of such focus is usually mild, so you usually only experience mild discomfort.

Not all activities cause you to feel uncomfortable. But routine physical activities tend to cause discomfort more often than non-routine physical activities. This is because you have stronger memories of the general sensations produced by them, as opposed to your memories of the non-routine. And therefore these sensations are less unique.

This explains why you can dread the anticipation of doing chores. Chores are part of your routine. You're so accustomed to the general feelings they produce in your body, that they offer little change, enjoyment and life for you.

And this also explains why the activities you perform at your place of employment can feel like drudgery. When you initially begin employment at a new job it can feel exciting. This is partly because the physical activities you perform are new to you, and produce general sensations that have a high level of uniqueness. But over time your memory of these sensations strengthens, and they become less and less unique. Thus, the routines of your job become less and less exciting and more and more like the mild discomfort of that four-letter word we call “work.”

And this helps to explain why a new hobby can be exciting at first, but boring later. Suppose you take up bicycling. If you haven’t ridden a bike in years, then you’ll derive a lot of enjoyment from the initial bike rides of your new hobby. But over time the general physical sensations produced from riding your bike will become more and more familiar to you, and less and less unique.

When this happens, the only way you can maintain your original level of enjoyment is to find ways to make riding your bike mentally unique. The mental uniqueness can help overcome the physical familiarity. And so you may experiment around with riding different types of bikes. Or you may play around with modifying your bike. Or you may join a bicycle club and participate in racing events, or cross-country treks with groups of other bicyclists. As the physical activity of a new hobby becomes less unique, you’ll have to compensate by injecting new mental activities if you wish to continue enjoying it.

TWO REASONS FOR PAIN

Physical discomfort can also be caused by things that are not so routine. Anytime a physical stimulus is so strong that it forces your awareness into superoptimal focus, you’ll experience discomfort and pain. This is for two reasons. We’ve already covered the first reason in the previous chapter, but here’s a paraphrased review:

A strong stimulus that takes command of your focus increases your IMF to such a point that the uniqueness of the stimulus declines significantly. This decrease in uniqueness causes a decrease in your awareness of change. And this causes a decrease in your experience of enjoyment and life.

The second reason is, that a strong stimulus causes a significant decline in your background awareness.

There are two different kinds of awareness, that I call “foreground awareness” and “background awareness.” Foreground awareness is your awareness of things that your mind is focused on. And background awareness is your awareness of what you’re not focused on.

The stronger your focus, the less background awareness you have. This is because you only have a limited amount of awareness. The more strongly your mind is focused on a stimulus, the more frequently your awareness shifts to it. And this causes your awareness to shift less frequently to stimuli in your background awareness.

So a stimulus that is so strong it takes command of your focus, will also forcibly drain you of much of your background awareness. Background awareness provides you with high levels of uniqueness, change, and enjoyment. So when your background awareness declines significantly, your level of enjoyment can also decline significantly. And this contributes to your experience of discomfort and pain.

The reason why background awareness provides you with high levels of uniqueness is, your IMF of stimuli in your background is always low. Remember that the less focused you are on a stimulus, the less familiar you are with it. This increases the uniqueness of that stimulus. And your level of focus on things in your background awareness tends to be very low, compared with your level of focus on things in your foreground awareness.

Background awareness can be compared with suboptimal focus. Remember that suboptimal focus occurs when your level of focus is so low you’re not experiencing the full potential for uniqueness that you could experience if you were to increase your level of focus. Background awareness is kind of like perpetual suboptimal focus. But technically it really isn’t focus. So it would be more accurate to say that it is like perpetual suboptimal *awareness*.

But even though it is suboptimal, it still contains a significant part of your awareness. There are so many billions (or more) of stimuli in the background of your awareness, that the sheer number contribute a great deal to your awareness of change, and your experience of enjoyment. You may not be deriving as much uniqueness, change and enjoyment from any one of these stimuli as you could if you were focused optimally on it. But because there are so many of these stimuli that you are suboptimally aware of, you make up for the loss in quality with a gain in quantity.

Therefore it’s important to maintain normal levels of background awareness. When your background awareness is forcibly drained by a strong stimulus that takes command of your focus, you lose a significant source of enjoyment.

And so we can summarize that there are two reasons why a strong physical stimulus can cause discomfort and pain, as follows:

1. Your foreground awareness of uniqueness declines significantly, due to high levels of IMF.
2. Your background awareness of uniqueness declines significantly, due to being forcibly drained and displaced into your foreground awareness.

EXAMPLES OF DISCOMFORT AND PAIN

For example, suppose you're dressed in light clothing, while standing outside in cold windy weather. The cold air will cause a physical stimulus on your skin that will be so strong, it will take command of your focus. And your IMF of the stimulus you're focused on (the feeling of coldness) will be so high that its level of uniqueness will decline rapidly. Meanwhile, your background awareness will decline rapidly, due to being forcibly drained away into your foreground awareness by the strong stimulus of coldness. So after just a short time in this cold weather you'll begin to feel uncomfortable due to a significant decline in your experience of uniqueness, change and enjoyment.

That is how discomfort can occur. But let's progress to a higher intensity of pain.

Suppose you get poked in the hand with a sharp needle. This will produce a very strong stimulus that will take instant command of your focus. In fact the stimulus will be so strong that your IMF will rise instantly, while the level of uniqueness of this stimulus will decline instantly. At the same time, a large amount of your background awareness will be drained instantly. This will cause an instant and significant decline in your experience of change and enjoyment. And thus you will feel instant, intense pain from the needle prick.

The stronger the stimulus that controls your focus, the more rapidly and significantly your experience of uniqueness, change and enjoyment tends to decline. Discomfort tends to grow more slowly and less significantly than pain, because stimuli that produce discomfort tend to be less strong. The strongest stimuli are those that produce outright pain. These stimuli are so strong that the pain they produce seems to occur instantaneously.

VISUAL SIGHTS CAN STIMULATE MENTAL DISCOMFORT

We've seen how routine physical activity causes mild discomfort. But physical activity produces only some of the routine stimuli that your mind experiences. You can also experience routines from things you see.

If you've lived in the same area for a long period of time, you've developed strong general memories for the sights there. So every time you get out of your house and walk or drive around your neighborhood, the things you see will generally not be very unique to you. In fact, in a general sense, they'll be very routine to your visual experience. I say in a general sense because there are many fine details in most things you see that you'll not be able to remember well. But the general images will be strong in your memory.

This kind of routine will not cause you physical discomfort, but it will cause a mild mental discomfort that we often associate with boredom. Boredom is caused from strong memories and high IMF of activities you're involved in. Vision has a heavy influence on the mental activities of people with sight. So when you routinely see the same things all the time, both your memory and your IMF of those things will grow strong. This easily produces superoptimal focus and leaves you feeling bored.

A common way people ease this kind of boredom is to take a vacation and get away from the area they live in. Seeing new sights brings uniqueness to your visual experience, and enables you to take more interest in your surroundings.

Visual sights can also stimulate boredom when the things you see tend to have a uniform color or pattern. The weather can influence this. Consider how gloomy you feel after experiencing a long period of gray, overcast skies. Or consider how dull living in a city can begin to feel after seeing asphalt and concrete for a long time. And people who live in institutional settings, such as prisons, also have a tendency to feel bored and depressed from the uniform look of their surroundings. The uniformity of a visual sight increases your IMF of that sight, causing superoptimal focus to easily occur. And this can produce the discomfort of boredom.

HOW SOUNDS CAUSE DISCOMFORT AND PAIN

Sounds can also produce feelings of boredom if you hear the same sounds repeatedly. For instance, listening to the same piece of music over and over again can leave you feeling desperately bored. This is mainly due to your strong recent memory of the music.

If you hear the steady drip of a faucet, while sitting in a silent room, you can find yourself climbing the wall with irritation. And yet the drip of

the faucet does not have to produce a loud sound. What is required for you to feel irritated is a sharp contrast between silence and the steady dripping sound. The sudden breaking of silence with each drip will have a way of catching your attention and involuntarily drawing your focus to it. This will prevent your mind from maintaining a focus on stimuli that are more unique, such as the words of a book, or the contemplations of your thoughts. Over time, both your recent memory and your IMF of the sound of dripping water will grow so strong that the uniqueness of the sound will drop to a very low level. And yet with each drip your focus will be forced upon this sound. This will reduce your experience of change, enjoyment and life, and leave you feeling very irritated.

But an extremely loud sound will force your focus to it so powerfully that you'll feel pain. In this case, your IMF of the sound will become very strong very quickly, reducing its uniqueness to very low levels.

ODORS AND DISCOMFORT

A strong odor can cause discomfort with your sense of smell. The strength of the odor involuntarily draws your focus to it and raises your IMF to high levels.

And there are some odors that tend to draw your focus more readily than others. Only slight amounts are required to involuntarily force your focus onto them and raise your IMF. For instance, the sulfuric smell of rotten eggs is a powerful attention-getter, even in very small amounts.

It's possible to grow accustomed to an odor, so that it loses its ability to involuntarily force away your focus and cause you discomfort. For instance, suppose you walk into someone else's house that has a strong odor to it. You may feel like retching. Yet, the regular inhabitants of the house may not seem bothered at all from the smell. This is because the odor has remained in the house for a long time and they've grown accustomed to it. In fact if you ask them what that smell is, they're likely to become puzzled and act as if they don't know what you're talking about. And this is because they've grown so accustomed to the odor that they don't even notice it anymore.

The same is true for people who smoke cigarettes. They actually enjoy the smell of second-hand smoke, when they do notice the odor. Yet that same smell instantly catches the attention of those who don't smoke, and leaves them feeling sick.

I believe that the reason you can grow accustomed to a strong odor is physiological. The part of your nervous system that is involved with your sense of smell can reduce its sensitivity to an incoming odor-stimulus after

a long period of exposure to it. This allows you to inhale the odor without your focus being involuntarily drawn to it. And this allows you to keep your focus on things that are more unique to your immediate experience.

TASTES AND DISCOMFORT

Taste works in much the same way as odor. You can grow accustomed to food that has a strong taste, and thus increase your ability to eat it without feeling sick. This is often referred to as “acquiring a taste” for a particular food.

Yet there are differences between your senses of smell and taste. With smell, you can grow so accustomed to an odor that you hardly notice it anymore. But with taste, if you eat the same type of food over and over again you will get sick and tired of it and will want to eat something different.

This indicates that you have a more enduring sensitivity to tastes than to smells. And this enables your recent memory of a flavor to grow so strong that the uniqueness of it will grow very weak. And this reduces the amount of change, enjoyment and life that you derive from eating food that produces that taste.

If you eat too much of a food, for too long a period of time, you will develop a very strong distant memory of its flavor. And this can lead you to dislike the taste of that food for the rest of your life.

STIMULI CAN ALSO CAUSE FEELINGS OF PLEASURE

This chapter has explored how stimuli can cause you to feel discomfort and pain with your five physical senses of touch, vision, hearing, smell, and taste. But stimuli can also cause feelings of pleasure. We'll explore how this happens in the next chapter.

6

WHAT CAUSES PLEASURE?

PLEASURE requires the following two ingredients:

1. Uniqueness.
2. Voluntary focus.

When you maintain optimal focus on a stimulus, without being forced into superoptimal focus, you'll experience the most uniqueness possible from that stimulus. If this stimulus is very unique, you will experience high levels of change and enjoyment. And this will be felt as pleasure.

PLEASURE REQUIRES VOLUNTARY FOCUS

A stimulus cannot produce pleasure if it is so powerful that it involuntarily forces you into superoptimal focus. The only way it can produce pleasure is if it is not that strong, and thus allows voluntary focus.

When you experience a pleasurable stimulus, you can easily shift the focus of your awareness away from it. When you do, the level of pleasure will decline, due to suboptimal awareness on the stimulus. But when you experience a painful stimulus, you cannot shift the focus of your awareness away from it. This prevents you from reducing the level of pain you're experiencing.

You can test this by trying to perform math equations while experiencing pain. You'll find that the stronger the pain, the more difficult it is for you to perform the math. This is because the stronger the pain, the more your focus is being involuntarily shifted to the painful stimulus, and away from your thought processes that are performing the math calculations.

After you're finished trying to perform math equations while experiencing pain, try to perform similar math while experiencing pleasure, such as while eating delicious food. You'll find that no matter how enjoyable the pleasure, you can still take your mind off of the stimulation sufficiently enough to easily perform the math.

A hallmark sign of pleasure is that the focus you place on it is always voluntary. You can always shift your focus away from a pleasurable

stimulation, in order to successfully perform a task requiring high degrees of concentration.

Shifting your focus away from a source of pleasure will not make the pleasurable feeling go away. It will still remain in your background awareness. But the level of pleasure will decline, due to the suboptimal awareness you'll have of it.

HOW PAIN BECOMES PLEASURE

Pain can turn into pleasure when pain subsides. As the strength of a pain-producing stimulus weakens, your mind gradually gains more and more control of its focus. When this happens, the superoptimal focus that produces the pain gradually transforms into optimal focus. And the optimal focus is felt as pleasure.

For example, if you injure your body, the pain coming from the injury might be felt in the form of burning waves of heat. But as the stimulus from the injury weakens and the pain subsides, the burning sensation will transform into a warm glow. And the warm glow will feel pleasurable.

Another kind of pain that turns into pleasure is the discomfort produced by physical labor. After an extended period of time performing physical labor, your body will likely have many aches and pains, and your muscles will feel fatigued. But if you stop working and relax in a cushioned easy chair, the aches, pains and fatigue will gradually ease, and you will begin to experience a feeling of restful pleasure throughout your body.

PLEASURE FROM TOUCH

Your sense of touch provides many opportunities for you to feel pleasure. This pleasure arises when nerve endings in your skin and muscles are stimulated, sending unique signals to your mind that are moderate in strength, and not so strong they take control of your focus.

Suppose you are lying face down on a table, receiving a massage from a skilled masseuse. As the masseuse gently rubs oil over your skin, and kneads the muscles of your shoulders and back, many nerve endings will be stimulated. Your mind naturally has a weak memory for fine detail. And most of the signals coming from the nerve endings will be in the form of fine detail. Because of this you'll have weak memories of them.

Your weak memories will make the sensations highly unique to your experience. And this high level of uniqueness will make the stimulation feel pleasurable.

HOW VISUAL SIGHTS PRODUCE PLEASURE

A visual sight can also produce pleasure. In this case the pleasure is derived from the uniqueness of the sight.

For example, you can experience this when viewing natural landscapes. The sight of a natural wonder, such as the Grand Canyon, is unique if you rarely see it. But if you frequently see it you'll have a strong recent memory of it. When you rarely see it, you are likely to declare it as beautiful. But when you frequently see it, it will seem less beautiful to you, and may even come across as boring.

SOUNDS AND PLEASURE

Music can bring pleasure to your listening experience. This is because the tones, scales, rhythms, and harmonies can be unique to your experience. But music must be arranged in a way that makes it easy for your mind to comprehend, if you're going to enjoy it. If it's poorly arranged, you'll have to engage in superoptimal focus in order to comprehend it, and you won't experience pleasure from the sound. This is why a sour note is displeasurable. It does not fit well into the arrangement of the overall musical piece, reducing your ability to comprehend what you hear without engaging in the displeasure of superoptimal focus.

Any sound you hear that you do not hear often will be significantly unique to your experience. But your focus must not go beyond optimal if you're to derive pleasure from the uniqueness. A unique sound that is very loud will cause pain in your ears due to the high level of Immediate Familiarity (IMF) it will stimulate in your hearing experience. But if the volume of that sound decreases sufficiently, you will then be able to derive pleasure from it.

On the other hand, if the volume of a unique sound is very low, you may still have difficulty deriving pleasure from it. This is because you'll have to increase your focus to superoptimal in order to comprehend the sound.

The sounds of nature are often a source of pleasure. For instance, the rippling sound of a mountain brook can bring a sense of tranquility to you when you're hiking in a wilderness. But the amount of pleasure you derive from such a sound is dependent upon the strength of your recent memory. If you're not accustomed to hearing the flowing sound of a brook, its uniqueness will bring change, enjoyment and life to your experience. But if you have lived for years in a cabin built near the banks

of the brook, you'll have a strong memory of the sound and will not derive much change, enjoyment and life from hearing it.

AROMATIC PLEASURES

Aromas can bring pleasure to your olfactory experience when you smell things that you don't often smell. Flowers can be a wonderful source of such pleasure because every different type of flower has a different type of scent. This enables you to spend hours sniffing different flowers without tiring of the experience.

On the other hand, a strong fragrance can be overpowering. The smell of perfume or cologne can leave you feeling nauseous if applied too liberally. This is because the strength of the fragrance will take command of your awareness, causing you to involuntarily enter superoptimal focus. But when perfume or cologne is applied sparingly, the fragrance will be weak enough to allow voluntary optimal focus. And this will enable you to feel pleasure from the scent.

Your olfactory sense has a way of adjusting to smells, reducing your ability to detect a familiar smell. This causes a pleasure-producing aroma to gradually fade the more you smell it. And this reduces your ability to derive pleasure from it, because you'll have to enter superoptimal focus and concentrate hard on the aroma in order to continue detecting it.

PLEASURES OF THE PALATE

The next time you eat a delicious food, pay close attention to the sensations it stimulates. You may notice that there's a mouthfeel to food, due to its texture. And you may notice other physical sensations that are not related to taste, such as the sensations of swallowing, and the filling of your stomach.

All of these sensations are produced by the simple act of eating. Which means that taste sensations are only a small part of your eating experience.

The degree to which you'll enjoy these sensations will depend on how weak your recent memory is of them. If you spend most of your day constantly eating, you won't be able to enjoy these sensations as much as someone who eats sparingly.

Your enjoyment will also depend on taste. When you eat a food that you don't often eat, you usually have weak memories of the taste. Thus the uniqueness of the taste sensation enables you to enjoy it better. But the

taste itself must not be so strong as to raise your level of IMF too much, causing superoptimal focus.

The multitude of sensations produced by eating makes consuming food an important source of enjoyment for people. This helps to explain why people often resort to food as a means for warding off boredom. They are seeking change, enjoyment and life. And they know they can find this through all the pleasures that are generated from the act of eating.

ANOTHER SOURCE OF PAIN AND PLEASURE

These past two chapters have shown you how your five physical senses of touch, vision, hearing, smell, and taste can cause you to experience pain and pleasure. But pain and pleasure can be caused by another sense, also. This is your sense of perception. The perceptions you consciously or subconsciously engage in will stimulate your emotions. And your emotions can be either painful or pleasurable.

We'll take a closer look at how this process works in the next chapter.

WHAT CAUSES EMOTIONS?

EMOTIONS OCCUR in response to the uniqueness of your perceptions. The more unique your perceptions are, the more pleasurable the emotion that will be produced, whereas the less unique your perceptions are, the more painful the emotion that will be produced.

I label pleasurable emotions as “positive” and painful emotions as “negative.”

PERCEPTIONS ARE YOUR SIXTH SENSE

A perception is a stimulus. A stimulus does not have to come from the nerve endings of your physical body. It can also come from perceptions. On the other hand, perceptions are formed in your brain, and the human brain is composed of billions of nerves. Since your brain is part of your physical body, it’s logical to conclude that perceptions are one of the physical forms of stimuli that you experience. This means your mind receives input from six physical senses—touch, vision, hearing, taste, smell, and perceptions. Perceptions are your sixth physical sense.

Since a perception is a stimulus, its level of uniqueness is dependent upon the two factors that affect the uniqueness level of a stimulus. These were discussed earlier in this book, and are as follows:

1. Degree of memory (recent and distant).
2. Degree of Immediate Familiarity (IMF).

Thus the weaker your memory is of a particular perception, and the weaker your IMF is of that perception, the more unique that perception will be to you. Uniqueness causes enjoyment, so the more unique the perception is, the more positive will be the emotion that you experience.

EMOTIONS HAVE MANY FLAVORS

The flavor of an emotion is related to the circumstances that trigger your perceptions. And since there are an infinite variety of circumstances you can find yourself in, there are an infinite variety of emotions that you

can experience. But most circumstances fall into general categories, and this has enabled us humans to apply labels to the general emotions that result.

I'll provide you with some examples of these general emotions. These examples are intended to show you how your perceptions affect your emotional state of mind, and how you can effectively deal with some of the general emotional states you find yourself in.

I do not have room in this book to deal with more than a handful of emotions. But the examples I provide should help you to find ways to understand and deal with all of the emotions you encounter, in all of their infinite shades.

The examples below address the general emotions of boredom, interest, sadness, depression, stress, calmness, fear, confidence, frustration, satisfaction, anger, elation, hate, love, and infatuation.

THE CAUSE OF BOREDOM

Boredom can come from having nothing to do. This is because your recent memories of your actions and surroundings become stronger and stronger the longer you stay in one place doing nothing. This gradually reduces the uniqueness of your current experience, thus reducing your enjoyment. The end result is that you begin to feel bored.

Boredom can also come from learning something that you already know. If you have a strong memory of a concept, then reviewing that concept in your mind will leave you feeling bored. For instance, suppose you went back to the first grade of elementary school and sat in on a math class. You already have a strong memory for the concept that $1 + 1 = 2$. The concept would not be very unique to you, so you would feel bored reviewing that concept in class.

Television commercials are a common source of boredom. You already know that some paper towels are more absorbent than others. You already know that a light beer will taste good but be less filling. You know that some cars look sporty and are fun to drive. And so forth. So when you see a typical television commercial, you are usually reviewing a concept that is already strong in your memory. Therefore you will tend to feel bored.

Boredom can come from performing routine activities, such as chores, or the duties of your employment. You have strong general memories of these activities because you perform them so often. Therefore they can produce a low level of uniqueness for you, causing boredom.

OVERCOMING BOREDOM

One method for overcoming boredom is to force yourself to get involved in doing something. Even if what you force yourself into doing is a routine activity, it can still lead you out of boredom. This is because your mind is always on the lookout for something new and unique. So when you are performing a routine activity, your mind will look for things you can do that are related to the activity, but that would be more unique to your experience. For instance, your routine activity might inspire your mind into discovering a new and improved way to perform the action. Or it may inspire you to notice other things you can do that seem more interesting.

Another reason why forcing yourself to perform a routine activity can lift you out of boredom is due to your mind's weak memory for fine detail. Everything you do creates finely detailed sensations arising from millions of nerve endings. Your mind has a weak memory for these details. So when you repeat an action, the finely detailed sensations that arise will be weakly remembered, and will thus seem relatively unique to your experience. The general sensations arising from the repeated action will be well-remembered, and therefore will not be very unique. But there's a good chance that you'll experience enough of the finely detailed sensations to overcome the boredom arising from the general sensations.

Also, if you take your time performing the routine action, without hurrying, this will help to prevent superoptimal focus, and will further help you to enjoy what you're doing. Hurrying can cause you to focus so strongly on the perception of getting something accomplished, that your IMF of that perception rises to the point of superoptimal focus. So a key to overcoming boredom is to get involved doing things while resisting any temptation to hurry.

Another method for overcoming boredom is to engage in learning, and allow your learning to naturally evolve. In fact you can start with relearning something you already know. This will then inspire your mind's curiosity. Your mind will develop a question related to the thing you relearned. You can then engage in research to find the answer to the question. And this will lead you into learning something new and unique.

THE CONTINUUM OF EMOTIONS

Interest is the opposite emotion to boredom. Yet it is on a continuum with it. The more uniqueness you discover the less bored you will feel, until finally the boredom will transform into the emotion of interest.

In fact, opposite emotions are always on a continuum with each other. There are different levels of uniqueness that are on a sliding scale that can take you from one end of an emotional continuum to another.

Your mind is motivated by enjoyment. So it always searches for ways to move from the negative area of an emotional continuum into the positive, more enjoyable area. All you have to do to find enjoyment and overcome boredom or any other negative emotion, is to pay attention to the urges of your mind and follow the lure of enjoyment. Of course you must be careful to avoid dangers. But if you are careful enough, that lure will always lead you into a more positive emotional experience.

THE CAUSE OF SADNESS

Sadness is an emotion that can be caused by losing something you enjoy and value. Enjoyment is caused by uniqueness. So if you lose something you enjoy, you have lost something that was a source of uniqueness to you.

But the actual feeling of sadness is not directly caused by the perception that you have lost something enjoyable. Rather, it is caused by placing superoptimal focus on this perception. Your mind naturally seeks enjoyment. But it also naturally seeks to protect the enjoyment it already has. So when you lose something that you enjoy, your mind will place superoptimal focus upon your loss, in an effort to find a way to get the enjoyable thing back.

This occurs involuntarily. You have no direct control over this kind of superoptimal focus. As soon as the realization enters your mind that you've lost something of value, your mind will take control of your focus, and force you into superoptimal focus upon that realization. And it will be very difficult for you to take your focus off of that realization. So it will be very difficult for you to rid yourself of the feeling of sadness that is produced by the superoptimal focus.

Of course you can try distracting your mind, and this may work for a short while. But sooner or later a wave of realization will hit you again, and back you will go into superoptimal focus. Waves of realization will continue to arise from the depths of your memory at unpredictable times, forcing you repeatedly into superoptimal focus and sadness.

This will continue for days, weeks, months or years, depending on how extensive you perceive your loss to be. But over time the waves will strike less and less often, allowing you longer and longer periods of happiness.

OVERCOMING SADNESS

But there are some methods that can be effective at more quickly reducing the amount of sadness you experience. Of course the most effective method is to recover the thing you've lost. This is the whole purpose of the superoptimal focus. The more focused you are on the loss, the more you'll be reminded to look for ways to get the missing thing returned. This can help you to develop a strategy to get the thing of value back.

But some losses may be impossible or impractical to reverse. In these cases you'll have to try a different method to overcome your sadness. One method is the "it could've been worse," technique. When you reflect upon how much worse a loss could have been, it can reduce your perception of how much you've lost. You can even feel some sense of gratitude for not having lost more. This is all about perception. The less extensive your mind perceives a loss to be, the less superoptimal focus it will place upon that perception.

Another method is the "silver lining behind the cloud," technique. If you can perceive that a loss of something valuable allows you to obtain something new that is valuable, your mind will lessen its superoptimal focus upon your loss.

Or you can try the "shit happens," approach. This is a fatalistic point of view, where you perceive that losses are an inevitable part of life. This helps you to perceive that although sometimes you're bound to lose, there are other times when you're bound to win. And so you understand that sooner or later something good is going to happen to you that will offset the bad thing. You can also call this approach the "win some, lose some," technique. Again, this helps you to lessen the perception of loss, thus reducing the amount of superoptimal focus and sadness you experience.

A METHOD TO AVOID

But there is one method that is often tried, yet never works. That is when you resist or ignore your feeling of sadness. No matter how hard you try to force yourself to feel happy rather than sad, you will not be able to make sadness go away. Remember, sadness is caused by involuntary superoptimal focus. Because it is involuntary, it is impossible to make it disappear through willpower.

In fact if you try to force away your sadness you'll make matters worse. There is a useful purpose to sadness. Your mind is trying to find a way to deal with the loss of something valuable. It forces you into

superoptimal focus so that you'll develop strategies to recover the thing you lost, or at least deal with it in some other effective manner. Trying to force it away prevents you from developing those strategies. And this prevents you from adapting to the loss in a manner that will protect your well-being.

If you allow the sadness to sink in, and allow yourself to feel the emotion completely, ideas and strategies for effectively dealing with the loss will naturally begin to form in your mind. At first maybe just a few ideas may arise. Then gradually more and more will arise. Then eventually a veritable torrent of ideas and strategies will begin to flood through your head. These ideas may be elaborate, or they may be on the scale of the "it could've been worse," "silver lining behind the cloud," and "shit happens," techniques. But they'll often be useful enough to help you through your grieving experience.

Avoid trying to force away or ignore a negative emotion. You experience these emotions for a good reason. Negative emotions are valuable, and without them you could not survive. So be sure to use them to help you deal effectively with all the difficult circumstances you encounter in life.

THE CAUSE OF DEPRESSION

Depression can occur when you perceive that all of your efforts to find enjoyment in life will be fruitless. Depression is chronic sadness, due to hopelessness. Its opposite emotion is hopefulness.

Your mind is a wonderfully versatile thing. You can use it for any purpose. In fact, you can even use it against itself. This is exactly what you do when you set up the conditions that cause depression. You use your mind against itself.

You can develop a mental habit of telling yourself things like, "the world is no good," "people are no good," "nobody cares about me," "it's no use trying anymore," "I'm doomed to failure," "my life is a waste," "I wish I had never been born," and so forth.

When you do this your mind perceives a loss. The loss it perceives is a loss in your ability to find enjoyment. This of course is a huge loss, so naturally your mind will force you into superoptimal focus on that loss. The superoptimal focus will then cause you to feel sadness.

If you try to ignore the sadness, it will not go away for long. Instead it will return to you again and again in waves, due to your mind's way of periodically reminding you of your perception of loss. Meanwhile you'll continue your habit of telling yourself that life is futile, and thus

perpetuate your negative emotional condition. This makes the sadness chronic, and chronic sadness is depression. And ignoring it will only make you feel depressed without even knowing you are depressed.

On the other hand, you can acknowledge the depression yet remain in the habit of engaging in perceptions of futility. Habits can be hard to break—especially when you don't recognize the harm they cause you. So when you remain in this habit you can know you are depressed without knowing how to overcome the depression.

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

One method for overcoming depression is prescribed by psychologists of the “cognitive” tradition. They tell you to watch your perceptions closely so that you can detect whenever a negative perception of futility arises. When one does arise you are to turn it into a positive perception of hopefulness. So for instance, if you catch yourself thinking, “the world is no good,” you would stop and change the perception into something like, “the world is a wonderful place where many good things happen.” Over time you will change your mental habit of negative futility-thinking into positive, hopeful-thinking.

When you make this change, your mind will no longer perceive a loss in your ability to find enjoyment. This will lead you out of depression and into the emotion of hopefulness.

Another method for overcoming depression is to allow yourself to feel the emotion completely. Depression is nothing more than chronic sadness caused by a chronically perceived loss. We've already learned that when you allow yourself to feel sadness your mind will begin to come up with ideas for dealing with the perceived loss that has stimulated the feeling. The same is true for depression.

But the problem you'll have when you feel your depression completely is that you'll also feel tempted to reject all of the ideas that arise in your mind for overcoming your loss. Your habitual way of thinking will consider these ideas as useless and futile. So you must resist the temptation to reject these ideas, and give them careful, fair consideration. You must then try out the best of these ideas and give them a chance to succeed.

After awhile you'll notice that some of them indeed are succeeding. This will give you encouragement and hope. And in this way you'll be able to gain faith in your ability to once again find enjoyment in life. Your depression will gradually lift and will be replaced by hopefulness.

THE CAUSE OF STRESS

Stress can be caused by trying to have more life than you are capable of having. You may find yourself enjoying life so much that you'll want to live more of life than you have time for. And so you may fall into the trap of taking on so many projects and activities that you begin to feel overburdened with all of the things you have to do. When this happens you feel stressed.

When you have an unfinished project waiting to be done, your mind will store this information in your recent memory. Periodically your mind will remind you of the unfinished project. The more reminders you receive, the less unique the perception of the unfinished project will be to your experience. This decline in uniqueness will reduce your level of change, life and enjoyment.

If you have many unfinished projects waiting to be done, you'll find yourself receiving many reminders that are declining in uniqueness and reducing your enjoyment. Furthermore, the more unfinished projects, the less time you'll have to complete them all. Therefore, the more unfinished projects, the longer each unfinished project will have to remain in your recent memory. This will result in more reminders from each project, that you will periodically receive over a longer period of time. This will compound the decline in uniqueness from each reminder you receive. And this will compound the reduction in your level of change, life, and enjoyment.

This compounded reduction will be felt as stress.

OVERCOMING THE STRESS OF UNFINISHED PROJECTS

An obvious way to avoid this kind of stress is to avoid taking on more projects than you feel comfortable with accomplishing. But if it's too late for that then the next best method is to stop taking on new projects until you've reduced the amount of your unfinished projects to a comfortable level.

But there are other methods that can be effective. For instance, you can make a list of things to do. This can help you to get projects done with less need for reminders. You can also organize and manage your time so that you can accomplish projects more quickly and efficiently. This will keep unfinished projects from backing up to uncomfortable levels.

THE STRESS OF HYPERVIGILANCE

Stress can also be caused by hypervigilance. Hypervigilance occurs when you maintain a constant high state of vigilance to protect yourself from a perceived threat. Over time this state of vigilance exacts a negative emotional toll on you.

For instance, suppose you live with someone whom you perceive to be a danger. You might maintain a high state of vigilance, always being careful to avoid doing anything that might get you into trouble with this person. Even if this hypervigilance keeps you out of danger, it will still cause stress.

The stress is caused because your mind keeps giving you constant reminders to be careful of the danger. These reminders decline in uniqueness over time, leading to reductions in your experience of change, life and enjoyment.

OVERCOMING THE STRESS OF HYPERVIGILANCE

The way to overcome the stress of hypervigilance is to deal with the perceived danger in a manner that causes the perception to go away.

One way to deal with a perceived danger is to re-evaluate the danger itself to determine if it truly represents a threat to your well-being. If the evaluation changes your perception so that you no longer perceive a threat, your hypervigilance will relax, and your stress will dissipate.

Another way to deal with a perceived danger is to confront it. Confrontation usually involves actions or dialogue designed to reduce the danger to a safe level. Confrontation can range from the extreme of fighting with physical or legal force, to something moderate such as diplomatic negotiation.

Perceived dangers can also be effectively dealt with through flight. Removing yourself from the vicinity of a danger can help you feel safe enough to relax your vigilance.

THE ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE OF OVERCOMING STRESS

When stress is overcome it is replaced with calmness. A calm mind is able to experience higher levels of uniqueness because it is not being constantly bombarded with the same reminders, over and over again.

But the disadvantage with a calm mind is that after awhile it can lead to boredom. Remember that boredom can come from having nothing to

do. If your mind is calm because it has nothing to do, this will lead to a decline in the level of uniqueness that your awareness experiences.

Therefore, it would seem that stress is not entirely a negative emotion. A moderate level of stress can actually be beneficial, because it keeps your mind involved in activities that cause unique perceptions. And this helps to prevent boredom. When you don't have too many projects, nor too few, and when you don't have too much danger, nor too much safety, you will achieve a balance between stress and calmness that will enable you to experience change, life and enjoyment at an optimal level.

THE CAUSE OF FEAR

Fear can be caused by placing superoptimal focus on a danger and your need to be safe. This occurs automatically and involuntarily whenever you perceive a danger. High IMF decreases the level of uniqueness in your awareness, thus reducing your enjoyment.

For instance, suppose you're walking down a street when a large dog approaches you with bared teeth and a snarling growl. You will likely perceive this as a significant danger and place superoptimal focus on both the dog and on your need to be safe.

This superoptimal focus will feel unpleasant, but it will serve a useful purpose. It will stimulate adrenaline in your body, making you more capable of thinking and acting quickly to protect yourself. So to protect yourself from harm, it's important to acknowledge the fear.

After a danger passes you'll still feel fear for awhile. This is because your mind will repeatedly remind you of the danger. These repeated reminders will also feel unpleasant, due to the superoptimal focus they'll trigger as well as the decreasing uniqueness of each subsequent reminder. But the reminders will be useful because they'll inspire you to take action to prevent encountering the danger again.

CHANGE CAN TRIGGER FEAR

Fear can also be triggered by change. This is ironic since change is life and is the ultimate source of your enjoyment. But change can trigger fear because it brings unknown circumstances to your life. Your mind has a tendency to place involuntary superoptimal focus upon a change, looking for any new dangers that come with it, and looking for ways to remain safe. But over time you learn how to handle the new dangers, and this leads to a lessening of your perception of your need to be safe, and therefore a lessening of fear.

This explains why a memory of something unique can be easier to enjoy than a current experience of something unique. You've proven to yourself your ability to survive the unique thing. So now you can relax your superoptimal focus on self-protection, and enjoy optimal focus while remembering it.

This also explains why you may find yourself resistant to change. Even though change brings uniqueness and enjoyment, the known safety and security of that which is old and familiar can lead you into clinging onto your present circumstances, while trying to avoid anything that might change those circumstances in the future.

OVERCOMING FEAR

Fear is overcome much in the same way that its cousin, hypervigilance, is overcome. An evaluation of the thing you are afraid of can change your perception of it, and lead you to no longer see danger and no longer be afraid. Or you can engage in fight or flight strategies that can lead to a lessening of your perception of danger.

And you can deal effectively with your fear of change by regulating change and preventing it from occurring too quickly. Of course, you don't always have control over how quickly a change will occur. Sometimes life will surprise you with events that suddenly and profoundly change the course of your existence. But where you do have control you can make change occur gradually rather than suddenly. This will enable you to gradually adapt to any new dangers, so that you can easily overcome the fear that arises with those dangers.

When fear is overcome it is replaced by confidence. Confidence occurs when you perceive an ability to be safe. A perception of safety allows your mind's focus to relax and recede to optimal levels.

THE CAUSE OF FRUSTRATION

Frustration is caused by trying to do that which is impossible to do. When your efforts are unsuccessful, your mind will place superoptimal focus upon the task you're trying to complete.

For instance, suppose you're using a screwdriver to remove a screw from something, so that you can disassemble it. But suppose the screw is stuck and difficult to turn. If you're in a hurry you'll feel frustrated. Remember that frustration is caused by trying to do that which is impossible to do. It may be possible to remove the screw by patiently working at it with the screwdriver. But if you're in a hurry, then you're

trying to remove the screw more quickly than is possible to remove it with the tool you're using.

This causes your mind to place superoptimal focus on the perception of getting the screw removed within the impossible time frame you have in mind. And when you're unsuccessful, that superoptimal focus will grow, causing your feeling of frustration to grow.

Frustration often results from trying to do things more quickly than time will allow. And so frustration can also be known by the name of impatience.

OVERCOMING FRUSTRATION

The feeling of frustration is useful if you avoid fighting it and allow yourself to feel it completely. And to completely feel this emotion, stop what you're doing and contemplate it. This will keep the feeling from growing to the point of anger, and allow you some space from the stimulus that is triggering your frustration.

When you immerse yourself in the feeling of frustration, ideas for overcoming it will gradually begin to arise in your mind. You'll eventually come to realize and accept that what you're trying to do is impossible. You'll then come up with better ideas for dealing with your situation. These ideas may include approaching your problem in a different manner that will make it possible to accomplish the end result you're trying to accomplish. For instance, in the case of removing the screw, you may decide to set this task aside for awhile until you have more time to allocate toward getting it done.

When frustration is overcome it is replaced by satisfaction. When you perceive your ability to get a task done within a reasonable time frame, you'll feel satisfied. And when you accomplish a task within a time frame that seems reasonable to you, you'll also feel satisfied. This feeling is caused by optimal focus being placed upon the task you've been working on.

THE CAUSE OF ANGER

Anger is an extreme form of frustration. It also is caused by trying to do that which is impossible to do. It arises when frustration reaches a point where it becomes impossible to think rationally. And at this point your superoptimal focus becomes so powerful you feel extreme emotional pain.

The superoptimal focus that causes frustration allows your mind to develop ideas for successfully completing the task you're trying to complete. This is because your mind has so much focus upon it, that most of the perceptions arising in your mind are related to completing the task. These perceptions can span a wide range of ideas, and be imaginative and innovative. For instance, in the example of removing the screw mentioned above, you may develop the following ideas: Try a different tool, such as an electric-powered screwdriver. Extend the time allowed for removing the screw. Ask a friend for assistance. Or spray the screw with lubricant.

But when superoptimal focus reaches the point of causing anger, helpful ideas such as these will not occur to you. This is because you'll feel so much emotional pain that your mind's focus will shift from completing the task to protecting yourself from the task. Your mind will see the task as the cause of your extreme emotional pain. And it will want to immediately take whatever action possible to protect itself, so that it can find relief from the pain.

Therefore, the ideas that will arise in your mind will be related to self-protection. And since you'll see the task as the danger you need to protect yourself from, you'll focus on protecting yourself from the task. And so the first idea that might arise will be to retreat from the task altogether. You may do so, and storm away angrily, but if you do you will now be faced with the idea of leaving it unaccomplished.

If you perceive the task as being too important to give up on, your mind will place superoptimal focus on the danger of giving up. This will produce fear, and this fear will motivate you to stick with it, or return to it if you stormed away. And now you'll perceive a need to protect yourself from two things: The perception of completing the task, and the perception of not completing it. This will leave your mind in an impossible state. It will place superoptimal focus on protecting itself from both perceptions at the same time. And yet both perceptions will be in direct conflict with each other.

The end result is that irrational ideas will now arise in your mind. Ideas such as: Destroying anything or anyone related to the task. Destroying yourself, to obtain relief from your emotional pain. Or taking extreme measures to accomplish the task, even if those measures are dangerous.

These irrational ideas are unlikely to provide you with the guidance you need for succeeding. And if you act upon them, you'll most likely compound your problems, giving yourself more tasks to accomplish in the future (such as the task of repairing or replacing something you've destroyed).

Therefore it's very important for you to recognize anger when it arises and seek ways to overcome it.

OVERCOMING ANGER

Treat anger as a warning signal. When you feel an extreme amount of emotional pain, and irrational ideas begin to arise, your mind is warning you that it has been placed in an impossible position. Your mind is screaming out a message that everything you're trying to do is impossible to do, and that any further action will likely cause you more harm than good.

Do not ignore this warning. If you do you'll leave yourself in a mental state where it will be impossible for you to think and act rationally. And this will most likely cause yourself a lot of hardship. In almost every case, when you feel anger, your best course of action is to immediately stop what you're doing. The only time it is helpful to act on anger is when you are truly in a desperate situation, where the ability to survive depends upon immediate action.

Stop what you are doing. This is the first step you must take to overcome anger. The next is to get away from the stimulus that is triggering your anger, if possible. This may mean putting some physical space between yourself and the task you're trying to accomplish. Or it may mean putting physical or mental space between yourself and another person whom you are having difficulty with. It also means putting time space between yourself and the task. You do this by putting the task off to a later time, giving your mind's focus a chance to recede from the extreme superoptimal focus of anger, to the lesser superoptimal focus of frustration.

After your mind's focus recedes to the point of frustration, you can then immerse yourself completely in that feeling and develop ideas for successfully accomplishing what you're trying to do.

ELATION

The opposite of anger is elation. But overcoming anger does not usually mean replacing the feeling with elation. Rather, it means reducing the anger at least to the point of frustration, so that you can develop rational ideas for getting something accomplished.

Elation is the extreme of satisfaction. When you become more than satisfied, you'll feel elated. Satisfaction occurs when you place optimal focus on a task you've been trying to accomplish. Elation occurs when

that task is very unique to your experience. When your memory of a task is weak, and your focus on the task is optimal, you'll feel elated.

For instance, suppose you have recently been hired to do a job you've never done before. At first you'll likely experience superoptimal focus on getting the job done. This is because you'll be fearful of not succeeding. This fear will motivate you into a learning process, and help your mind to develop many new ideas for successfully completing the new tasks you've taken on.

But at some point the new ideas will coalesce and form a complete picture in your mind of how to successfully perform your job. At this point your mind's focus will recede from superoptimal to optimal. And at the same time, you'll be performing tasks that you still have somewhat weak memories for performing. This will make the tasks very unique to your experience, and cause you to feel elation.

THE CAUSE OF HATE

Hate is caused by distrust. In fact hate *is* distrust. The more you hate something, the more you distrust it. Hatred occurs in a wide range of degrees, from minor dislike to major disdain. If you have minor distrust for something or someone, you'll have minor dislike. If you have major distrust, you'll have major disdain.

The feeling of hate arises when you place superoptimal focus on your need to protect yourself. When you perceive that someone or something might harm you, your mind will involuntarily place superoptimal focus on that perception. We've already seen how this will produce feelings of fear and anger. But it will also produce the feeling of hate.

Hatred is more chronic than fear and anger. You tend to feel fear and anger for short periods of time. But you tend to feel hate over much longer periods. This is because distrust is very durable, and can be very difficult to overcome. Distrust is an important survival tool. You need it, because there are many dangers in life that last for a long time. You need to be reminded of those dangers, and distrust provides such reminders to you.

Whenever you are near the stimulus that is the source of your hatred, your hatred reminds you not to trust the stimulus. So if the stimulus is another person, you'll automatically feel hate and distrust for that person every time you find yourself near him. This reaction is so powerful that even when you're around things that remind you of the stimulus, but are not the stimulus itself, feelings of hatred and distrust will arise in your mind.

Hatred is a powerful survival tool. But it also taxes your well-being. Remember, hate is caused by superoptimal focus. Superoptimal focus causes painful feelings. So hatred itself is a painful feeling. This means that the more you hate, the more pain you'll feel.

OVERCOMING HATE

Therefore it's important to overcome hate whenever possible. The way to do this is to find ways to reduce your perceptions of distrust. You can do this in the same way that other negative emotions are overcome. Simply immerse yourself in the feeling of hate, and allow your mind to develop ideas for effectively dealing with the stimulus that is triggering the feeling.

For instance, suppose there's a person in your life that you hate. If you immerse yourself completely in your hatred, ideas will come into your mind for effectively dealing with that person. Some of these ideas might be related to overcoming the person through conflict. Other ideas might deal with how to avoid the person. And still other ideas might concern ways to develop trust in the person.

If you figure out how to overcome the person through conflict, then your adversary will represent less of a threat to you. And when he is less of a threat, you'll distrust him less.

If you figure out how to avoid the person, then you'll find yourself near that person less often. This will reduce the amount of incidents that trigger your feeling of hate, thus reducing the amount of time you'll spend feeling pain.

If you figure out how to develop trust in that person—perhaps through dialogue and developing mutual understanding—then distrust will be replaced by trust, freeing you from the pain of hate.

LOVE

The opposite of hate is love. Love occurs when you trust someone or something. You may love a person because you trust them to look after your well-being. And you may love your car because you trust it to provide you with reliable transportation.

Just like hate, love occurs in a wide range of degrees. These degrees range from minor like to major affection. If you have minor trust for something or someone, you'll have minor like. If you have major trust, you'll have major affection.

The feeling of love arises when your ability to trust allows your focus to remain optimal, rather than rise to superoptimal. For instance, when you're engaged in some sort of enjoyable activity and a person you love comes near you, you will likely be able to maintain optimal focus on the activity.

But if someone you hate comes near you, your focus will involuntarily shift from the enjoyable activity to your perception of distrust for that person. So you'll have to concentrate hard on maintaining any focus on your activity. And when you do, this will drain your background awareness, causing it to move to the foreground to focus upon the activity you're engaged in. This will give you the ability to remain focused on both the activity and your hatred. But this draining of your background awareness will cause suboptimal background awareness. And this will reduce your ability to experience change, enjoyment and life.

Therefore, it is easier to enjoy yourself and get things accomplished when you are near people you love, than when you are near people you hate.

ROMANCE

When you love someone for whom you have weak memories, you'll feel an extreme form of love called infatuation. This often occurs with romantic relationships. When you don't know a person well, or have not spent a lot of time with that person, your memories of that person will be relatively weak. We naturally hold a certain amount of distrust for people we don't know well. But in a romantic relationship it is possible to suddenly overcome this. When your natural distrust suddenly transforms into trust, you'll feel yourself falling in love with that person.

Initially your love will be experienced as the extreme of infatuation. Your relatively weak memories of the person you've fallen in love with will cause their personality to be unique to your experience. This uniqueness, combined with trust, causes the infatuation.

Over time, as you get to know the person more and more, your memories will grow stronger and stronger. This will reduce the uniqueness of their personality and result in a decrease of infatuation to the less extreme levels of ordinary love. But at the same time your trust will have the potential for growing stronger and stronger the longer you remain allied with that person. If that person continues to behave in a manner that proves trustworthy to you, your trust will strengthen over time and your love will remain strong. And this will improve the chances that your relationship will continue to last, long after the infatuation has left.

LOVE IS TRUST

But love is important for more than just romantic relationships. Love is necessary to make any relationship with others beneficial. Love *is* trust. And trust is the most important element needed to forge mutually beneficial relationships. The next chapter will discuss how you can benefit from others, and will describe in more detail the important role that love and trust play in bringing you change, life and enjoyment.

HOW CAN YOU BENEFIT FROM OTHERS?

OTHER BEINGS can provide you with the following two benefits:

1. Longevity.
2. Change.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LONGEVITY

Longevity is important because the longer you live, the more change, enjoyment and life you can experience. Here are a number of ways other beings (including plants, animals and humans) provide you with longevity:

Plants are a source of your food, as well as a source of raw material used to produce textiles for your clothing and lumber for your shelter, among other things vital for your survival.

Animals are also a source of food, and provide material used for your clothing; and aid in many other miscellaneous ways to help you survive.

You derive longevity from human beings in all kinds of ways. First, your parents conceived and raised you until you could take care of yourself. You may engage in activities of mutual assistance with members of your family or friends. Your employer gives you longevity by giving you a livelihood. Your coworkers help you to produce the things that make your livelihood successful. The citizens of your community provide businesses and services that help you meet your needs. The citizens of your country partake in economic activities that keep goods and services available to you. And in fact, people all over the world provide you with the benefit of longevity by engaging in economic activities which in many indirect ways ultimately help to make your survival on earth possible.

But that's not all. Plants, animals and humans are beings that help you in two ways. First, they help you to live longer. Second, after they help you to live longer they serve as a source of enjoyment by bringing change to your life.

The following are ways you derive change from plants, animals and humans:

DERIVING CHANGE FROM PLANTS

There are a number of ways you can derive change from plants:

You can simply observe their appearance. There are over three hundred thousand different species of plants existent in this world. Each different species has a different appearance. This wide variety provides abundant amounts of uniqueness and change.

And when you observe plants from a distance you'll notice that their vast numbers alter landscapes in many unique ways. There are forests, meadows, grasslands, gardens, and farmlands adding change and enjoyment to your visual pleasure.

And so when plants are observed individually or in numbers you reap valuable benefits from them, due to the uniqueness and change their appearance offers.

But plants also have different aromas, flavors and textures that can appeal in many various ways to your senses of smell, taste and feel.

And so you see that plants are important contributors to change, enjoyment and life. The amount of life you are currently experiencing has been heavily influenced by contributions from the Plant Kingdom.

DERIVING CHANGE FROM ANIMALS

There are a number of ways you can derive uniqueness and change from animals:

Just like plants, with animals you can simply observe their appearance. There are over a million-and-a-half species of animals existent in this world, each with its own unique appearance. And similar to plants, animals can present a unique appearance when observed in numbers. For instance, a flock of birds, school of fish, herd of cattle, or colony of ants all present something unique to see.

But plants tend to be inactive, while animals tend to be active. The activities and behavior of animals produce their own brand of change and uniqueness that is mostly unavailable from plants. And every different species of animal engages in its own style of activity. For instance, bears forage and hunt. Birds fly and nest. And fish swim.

With the different behaviors found within different animals, the Animal Kingdom offers even more diversity, uniqueness and change than that found within the Plant Kingdom.

DERIVING CHANGE FROM HUMANS

Human beings are animals, but they have a potential to provide you with much more uniqueness and change than anything you can derive from the rest of the Animal Kingdom. This is because the brain of a human offers a wider diversity and deeper capacity for intelligence than any one species of non-human animal. This superior diversity and capacity allows humans to be much more creative than non-humans. The creativity of humans offers an infinitely vast source of uniqueness, change, enjoyment and life for those who interact with them.

I started with appearance when I described how plants and animals can produce change in your experience. And so I will do again with humans. But note how the intelligence of humans can produce far more variety in appearance than can any plant or non-human animal:

The gender, race, age, size, shape and weight of every human body helps make everyone appear different. Facial characteristics, such as thickness of eyebrows, color of eyes, size and shape of the nose and lips, and presence or absence of facial hair also affect appearance. And we constantly change our facial expressions to match our shifting emotions.

But our intelligence helps us to alter our appearance through clothing. We've invented different styles of dress, and different types of occasions for which to dress differently. And some of us wear jewelry or cosmetics, while others do not. And everyone has their own preference for how they wear their hair.

Not only that but we also change our appearance from hour to hour, day to day, and month to month. In the morning we may wear a robe or a nightgown. At work we may wear a suit, uniform or special work clothes. And in the evening we may wear casual attire. We tend to wear different outfits from one day to the next, as we change shirts, dresses, pants and shoes. And we wear seasonal clothing for adapting to climate conditions that change from one season to the next.

We humans have used our intelligence to invent dieting, hair styling, cosmetics, jewelry, clothing, fads, and notions of what to wear when. All of this contributes to your experience of uniqueness and change when you observe other individual people.

But people also offer uniqueness and change when observed in numbers. People build and occupy villages, towns, cities, and large metropolitan areas. They drive cars on busy highways and freeways, sometimes jamming them up with traffic. They occupy stadiums and watch teams of others engage in sports. They hold parades, carnivals, and festivals. They stand in lines at banks and grocery stores. In fact people

find thousands of different ways to congregate in small and large numbers. And all of their different ways of grouping together brings uniqueness and change to your life experience.

People also engage in a diverse array of activities and behaviors. For example, there are church-goers and atheists, outdoors enthusiasts and homebodies, alcoholics and teetotalers, apathetics and activists. Humans have different political, religious and sexual preferences. Men and women have many differences in the types of activities they engage in, that are typical to their specific gender. Specialties, hobbies, knowledge, and interests differ amongst people, depending on personal histories and the things they are exposed to.

In fact every human being has his or her own unique background and personal history. This gives each one of us a unique perspective on life, and a unique set of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. Add to this a unique genetic makeup affecting our physiques and personalities and you'll see that each and every human being amongst the billions of humans existing or who have ever existed, is one-of-a-kind. And this makes every human being alive today a potentially vast and rich resource of uniqueness, change, enjoyment and life, that you can benefit from.

THE DARK SIDE

It might leave you wondering why anyone could possibly die young or be unhappy, what with all the longevity, uniqueness, change and enjoyment that can be derived in this world from plants, animals and humans. But you need not wonder long when you start to consider that all beings have their darker side.

Plants can poison, animals can attack, and humans—well they can do all these things and more to harm you. The dark side of this world requires that you exercise caution when observing or interacting with others. You have to make calculated decisions whenever you deal with another being. And what you have to calculate is whether or not you'll gain more than you'll lose from your dealings.

TWO EQUATIONS

There are two equations that are helpful to consider when making this calculation. I call these the Longevity Equation and the Change Equation.

The Longevity Equation determines your likelihood of gaining more longevity than you will lose.

The Change Equation determines your likelihood of gaining more change than you will lose.

THE LONGEVITY EQUATION

When you expect to gain more longevity than you'll lose, you've calculated a positive Longevity Equation. But when you expect to lose more longevity than you'll gain, you've calculated a negative Longevity Equation.

You can calculate positive or negative Longevity Equations when dealing with plants, animals or human beings. For instance, when you estimate that the nourishment you'll gain from a plant you want to grow for food will be worth the energy it will require from you to grow the plant, you'll calculate a positive Longevity Equation. You'll gain longevity from the nourishment. But you'll lose longevity from the calories you'll burn cultivating the plant to maturity. But since you expect to gain more longevity from the nourishment than you'll lose from burning the calories, the effort to grow the plant will seem worthwhile to you.

The same could be true from the activity of fishing. If you go fishing with the expectation that you'll catch enough fish to provide enough nourishment to overcome the calories you'll burn from the activity of fishing, you'll calculate a positive Longevity Equation. And so a positive Longevity Equation can be calculated from your dealings with animals—in this case fish.

On the other hand, if you go fishing just for the fun of it, and intend to release every fish you catch back into the water, you'll have to calculate a negative Longevity Equation from the activity of fishing. For here you'll calculate zero gains in nourishment and longevity from the fish, while losing some of your own longevity from the calories you'll burn while fishing.

HUMANS AND LONGEVITY

Your dealings with humans can also cause positive or negative Longevity Equations. For instance, if you take a job that will require a daily round-trip commute of 300 miles, you'll likely spend more money commuting than you'll earn in wages from your job. So in this case, the longevity you'll derive from your employer will be less than the longevity you'll lose from commuting to and from work. This negative Longevity Equation will likely lead you to quitting your job or moving closer to it.

If you move closer to it, the cost of commuting will likely decrease below the amount of wages you'll earn. This will enable you to change your calculation from a negative to a positive Longevity Equation.

Bookkeepers know all about the Longevity Equation. Every bit of income coming into a business adds to the longevity of that business. But every expense incurred subtracts from it. When income exceeds expenses, a net profit is calculated. This is a positive Longevity Equation. And when expenses exceed income, a net loss is calculated, producing a negative Longevity Equation.

If you marry a man who promises to support you, then you may be calculating a positive Longevity Equation from the marriage. But after the marriage, if he begins to physically abuse you to the point where you fear for your life, your calculation would change from a positive to a negative Longevity Equation.

We ordinarily view police as protectors of our safety. So we calculate a positive Longevity Equation when considering law enforcers. But if you commit a crime, and a police officer draws a gun on you, you might begin calculating a negative Longevity Equation when considering the option of drawing your own gun in return.

THE CHANGE EQUATION

When you expect to gain more uniqueness and change than you'll lose, you have calculated a positive Change Equation. But when you expect to lose more uniqueness and change than you'll gain, you have calculated a negative Change Equation.

Just like longevity, you can calculate positive or negative Change Equations when dealing with plants, animals or human beings. For instance, you may want to decide whether or not it's worth it to grow a plant that produces a beautiful flower. The work effort you'll put into cultivating the plant until it flowers might require that you utilize superoptimal focus. You'll have to concentrate your mental energies on things like deciding where to dig the hole for the plant. And you'll have to figure out how much to water it, and what kind of fertilizer to use. This superoptimal focus will reduce your experience of uniqueness and change. Plus, you'll have to engage in the physical efforts of digging, watering, and fertilizing. These physical efforts might increase your Immediate Familiarity (IMF) of feelings in your muscles to the point of superoptimal focus. And the superoptimal focus will reduce your experience of uniqueness and change.

Therefore, you might expect to experience losses in uniqueness and change from the effort of growing the plant. But you'll also expect to experience some gains in uniqueness and change. The very activity of growing the plant might be very unique to you, if this is an activity you don't often engage in. The appearance of the plant as it grows and matures might also be very unique to you if you don't often see plants like this. And the flower it produces will likely bring high levels of uniqueness and change to your awareness.

If you expect that your gains in uniqueness and change will exceed your losses, then you'll calculate a positive Change Equation, and will likely decide to grow the plant. But if you expect that your losses in uniqueness and change will exceed your gains, you'll calculate a negative Change Equation, and will likely decide not to grow the plant.

You can also calculate a positive or negative Change Equation when dealing with animals. For instance, suppose you are trying to decide whether or not to acquire a puppy for a pet. You'll know that puppies can be a nuisance, and can require a lot of effort to raise. This effort will require certain measures of superoptimal focus. You can expect to make an effort to feed the dog, clean up after it, housebreak it, train it, replace chewed up valuables, and so forth. And when it grows to maturity you can expect other challenges to deal with. All of this effort and superoptimal focus will reduce your experience of uniqueness and change.

But on the other hand, a puppy can bring an enormous amount of uniqueness and change into your life. You can expect that the look, feel, behavior and personality of the animal will be very unique to your experience.

If you expect that your gains in uniqueness and change will exceed your losses, then you'll calculate a positive Change Equation and will likely decide to acquire the puppy. But if you expect that your losses in uniqueness and change will exceed your gains, you'll calculate a negative Change Equation and will likely decide not to acquire the puppy.

HUMANS AND CHANGE

Your dealings with humans can also cause positive or negative Change Equations. For instance, suppose you're trying to decide whether or not to visit a relative. If that relative is temperamental in nature, you'll expect a difficult visit. So you may expect to engage in superoptimal focus, concentrating on how to avoid arousing your relative's irascibility. This superoptimal focus will increase your IMF, and decrease your experience

of uniqueness, change and enjoyment. The could cause you to calculate a negative Change Equation and cancel your visit with the relative.

A person who is in a good mood is likely to have no major immediate problems to take care of. You probably enjoy being around people like this. And this is because they present a positive Change Equation to you. They have no problems to take care of, so you won't have to deal with any problems requiring superoptimal focus when you associate with them. This allows you to maintain an optimal focus, and gain the most uniqueness and change possible from interacting with their personalities.

MIXED EQUATIONS

So far I have presented the Longevity and Change Equations separate from each other. But in reality every decision you make in life involves both of these equations at the same time. For instance, the one who grows plants for food may do so because of a positive Longevity Equation. But at the same time he may be doing so in spite of a negative Change Equation. The negative Change Equation may occur if the work involved in farming requires so much superoptimal focus that he loses more uniqueness and change than he acquires. In a case like this the farmer is choosing to keep his body alive at the cost of giving up life in his mind.

THE FOUR MIXED EQUATIONS

There are four kinds of mixed equations, as follows:

1. Positive Longevity and Positive Change.
2. Positive Longevity and Negative Change.
3. Negative Longevity and Positive Change.
4. Negative Longevity and Negative Change.

The best type of situation to be in is a positive Longevity and positive Change Equation. An example of this would be if you worked at a job you enjoyed. In this case the pay earned from the job would be adding to your longevity, while the uniqueness derived from the work would be adding to your change.

But the situation would be much different if you worked at a job you didn't enjoy. This would cause a positive Longevity and negative Change Equation.

You often find yourself dealing with mixed equation number three. This occurs when you're faced with a negative Longevity and positive

Change Equation. Suppose you buy a boat. The people who build, sell and maintain boats tend to charge a lot of money. So boats tend to be expensive to buy and maintain. The cost of the boat would reduce your longevity. But the uniqueness derived from using the boat would add to your change.

The decision to have children usually involves a negative Longevity and positive Change Equation. Children are even more expensive than boats. They tend to cost a lot to raise, and the older they get the more they cost. But as children grow older they gradually unveil unique personalities and behaviors. This uniqueness can reap rewards in terms of adding change to the lives of parents. And this helps parents to enjoy and love their children, despite the expense in longevity.

The worst type of situation to be in is one that offers a negative Longevity and negative Change Equation. This could occur if you were involved with a dangerous and difficult person. You would lose longevity from the risk to your safety, and you would lose uniqueness and change due to the superoptimal focus brought on by your fear and hypervigilance.

POSITIVE EQUATIONS REQUIRE COOPERATION

Obviously the more positive Longevity and positive Change Equations you're involved in the better off you're going to be. And so your challenge in life is to have as many of these equations as possible. But the problem with finding positive equations is that they require the cooperation of others.

Suppose you rob someone by forcing him at gunpoint to give you his money. He'll likely cooperate, so this transaction would seem to present a positive Longevity Equation for you. But when you consider the risk of being caught by uncooperative law enforcers, and the danger of living as a prisoner, the positive Longevity Equation changes to negative.

Not only that but even if you're not caught, your actions will strengthen attitudes within yourself that will be reflected in your demeanor. People whom you deal with in the future will sense something about you that seems untrustworthy and will be less likely to cooperate with you. This decline in future cooperation will more than offset the initial cooperation you found when you committed the robbery.

And so the very action of robbing someone—whether you get caught or not—will make it difficult for you to win the trust and cooperation of others in the future.

TRUSTWORTHINESS IS THE HIGHEST VIRTUE

Trust is the key to winning cooperation from others. The more people trust you the more likely they are to cooperate. Trustworthiness, more than any other virtue, enables you to benefit from others by filling your life with positive Longevity and positive Change Equations. And so trustworthiness is the highest virtue.

The way to become trustworthy is to cultivate trust in all of your interactions with others. Let them know through your actions and genuine demeanor that they can rely on you to help them live long and enjoy life. Help them as much as you can to achieve positive Longevity and positive Change Equations.

But be careful. Remember the dark side of other beings. Just as trustworthiness is the highest virtue for you, so it is with others. You must be able to count on the trustworthiness of another being before you can expect that other being to help you, yourself, to live long and enjoy life.

In the ideal situation there will be mutual trust between yourself and others. And this will enable you and others to work together in an effective manner to produce positive Longevity and Change Equations for each other.

In the last chapter I pointed out that trust is love. So in the ideal situation of mutual trust, love exists between yourself and others. This means that the more you can cultivate these ideal situations in life, the more love you will have in your life. And the more love you have in your life, the longer you will likely live and the more you will enjoy living.

THE FOUR SITUATIONS OF TRUST

There are four situations involving trustworthiness that determine how much you can benefit from others, as follows:

1. You are trustworthy, and so are those with whom you deal.
2. You are trustworthy, but those with whom you deal are not.
3. You are not trustworthy, but those with whom you deal are.
4. You are not trustworthy, and neither are those with whom you deal.

The first situation is ideal, as mentioned above. It tends to produce positive Longevity and positive Change Equations for yourself, and for those with whom you interact.

Situation number two tends to produce negative equations for yourself, but positive equations for the ones you deal with. This occurs when others

take advantage of your trustworthiness, but prove to be untrustworthy themselves. The more you involve yourself in situations like this, the less trusting of others you'll become. The less trusting you become, the less often you'll involve yourself in situations like this. But you'll also find yourself less involved in situation number one, due to increasing difficulty you'll have in trusting anybody.

Situation number three is the opposite of situation number two. This tends to produce positive equations for yourself (at least temporarily), and negative equations for the ones you deal with. This occurs when you take advantage of the trustworthiness of others, but where you are not trustworthy yourself. The more you involve yourself in situations like this, the less trustworthy you'll become and the less opportunities you'll find for more of these situations. Your attitudes and behavioral habits are reinforced with each situation like this until you reach a point where it becomes very difficult for you to convey trustworthiness to others and gain their cooperation.

The last situation is the worst kind to be involved in. This often involves non-cooperation and fighting. It can be a zero-sum game, where negative Longevity and negative Change Equations are produced for yourself and those with whom you deal. When any positive equations are produced, they are only the result of one person overpowering another and forcing their cooperation. This kind of situation occurs frequently in our world, due to a mindset that many have concerning how they believe they can benefit from others.

Many believe that benefits cannot be derived except from overpowering others. And so they engage in endless struggles, sometimes winning and sometimes losing. In the process they diminish their trustworthiness, live loveless lives, and reduce their chances of living a long time or of enjoying life.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

While trustworthiness is the highest virtue, it is not an end to itself. It's important because it helps you to benefit from others by producing positive Longevity and Change Equations.

But the reason why you want these equations is because they enable you to have more life.

The creation of life is the ultimate goal. The more this goal is achieved, the more life is created. And the more life that is created, the longer you and others will live, and the more you and others will enjoy yourselves.

So this is a way you should live your life. You should create life for others, and you should ensure that they create life for you.

Now, since creating life is the ultimate goal, one more question comes to mind:

How is life created?

By now you may have some ideas concerning how to answer this question. But I wish to be logical and thorough in my treatment of this all-important subject. I want to fill in as many gaps in my logic that I can, so that you will have a clear picture of the meaning of my philosophy.

So please turn to the next chapter where I will now discuss how to create life.

HOW IS LIFE CREATED?

LIFE IS CREATED whenever anything happens that causes change. Living beings are always causing change, so living beings are always creating life.

CREATING LONGEVITY CREATES LIFE

If you do something that produces a positive Longevity Equation, by helping someone to live longer, you are creating life. This is because the longer someone lives the more life they can experience. Say for example that you build a house. The people who move into the house will benefit by getting their need for shelter satisfied. Shelter is needed for survival and a long life. Therefore building the house creates life for those who occupy it.

If you get paid for building the house the money can be used to buy the things you need to survive. And so the people who pay you are also creating life by helping you to live longer.

CREATING CHANGE CREATES LIFE

If you do something that produces a positive Change Equation by helping someone to experience uniqueness and change, you are creating life. This is because change is life, and uniqueness causes change. Suppose you tell someone an entertaining story. The story will be entertaining because it will introduce unique perceptions to their awareness. The uniqueness will cause them to experience change, and the change will increase the amount of life they experience. Therefore telling the story will create life.

And if they tell you an entertaining story in return, they will introduce unique perceptions to your awareness. And this will create life for you.

ENDLESS WAYS TO CREATE LIFE

There are an endless amount of ways to create longevity, change and life. For instance, whatever you do for a living—as long as it produces

more longevity or change than it takes away—is a way of creating life. Just about every occupation can fall into this category. Here are some examples:

Carpentry, farming, clerical work, ditch digging, manufacturing, retailing, sales, acting, singing, advocating, legislating, construction, finance, medicine, ministry, communications, and much more.

Whenever you engage in any of these occupations you are being creative and are creating life.

But you must be careful about how you go about what you do for a living. For instance, a construction worker will take away more life than he creates if he performs shoddy work that cannot be relied upon. Or a doctor will take more life than he creates if he misdiagnoses and prescribes harmful treatments.

Your social interactions also create life. Revealing your thoughts, feelings and personality to others will add uniqueness and change to their experience. Or just walking down the street or sitting in one place silently can create life. Others will observe your unique appearance and demeanor, and benefit in that manner.

Satisfying your curiosities and pursuing your passions will also create life. It will create life for yourself by adding uniqueness and change to your experience. And it will create life for others by giving you unique knowledge and perspectives which you can share with others.

Just living and leading an ordinary life will create life for yourself and others. You need not make any kind of special effort, just as long as you ensure that you cause no harm to others. Life is automatically created and renewed just by living it. Everything you say, do and experience is constantly changing within the vast matrix of infinite creativity that comprises your universe of awareness. Every day, your world is at least a little bit different. Every day, beings interact with each other in an infinite variety of ways, that cause the world to constantly change. Your participation in the world forces you to change so that you can adapt to the change that constantly occurs. You cannot participate in yesterday's world. You must participate in today's world, under today's terms. And when you do so you must be creative enough to find ways to effectively participate, survive and enjoy yourself. This creativity creates life for both yourself and others. And this creativity represents your personal contribution to the never-ending renewal of life that keeps our world thriving.

CREATIVITY TECHNIQUES

Although you don't have to do anything special to be creative, there are many techniques you can engage in that can help you to be more creative than you may be right now. The more creative you are, the more longevity, change and enjoyment you can have. Also the more creative you are, the more likely that you'll be trusted by others. This is because you'll be able to create more life for others, so they'll consider you to be more desirable to deal with.

Therefore it's helpful to develop techniques, or learn techniques from others, that will enable you to improve your skills at creativity. The following are a few techniques that can help you be more creative:

THE TECHNIQUE OF LEARNING

The more knowledge you have, the more creative you can be. Consider the line of work you're in. The more you know about your line of work the more productive you can be at it. Those who take the time to study manuals and textbooks that teach the skills of their careers have an advantage over their coworkers who do not. They become more creative and productive. Their additional creativity adds additional life to others, which helps others to trust them more. Often these people who trust them more are their employers or clients. So the learning and creativity they acquire helps them to advance in their careers. The net result is that they increase their longevity, while also increasing their experience of uniqueness and change.

All the great thinkers and inventors of this world have stood on the shoulders of those who have come before them. They studied and learned the concepts that their forbears developed. And then they used those concepts to inspire them to think and create further. And this is what has helped them to become recognized as great thinkers and inventors.

The more you learn, the more of this world you know. And the more of this world you know, the more capable you are at putting together elements of this world in order to create new elements.

You don't have to learn by studying books. You can study life. You can observe and question and constantly keep an open mind toward adjusting and correcting your perception of things. And you can explore. You can try doing different things to see where they lead. And you can discover different things by exposing your awareness to that which is foreign and exotic to your everyday ordinary experience of life.

Learning stimulates creativity—whether that learning is accomplished through books, life observation, or life experience.

But learning can also be difficult. Superoptimal focus is often required in order to absorb the concepts presented before you. This superoptimal focus reduces your experience of uniqueness, change and enjoyment. So you must be careful with learning. You must calculate the long-term results you expect to receive from the concepts you intend to learn. If you expect that the things you will learn will produce more uniqueness and change in the long run than what you will lose in the short run, then you will calculate a positive Change Equation. And this will make the effort of learning seem worthwhile to you.

Plus, you can enhance the value of learning through an emphasis on the practical. When you focus mainly on learning things that will improve your ability to survive, you will be able to calculate a positive Longevity Equation along with a positive Change Equation. Learning advanced skills of your career, or learning how to repair your car, are two examples of how you can enhance your learning with positive Longevity and Change Equations.

Learning can be a difficult but worthwhile technique for improving creativity. It is fundamentally sound and ancient in its origins. There is no technique humans have used for improving creativity that has been more tried and proven than the technique of learning. Learning will help you to create life.

THE TECHNIQUE OF FORCED ACTION

Your mind is an amazing and useful tool for forgetfulness. You forget things all the time. Try to remember everything you have experienced within the past five minutes. By everything, I mean every detail of every stimulus that you perceived in your foreground and background awareness. What did these stimuli feel like? What was every thought you thought of? What was every emotion that struck you? Describe to yourself every sensation, thought and emotion you perceived, exactly as you perceived them.

Impossible? You bet. And that is because your mind is very skilled at forgetting. Even when looking back over just the past five minutes you'll see that you have lost your memory of most of the details you have experienced. So consider how much more you have lost over the course of your lifetime. It's hard to forget a small percentage of significant or general things you've experienced during your life. But the myriad millions of billions of fine details from the myriad millions and billions of

fine sensations have escaped your memory almost as quickly as you've become aware of them.

This "forgetting skill" is very useful to you. It enables you to re-experience sensations, thoughts and emotions over and over again as if they were almost new to you each time. Remember that the weaker your memory is of something, the more unique and enjoyable that thing is to you. And you have a very weak memory for the fine details you've experienced in life. Therefore, the fine details in life maintain a high level of uniqueness that enable you to enjoy them repeatedly throughout your lifetime.

But this also has a downside. Your forgetfulness of fine details can cause you to forget how enjoyable something can be. This often happens when you consider a work activity that needs to be completed, such as a chore. You'll have a strong memory of the general aspects of doing the chore if it's something you've done repeatedly before. This strong memory will cause you to anticipate a low level of uniqueness and change from getting the job done, and therefore a low level of enjoyment. Therefore you will most likely calculate a negative Change Equation in anticipation of the work.

This will make you less likely to perform the chore. And this can cause inaction on an important work activity. This inaction will then cause a negative Longevity Equation. The negative Longevity Equation will arise from the fact that when you procrastinate or fail to get your necessary duties accomplished you reduce your ability to survive.

The way to overcome this problem is to force yourself into action. When you force yourself to work on the chore, you convert your negative Longevity Equation into a positive one. At the same time, you are also very likely to discover that the anticipated negative Change Equation is not negative at all, but is positive. You'll discover this when you find yourself "getting into" the activity and enjoying it.

This phenomenon occurs as a result of the fine details from the stimuli that are associated with the chore. These fine details have been forgotten, but they return to you when you engage in the actual action you have been dreading. These details will be unique to your awareness, due to your weak memory of them, and will thus cause you to experience change and enjoyment.

Forcing yourself into action has a way of bringing on this kind of unexpected enjoyment. The same forgetfulness of your mind that made you want to avoid the action will also make you enjoy the action once you finally get into it.

This technique of forced action will work as long as you avoid trying to perform undesirable activities in a hurry. If you force yourself into an action with the attitude of getting it over with and done quickly, you'll have to engage in superoptimal focus on an effort to work fast. This will reduce background awareness of the finely detailed sensations produced by your actions. This superoptimal focus and reduced background awareness will reduce your experience of uniqueness and enjoyment, causing you to dislike performing the activity.

By taking your time while forcing yourself to do something you anticipate not enjoying, there's an excellent chance you'll actually find yourself enjoying it. This is because you'll avoid superoptimal focus and be able to experience finely detailed forgotten sensations, with optimal awareness. And if you get into the habit of forcing yourself into action in this way, you'll find yourself improving your creativity—thus creating more life for both yourself and others.

THE TECHNIQUE OF RANDOM SUBCONSCIOUS INSPIRATION

Your mind never quits thinking. But you are only barely aware of most of the thinking you do. This is because most of it is nonverbal and occurs within your background awareness. I refer to this as subconscious thought.

The nonverbal nature of subconscious thought enables your mind to think at lightning-fast speed. Remember that your awareness shifts around at this same lightning-fast speed. It is constantly shifting around amongst sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts. The things it shifts to most frequently are the things that are within the focus of your mind—or foreground awareness. The rest exists within the background awareness of your mind.

Your background awareness has very little time to develop your subconscious thoughts, since it must also spend time shifting to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, and emotions. Therefore the thoughts of your subconscious must be developed at lightning-fast speed during the brief moments that your background awareness does shift to them. This requires your subconscious to forgo the luxury of converting concepts into verbal thoughts. That takes too much time.

This is why your subconscious mind thinks nonverbally.

The process of nonverbal subconscious thought involves remembering concepts, then combining them together to form new concepts. These new concepts then get combined with other new concepts, as well as old

remembered concepts, to form even newer concepts. After awhile all of the new concepts coalesce together to form one very large concept, that becomes so large it catches the attention of your awareness. Your awareness will then shift to the new concept more frequently, putting it into its foreground awareness, and giving it time to convert the new large concept into verbal thought.

The verbal thought will represent a brand new concept that your subconscious mind has created. And this is how your mind spontaneously creates new ideas for your conscious awareness.

This spontaneous creation of new ideas is often referred to as inspiration.

Inspiration occurs somewhat randomly. It is not entirely random, though. The things that your mind is focused on will often serve as a seed for your subconscious mind to develop. Thus, when you are working at solving a problem, the answer to that problem might suddenly occur to you from out of your subconscious mind. This gives you some control over the workings of your subconscious. By focusing on something, your subconscious will tend to go to work on it and inspire you with new thoughts on how to deal with what you are focused on.

But there is also a randomness to the process. First, you have no control over when a new inspiration will strike you. It will happen whenever it happens, in the subconscious' own time. Also, you often receive inspirations that are completely unexpected concerning things completely unrelated to what you have been focused on.

These unexpected inspirations might involve ordinary things, such as remembering to do something that you've been wanting to take care of. Or they might involve bizarre or silly ideas that have no practical value except to entertain your mind with uniqueness.

But once-in-awhile an inspiration will strike you that will seem of profound significance. It will capture your imagination and leave you feeling excited. It could be an idea that changes your perspective of the world. Or it could be an idea that can lead you to change the course of your life. Or it could be an idea that could lead to a great discovery or invention.

Whatever the idea is, it will seem exciting to you due to its uniqueness and the potential for change that it presents.

It is important to take inspirations like these seriously. Do not shrug them off or engage in defeatist thinking, dismissing the inspiration as just an impossible dream. It could be an impossible dream, but the only way to know for sure is to analyze the inspiration carefully.

On the other hand be careful to avoid taking the inspiration too seriously. If it is an impossible dream, you stand to lose a lot by giving up everything you have now so that you can pursue it.

Analyze these kinds of inspiration carefully and try them out on a small scale to see if they work for you. If one does work, you can then expand your efforts at developing it to larger and larger scales.

These random rays of inspiration that arise from your subconscious mind will help you to be more creative if you take them seriously but pursue them carefully.

It is said that Isaac Newton was inspired to develop his theory of gravity after an apple fell on his head. Whether or not that story is true, it symbolizes the great potential that random subconscious inspiration holds for helping you to be more creative. Inspiration strikes with the randomness of the proverbial apple striking Newton's cranium. Yet the potential contained within some of the new ideas that occur to you can make a significant impact upon our world, creating vast amounts of new life for both yourself and everyone else.

OTHER TECHNIQUES

The techniques of learning, forced action, and random subconscious inspiration are not the only techniques available for improving your creativity. I have presented them here to show you how possible it is to improve your creativity.

Imagine doing the opposite of these techniques. Suppose you avoided learning. Suppose you always procrastinated and never forced yourself to perform the routine chores of life. And suppose you always disregarded your inspirations, and never followed them up with exploration, experimentation or action. Consider what your level of creativity would be under these circumstances.

It certainly is possible to do the opposite of these techniques. And in fact, you may know some people who do this, and act counterproductive to their creativity potential. When you observe these people, ask yourself how happy they are. Do they really enjoy life to any significant degree? Do they really seem to have much of a life? Or do they seem to merely exist, living within colorless static worlds devoid of excitement?

If you wish to have significant enjoyment in life, and bring such enjoyment to the lives of others, you must be proactive at creating life. Utilize the techniques presented in this chapter. Learn techniques from others. And develop more techniques on your own. Different techniques work differently for different people. Find what works best for yourself.

But be careful. Moderation at creativity is also important. If you attempt too much creativity, you will cause too much stress in your life. This will cause superoptimal focus and ultimately reduce the amount of uniqueness, change and enjoyment that you will experience. So find a balance between too much stress and too little stress, that allows you to feel comfortable yet interested, and let this be your level of creativity.

DESTROYING LIFE

Another thing to be careful of, is to avoid destroying that which is created. If you create life for others, then engage in hostile behavior toward them, you'll actually take more life away than you create. Their perceptions of danger will force their minds into the superoptimal focus of negative emotions. And as you've learned, superoptimal focus causes a reduction in life.

You may be a very productive worker, or have the creative talent of an artistic genius. But when you treat others in a manner that triggers negative emotions in them, you actually destroy everything you create. If you want to create life for others, then you must also allow them to enjoy what you create by behaving in a trustworthy manner toward them.

And when others create life for you, it's important to receive their creations without destroying life. If you behave in a hostile or untrustworthy manner toward those who assist you, you may trigger superoptimal focus in them, causing a reduction in their experience of life. And in this manner you'll be destroying as much life as is being created for you. Those who've created that life will then have less life to give you in the future. And they'll be less motivated to create any additional life on your behalf.

So if you want others to create life for you, you must ensure that the life they create for you does not come at the expense of their own life.

THE END OF CREATIVITY

The highest goal in life is to create life. Without creation, life could not exist. In fact everything you think, say, and do is an act of creativity.

And yet, no matter how creative you choose to be, and no matter how much life you create for yourself and others, you still grow older every day.

And one of these days you will die.

Life on this earth is not eternal. Creativity can only take you so far in this world. It does have a limit. And one day you'll reach that limit. Your death will end your creativity.

At least in this world.

Is there another world? Can you continue to be creative beyond the grave? If so what will the next world be like? What kind of life can you create for yourself in any world that lies beyond?

These questions contain the deepest mysteries your mind can ponder. In Part Two of this book I'll tackle these mysteries. I'll use logic and practical reasoning to unravel as best I can the nature of death, and the possibility of life after death.

Follow my logic and come with me. I have shown you the logic of life. Journey with me now to the other side and I will present to you the logic of death.

PART 2:

THE
LOGIC
OF
DEATH

WHAT IS DEATH?

DEATH IS IMPOSSIBLE. But only in the sense that all things change and never stop changing. And change is life. This would of course make death impossible. However death is possible in another way.

A DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER

When you experience conscious awareness, you are alive. When you cease to experience conscious awareness, you are dead. And you are dead because you cease to be aware of change. Awareness of change is life for you. Cessation of this awareness is death.

You may argue that if you're knocked unconscious from a bump on the head, your conscious awareness ceases until you regain consciousness. This may be so, or it may not be so. It could be that while you're "unconscious" you experience dreams—which is a form of conscious awareness. And it could be that when you regain consciousness you forget that you were dreaming. The trauma to your brain from the bump on your head might cause you to lose memory of having dreamed.

It's impossible to prove that we actually lose our conscious awareness when we're knocked unconscious, or are anesthetized for surgery, or are in a deep sleep or coma. Even when a person is considered brain-dead by medical experts it's impossible to know that they have actually lost conscious awareness. The medical instruments available today for measuring brain waves may not have the ability to detect all forms of conscious mental activity.

And it may never be possible to know for sure that conscious awareness can be lost while the physical body is still alive. It could be that there is energy in the mind that will always escape human detection even with the most advanced technology that can be developed.

Let's take that point further. It may also never be possible to know for sure that conscious awareness can be lost *after* the physical body is no longer alive.

The mind is a deep mystery, and there are so many mysteries about it that are impossible to solve. So this makes the question, "What is death?" surprisingly difficult to answer. We cannot know what happens to our

conscious awareness after the body ceases to function. And so we cannot know exactly what death is.

A DEFINITION OF PHYSICAL DEATH

But we do know this. We know that any being that takes on physical life in this world will eventually die. And we know that there is no living being alive today that is not immune from death. But by death I mean physical death. I mean the point in time when the physical body ceases to function.

Yet even this point in time is not very clear. The physical body dies gradually, and not all at once, with different organs failing at different times.

So I must resort to a simplistic definition of death, for the sake of convenience. In my simple convenient definition I say that you are physically dead after your heart permanently stops beating.

TWO TYPES OF DEATH

But a definition of physical death only resolves part of the question, “What is death?” We still must know what happens to conscious awareness after physical death occurs. You may cease to remain consciously aware after the point of physical death. In this case, mental death—or death of the mind—occurs at around the same time as physical death. Or you may continue to remain consciously aware after the point of death. In this case mental death does not coincide with physical death.

This means we are left with two types of death—Physical death, and mental death. And it means that they both may coincide with each other, or they may not. Or perhaps mental death never occurs at all.

So what is death? Death is of two kinds—physical death and mental death. Physical death occurs when your heart permanently stops beating. Mental death occurs when you cease being consciously aware. Physical death is inevitable. Mental death may never occur at all.

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

OF COURSE! ABSOLUTELY! There is positively no doubt in my mind that there is life after death. Well, except for maybe just a little bit of doubt. Okay, okay, it's more than just a little. It's a nagging doubt, in fact. I can declare to myself and the whole world that there absolutely and for sure is life after death, and this helps to suppress the nagging doubts in my head. But I can never make those doubts go away completely. And when I finally acknowledge the suppressed doubts, they come pounding back like a punch to the stomach.

THE FAILURE OF SCIENCE

Science has failed, and I believe always will fail, in its attempts to prove whether or not there is life after death. The only scientific evidence that exists indicating a hereafter is anecdotal. This anecdotal evidence comes from people who have had near-death experiences. In their near-death experiences they have been pronounced clinically dead, then revived. After being revived they have recounted events they say happened to them while "dead." They have given their stories to scientists, who have carefully recorded and analyzed their tales. These accounts from people about floating out of their bodies, traveling through a tunnel, visiting a being of light and so forth, provide compelling signs indicating the possibility of mental survival of physical death.

But remember, this is anecdotal evidence. Scientists maintain that anecdotal evidence is one of the weakest kinds of evidence, and falls short of proof. And scientists have offered many compelling explanations to counter arguments that these near-death experiences provide glimpses of the hereafter.

THE FAILURE OF RELIGION

Religions of all varieties proclaim the belief in life after death. In fact it is a cornerstone belief of all religions, and is one of the few things all religions have in common. For who would want to practice a religion that gives you no hope of a hereafter?

The fact of the matter is, we all want to believe that we will survive bodily death. Everyone wants to live forever. Because everyone loves life. Even suicidal people hope to find themselves in a hereafter, once their self-inflicted deed is done.

But life after death is not proven by proclaiming it with an air of religious authority. Nor is it proven through wishful thinking, strong hope, strong faith, or suppressed doubt. Both religion and science have failed to prove it, and I believe they will always fail.

THE FAILURE OF ATHEISM

And on the flip-side of this coin it is also impossible to prove that there is *no* life after death. Atheists may proclaim this with authority but they don't know for sure. Your wish to be free from following restrictive moral rules may prompt you to wishfully believe there is no hereafter. But wishing doesn't prove anything one way or another.

Life after death, or its absence, is simply not provable.

THE PROFUNDITY OF AGNOSTICISM

For as long as you live in this world you'll never know whether or not there is life after death. It is and always will be a great mystery.

This is no small concept. This is the most profound and important metaphysical concept you can ever grasp and accept. If you can accept this concept, and be agnostic about life after death, your life will be far different from many people.

Those who believe in life after death, and suppress their doubts, seem to be in the majority. And cultures and governments throughout the world are heavily influenced by these believers. The belief in life after death gives power to religions and provides religious leaders with authority and influence. They in turn tell their followers what to believe in, how to live, and how to vote. And they often carry heavy influence with political leaders.

You may fear the perdition of hell and find yourself driven by this fear to live the way religious and political leaders tell you. But this cuts you off from the freedom you need to live life to its fullest. Life is change. But you cannot experience change to its fullest potential when you restrict yourself to a set of narrow rules handed down by others.

Following narrow rules will leave you feeling stagnated, bored and dissatisfied. The only way out is to overcome your fear of perdition and expand the boundaries within which you govern your life.

This is how agnosticism helps. It makes you aware that the people who proclaim with authority that there is life after death really don't know what they're talking about. And this enables you to conclude that you derive no special benefit from following the rules they try to give you. This frees you from their rules and enables you to experience more of your potential for change, life and enjoyment.

THE FREEING POWER OF AGNOSTICISM

Agnosticism also helps free you from the deep emotional depression you would experience, believing there is no life after death. The unbelieving atheist must suppress the hope that a hereafter could be possible. And this leads to hopelessness. Life loses any sense of usefulness when you believe that one day your consciousness will be completely obliterated forever. You must have some hope that life after death could be possible if you want to believe your life is worth living now.

Another thing agnosticism frees you from is the quest of trying to find the answer to this great mystery. When you accept that finding an answer is impossible, you can then focus your attention and energy to solving other problems that are less frustrating. Such acceptance frees up your time from pursuing spiritual quests that are fruitless and wasteful. It enables you to discard religious books, leaving them unread. You can stay away from religious rituals and meeting-places. You can save money by not contributing to a religious community. And you can find more satisfying relationships by changing to more realistic-thinking friends.

HOW TO JOIN THE MINORITY

I believe that only a minority of people in this world have come to accept this profound concept that it is impossible to prove whether or not there is life after death. But people in this minority have opened up the potential to enjoy their lives in ways that those in the majority can only imagine. They can think freely and guide their lives in ways that fulfill their needs. They can explore and discover new ways to make their lives wonderful. And they can live with a hope that is tempered by reality and logic, rather than by blind faith and wasteful expenditure of resources.

It's easy to become part of this minority. Simply accept the obvious. Simply say to yourself, "Is there life after death? Well, maybe. Or maybe not. I just don't know. And it is absolutely impossible for me to know.

Therefore I won't waste my time and resources pretending that I can know."

WHY THE GREAT MYSTERY?

WHY THE GREAT MYSTERY? Why is it impossible to know whether or not there is life after death?

ANSWERING WITH LOGICAL AND PRACTICAL ASSUMPTIONS

I believe you cannot know the answer to the above question with certainty, due to its metaphysical nature. It ventures into the supernatural and beyond the boundaries of scientific exploration. Therefore trying to answer with certainty is a waste of time.

Conventional logic does not waste time. But it only goes so far as to tell us whether or not something is certain. If you want more information about something that is not certain, and if you want to acquire this information in a logical manner, you must devise an unconventional logic. I have done just that by devising something that I call *Logical Assumption*.

With Logical Assumption, something can be assumed to be true as long as there is a possibility that it could be true.

But I want to be careful in the way I use Logical Assumption because I want to avoid wasting your time. There are probably millions of logical assumptions that I could come up with to answer the question of this chapter. This is because it is possible that just about anything could be true. But I doubt you have enough time or inclination to ponder millions of answers. Therefore I want to be careful in the way I assume, and limit ourselves to logical assumptions that will serve a useful purpose.

And this leads to yet another kind of logic I have devised. I call it, *Logical and Practical Assumption*.

With Logical and Practical Assumption, something can be assumed to be true as long as there is a possibility that it could be true, *and* as long as a useful purpose is served from assuming it to be true.

THE MOST LOGICAL AND PRACTICAL ASSUMPTIONS

This kind of logic will narrow the amount of assumptions down somewhat, but it still does not go far enough. Useful purposes can be found in all sorts of logical assumptions.

A criterion is needed to narrow down the answer even more. And I want to narrow it down to just one. When you only have to ponder one answer to a metaphysical question, you'll save a lot of time. And narrowing down the answer to just one will enable me to continue on with a progression of ideas in this book. I'll be able to build a series of logical assumptions, one on top of the other, in order to take you further and further into the realm of the metaphysical.

And so I'll use such a criterion. I'll call it, *Most Judgment*. With *Most Judgment*, I'll use my own subjective opinion to judge which logical and practical assumption is the *most* logical, and the *most* practical.

I'll use my own subjective opinion to do this because I have nothing else to rely upon. Logic and practicality have their limits. At a certain point they both will fail without interjecting subjective opinion. And when you deal with the deep metaphysical mysteries of life, that point is quickly reached.

I'll weigh my subjective opinions carefully, but can only hope that you will agree with them. But whether or not you do agree, I hope that my opinions will help stimulate your thinking. If so then you'll be motivated to find answers for yourself concerning the logic of death, using your own *Most Judgment*. So I'll utilize Logical and Practical Assumption, which will allow you to use your time wisely as I address the question of this chapter and subsequent questions that arise. But I'll also use my subjective opinion to determine which assumption is the *most* logical and practical answer to any given question.

IT REALLY IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW

First, I'll assume that it really is impossible to know whether or not there is life after death. Science has made many surprising advances. Two hundred years ago many thought it was impossible that human beings could fly. Now human beings not only fly but they've also landed on the moon.

So who knows? Maybe one day science will surprise us again and discover a way to probe the realm that lies beyond death. But I'm assuming it's impossible to do this, because thus far science has failed in this endeavor—and it seems improbable to me that it will ever succeed. Therefore it seems most logical to make this assumption.

This assumption also seems most practical because if you assumed the opposite—that it is possible to know—you would then be motivated to pursue scientific efforts in order find the answer. But I believe any such scientific efforts would be doomed to failure, and would be a waste of time and resources.

THERE REALLY IS LIFE AFTER DEATH

The second logical and practical assumption I'll make is that there really is life after death.

However it would also be just as logical to assume that there is no life after death. But it would not be practical to make such an assumption. If there actually were no life after death, then life would ultimately be useless and the question of life after death would be purely academic. In fact if a scientist were to one day prove that there is no life after death, no practical purpose would be served. Such proof would only serve to show you that your life is useless and not worth living.

It would thus be impractical to assume that there is no life after death. Remember I want to be practical, because I want to avoid wasting your time pondering over that which serves no useful purpose.

But it's practical to assume that there really is life after death. This is so because it gives you hope that your life will continue beyond the grave. This hopefulness will free you from ideas that life is useless, and will thus free you from depression. It will also enable you to find a purpose for living. An assumption serves a useful purpose when it helps you to be hopeful and free from depression or gloom, and gives you a purpose for living. Therefore it makes practical sense to assume that there is life after death.

It's also practical because it can motivate you to prepare for the hereafter. If there truly is a hereafter, and if there is a way to prepare well for it, then you'll be glad you prepared when you get to the other side. You'll realize you spent your time wisely. And so this is another useful and practical purpose for assuming that there is life after death. You need to be prepared for it, just in case.

TWO ASSUMPTIONS

So now we have two logical and practical assumptions that we are suspending our disbelief or doubts with, and assuming to be true. These two assumptions are:

1. It is impossible to know for sure whether or not there is life after death.
2. There really is life after death.

If both of these assumptions are true, why would it be so? Why must you wait until the moment of death to find the answer? Why are you denied the relief of discovering the hereafter until you are after here?

IMAGINE IF IT WERE PROVEN

You can gain some insight into this issue by using your imagination. Imagine that it really is possible to know if there is life after death. Suppose that science has actually discovered a window to the other side, and found irrefutable proof that you will live forever.

Imagine the impact this might have on your life. You face many challenges. You have to pay your rent or mortgage so you can fulfill your need for shelter. You have to put food on your table. You must contend with difficult people. And you have so many other challenges that add stress to living.

But if you knew for sure that no matter what happened to you, you would go on living forever, how would you change the way you face challenge? If you knew that exposure to the elements could only kill your body, and not your mind, you might not care if you lived in the out-of-doors. If you knew that starvation could only kill your body, and not your mind, you might feel less motivated to seek food. If you knew that difficult people could never kill your mind, you might not worry so much about them murdering your body. In fact you would have little motivation to try hard to meet challenges, so as to avoid death.

YOUR NEED FOR MOTIVATION

It's your love of conscious awareness that keeps you alert to danger and vigilant against loss and deprivation. You love the change, enjoyment and life that you are consciously aware of, and you equate bodily death with the possible extinction of your conscious awareness and an end to your experience of change, enjoyment and life. So you protect yourself from death by making a strong effort to meet the challenges of life. The possibility of eternal death keeps you struggling to stay alive.

And here you have a clue as to why it's impossible to know if there is life after death. If you did know, you would feel less motivated to maintain your physical life in this world. And so our effort to answer the

question that began this chapter leads us to a third logical and practical assumption, to be added to the first two assumptions listed above:

3. It is impossible to know that there is life after death because you need to be motivated to stay alive in this world.

We've now made a logical and practical progression of assumptions from Assumption Number One to Assumption Number Three. Yet we're still left with a question. The logical question that follows Assumption Number Three is, "Why must you be motivated to stay alive in this world?"

Another way to word this question is, "Why must you avoid the hereafter? Why must you stay here in this world, where you experience so much hardship and stress, when you could go to the other side—where conditions might be better?"

The most logical and practical answer I can come up with is that there must be something about the other side that is important for you to avoid. And the only way you can have an idea of what that something to avoid is, is to engage in more Logical and Practical Assumption to gain an idea of what the other side is like.

WHAT IS THE OTHER SIDE LIKE?

WE CALL IT by many names. It is heaven, hell, paradise, the hereafter, the spirit realm, purgatory, the bardo, the happy hunting ground, nirvana, the other side, and all kinds of other things. It's the place we imagine, where our mind will go, after death of the physical body.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

You cannot know for sure that there is an “other side,” but if there is you may wonder what it will be like. Will you be happy there? Will life be easy? Will there be peace and free love? Or will your hereafter be painful, difficult, boring, or perhaps just a short transitional phase leading to rebirth, in a cycle of eternal reincarnation?

This is an important question. It's difficult for you to know how to prepare for life on the other side if you don't know what it will be like. You may be living your life as if you're blind—always wondering if your actions will cause you to go to heaven or hell. We all need some guidance in this area, because we all desire a pleasant hereafter rather than a painful one. And a helpful way to obtain guidance on preparing for the hereafter is to develop an idea of what it's like.

But you can't see or experience the hereafter while living herenow, in this world. So you're left to speculate about its nature. I believe that the best approach to this speculation is to continue to use Logical and Practical Assumption, and build a series of assumptions based upon the logic used.

THE POINT OF DEATH

You can begin by imagining what you will experience at the point of physical death, after your heart stops beating, never to resume beating again. There are anecdotal accounts from people who have revived after being pronounced clinically dead. They sometimes recount phenomena such as: hovering over their bodies, traveling through a long, spiraling tunnel toward a being of light, visiting with loved ones who have died before them, and so on. All of this may or may not actually happen to you

when you die. But one thing stands to logical reason: If your mind survives physical death then you'll probably reach some point after death when you realize that your physical body has died.

I say "probably" because it could be that we instantly reincarnate into the womb of some creature on earth, and never actually pass to an other side. But if this is the case then the other side is actually this side. So there would be no need to speculate as to what the other side is like. You would know what it's like because you're living in it right now.

So if you want to be practical about speculating on what the other side is like, you must assume that it is a place beyond this world that your mind passes to. And it's logical to assume that at some point after passing beyond this world you'll realize that your physical body is dead. This is logical because life is the awareness of change. A big change occurs at death if your mind exits your body. So if you're alive throughout this transitional phase, then you'll very likely become aware of this big change.

RELIEF, PEACE AND TRANQUILITY

At the point when you realize you have died, it is also logical to assume that you'll experience an enormous sense of relief, peace and tranquility.

You'll feel relieved because you'll finally know the answer to the Great Mystery. You'll know that there really is life after death, and that you are immortal. You'll feel at peace because you'll lose your fear of death. And you'll feel tranquil because you'll sense an end to the urgency that comes from facing the constant struggle for survival.

Perhaps this is why those who recount having a near-death experience often report having felt a deep sense of peace during their out-of-body adventure. It's logical they would feel flooded with a sense of peace, due to their sudden realization of their own immortality. It is ironic. The moment you know you are dead is the moment you know you cannot die. And the most natural response to this sudden knowledge would be to experience a feeling of deep peace.

Of course you may experience other emotions as well: Joy, when you reflect upon how strongly you value the idea of being immortal. Or regret, when you reflect on things you wish you had done in this world before dying. Or some other emotion, depending upon your frame of mind at the time. But it's logical to assume that there will be an underlying feeling of peace to go along with any other emotion you experience.

OUR FIRST FOUR ASSUMPTIONS

We have now developed several logical and practical assumptions about what the other side is like, as follows:

1. It is a place beyond this world, where your mind passes to after physical death of the body.
2. At some point after your mind passes to the other side you will realize you are dead.
3. The moment you know you are dead will be the moment you know that you cannot die.
4. You will experience a deep sense of peace, from knowing that you no longer have to struggle to stay alive.

ENCOUNTERING OTHERS

But after you reach Assumption Number Four, what's next? What happens to you after you feel flooded with a feeling of peace?

You cannot have life without change, because life is the conscious awareness of change. Therefore after you reach Assumption Number Four, your conscious awareness will not stay fixed upon one thing while experiencing eternal peace. That would be death.

Your mind craves change, enjoyment and life. Therefore it's logical to assume that you'll move on to other things. It's also logical to assume that your mind will encounter other minds, from beings who have died before you. After all, you will not be the only one who has ever died. And most of what constitutes "you" comes from your awareness of the matrix of interaction with other beings that you've been a part of in this universe.

Your mind needs change in order to stay alive. And change is most abundant when you have input from the creativity percolating in the minds of other beings. The other side would be a boring hell for you if you could not continue to interact with the minds of others. An isolated mind is limited in its ability to create on its own, because it does not have access to the exotic perceptions, personalities and behaviors of others.

I believe the most logical and practical assumption to make is that you'll be able to interact with the minds of others in the hereafter. Life would not be worth living in any other scenario. Or to put it more accurately, the experience of life would be diminished to such an extreme that it would be nearly the same as death. We've already assumed that there is life after death. We cannot gain practical value from this assumption unless we assume that it can be a full life—that is at least as

comparable to the fullness of life we experience in this world we live in now.

So let's add two more assumptions to our list of assumptions above:

5. You will continue to experience conscious awareness of change.
6. You will interact with the minds of others.

AWARENESS OF CREATION

There may or may not be physical aspects to the other side. But I believe it's impractical to speculate much upon this. You can go so deep into analyzing the essence of the nature of perception that you can argue that nothing physical exists, even in this world. After all, everything you experience is experienced in your own mind, as perceptions. And your mind is mental, not physical. Therefore it doesn't matter much whether or not there are physical aspects to the hereafter. Because even if there are, you'll only be able to experience them with your mental awareness.

The important thing to understand is that awareness of change must exist on the other side, whether or not the things that change are actually physical. Life is the conscious awareness of change. And change comes from the creation of new, unique things, whether they be physical or mental.

Let's now add one more assumption to our list of assumptions of what the other side is like:

7. You will be aware of new, unique things that have been created, whether those things are physical or mental.

COMPLETE FREEDOM

Now let's go back to that feeling of peace you'll begin to experience the moment you know you're dead (Assumption Number Four). This feeling of peace will arise from realizing that you're immortal. You'll feel relieved from the task of engaging in constant survival tactics. And you'll feel at ease, because you'll know that nothing can ultimately harm you.

I believe that over time the full implication of immortality will gradually sink into your mind. And your feeling of peace will be replaced by a sense of excitement. You'll come to fully understand that regardless of what you do or try to do, you cannot destroy yourself or be destroyed. It will be something like riding the bumper cars at a carnival. After you ride around in your rubber-edged car for a little while, you begin to realize

that you can bang into other cars, crash into walls, careen off of wrecks, and finally walk away unscathed, with no harm done to anyone or anything. And this realization helps make the ride fun.

This brings us to another logical and practical assumption:

8. You will have complete freedom to do, or attempt to do, whatever you want, without fear of death.

AUTOMATIC ACCEPTANCE

Now imagine the kind of party that living beings are having on the other side. They can do whatever they want without any fear. They can live their lives completely unchecked. They are free to live boisterous and wild and loud and maniacal without any concern or care, because they know they cannot die.

Things can get pretty raucous in an environment like that.

When you cross to the other side you may well find yourself immersed in the wildest party you've ever been to. And there's a good chance you'll want to join the partiers so that you too can have as much fun as they seem to be having.

But will you be welcome at the party? Why would they want to accept you? What would you have to offer these free beings, to make them willing to interact with you?

There's only one thing you could offer them. It's the one and only thing you would have in your possession. And it's the one and only thing you'll be able to take with you when you pass to the other side.

That one thing is your mind.

You have your mind in this world, and you'll have your mind in the hereafter. But nothing else you have in this world can pass with you to the hereafter.

And your mind will be attractive to other beings in the hereafter because of its very inherent nature. It is a mind. It has the ability to create. And it has the ability to interact, sharing its creations with others. Therefore it has the ability to offer uniqueness, change and life to other living beings. And this can bring them enjoyment.

Therefore it's logical to assume that you'll be automatically accepted on the other side, by the living beings who are already there. You'll be automatically accepted by virtue of your inherent possession of a mind.

And so we have another logical and practical assumption:

9. You will be automatically accepted by other living beings.

POTENTIAL REJECTION

However, let's be careful about this assumption of automatic acceptance. I believe that the automatic aspect of it will only be initial.

Let's return to the party analogy. Suppose you receive an invitation to a party. You can expect that when you walk into the party you'll be automatically accepted by the other partygoers. They'll see you as a human being with the potential to offer something beneficial to them. And they'll give you time to prove yourself in that manner.

But suppose instead you begin to misbehave and cause a great amount of annoyance and nuisance to others. Sooner or later you'll likely find yourself being asked, or perhaps forced to leave. You'll no longer be welcome at the party.

In the same manner, I believe it is logical and practical to assume that you can eventually find yourself unwelcome on the other side. You can choose to use your mind in a manner that other living beings find undesirable. And then you might find yourself being shunned or avoided. Other living beings would want to avoid you because they would need to make their afterlife experience as enjoyable as possible for themselves.

So it is logical and practical to assume:

10. You could eventually be rejected by other living beings if you behave in a manner they don't like.

THE HIGHEST VIRTUE

Your problem then, would be to find ways to remain accepted and avoid rejection. It seems logical that the only way you could do this is to prove yourself and gain the trust of other living beings. They must learn that they you will enhance their lives, rather than reduce their enjoyment of life.

Trustworthiness is the highest virtue in this world, and I believe it will be just as important in any next world. Consider your life in this world. You would not be able to maintain stable relationships with friends and family if they could not trust you to be considerate of their interests. You would not be able to hold down a job if your employer could not trust you to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. And you would not be able to do business in a convenient manner with anyone if they could not trust you to be honest.

Trust is the highest virtue of all in this world. If trust did not exist at some level, society could not function at any level. We build and live in our houses because we trust that our neighbors will not try to burn us

down. We walk beside roadways because we trust that drivers will be careful not to run us over. We drive because we trust that other drivers will observe important safety rules, such as stopping for red lights. We shop in grocery stores, rather than farm our own food, because we trust our economic system of interdependence. Nearly everything we do depends upon the cooperation of others. So we must trust that others will cooperate, in order for us to feel safe doing anything.

Trust reigns as king of virtues in our world. It is the highest virtue of all. Our state of human existence would be absolutely miserable without trust. And in fact, human beings could not exist if trust did not exist.

The words “trust” and “love” are interchangeable. There can be no love without trust. I believe it’s impossible to love those whom you do not trust. Nor is it possible to love others when you behave in an untrustworthy manner toward them.

We are attracted to people we trust, and repelled by those whom we distrust. When you tell someone that you love them, I believe you are essentially telling them that you trust them, and that they can be trusted by you. “Love” and “trust” mean the same thing. The only difference is that the word “love” is a stronger way of expressing the concept behind the word “trust.”

So I use the word “trust” when I refer to the highest virtue. This expresses the concept in a clear and logical manner while avoiding all the confusion that sometimes comes with the word “love.”

I believe it is logical and practical to assume that trust is the highest virtue on the other side also, and not just on this side. You must be trustworthy on the other side in order for living beings to be motivated to maintain company and interaction with you. They must trust that you’ll use your mind in a manner that will help them to enjoy life, rather than in a manner that will detract from enjoyment. And they must trust each other in the same way.

This logical and practical assumption can be stated as follows:

11. Trustworthiness is the highest virtue on the other side.

THE HIGHEST GOAL

While trustworthiness is the highest virtue, it is not an end to itself. The reason why it’s so important to be trustworthy is because it provides an enormous amount of assistance in helping you to be creative. In this world, when you’re trustworthy you’re welcomed into the company of others. They then interact with you and share their creativity with you.

Their creativity brings you life and enjoyment. And when you combine what they've created with your own creativity, you create much more life than you could without their input. And this furthers your experience of enjoyment. Also when you share with others the life you create, it furthers their own experience of enjoyment.

Therefore while the highest virtue is trustworthiness, the purpose of the trustworthiness is to achieve a certain goal. And that is to create life. The more life you create, the more uniqueness, change and enjoyment you and others will experience.

A parallel can be drawn between this side and the other side. On this side, trustworthiness is the highest virtue, and creativity is the highest goal. And we've established that it's logical and practical to assume that on the other side trustworthiness is also the highest virtue. Therefore it's logical and practical to continue this comparison between both sides by assuming that creativity is the highest goal on the other side, just as it's the highest goal on this side.

The more life you create on the other side, the more uniqueness, change and enjoyment you and others will experience. This will enable you to be welcome at all the "wild parties" and other gatherings that may occur there. You'll be trusted for the life you can create and share with other living beings.

And so I believe it is logical and practical to assume the following:

12. The highest goal on the other side is to create life.

THE VALUE OF AVOIDING THE OTHER SIDE

And this brings us to why you must try to avoid going to the other side while you're on this side. The longer you spend here, the more time you have to develop your ability to be trustworthy and creative.

Trustworthiness and creativity are mental skills that belong to your mind. Your mind is the only thing you'll take with you when you die. Therefore it is logical to assume that these mental skills will come along with your mind to the other side when you die.

And the stronger these skills are, the more other beings will be able to enjoy you when you are met by them on the other side. Thus, the more prepared you will be for interacting with them and for remaining welcome in their company.

The way you make these mental skills strong here and now is through your instinct to survive. You know that you must be trustworthy in this world in order to survive. You must be trusted by your employer to be

creative and productive in order to maintain your livelihood. You must be trusted by business associates in order to do business with others. And you must be trusted by friends and family in order to have strong interpersonal relationships with them. The more trustworthy you are the more you are able to rely on others for help in the treacherous task of maintaining life in this world full of dangers.

And the more creative you are in this world the more successful at survival you can be. For instance, the more you study and learn, the more capable you are of being creative. This creativity can help you to succeed at your job, in your personal life, and in your ability to deal with dangers. And when you develop your skills at creativity in other ways you are also able to find success at dealing with the challenges of this world.

Your survival instincts give you an incentive to develop your skills at being both trustworthy and creative. And the longer you succeed at surviving, the stronger you can develop these skills. This, in turn, will improve your ability to effectively pursue enjoyment when you take these skills to the other side.

You will eventually fail to survive. But if you have worked hard in this life at surviving, by being trustworthy and creative, you'll be well prepared for your transition to the other side. You'll find yourself welcome by other beings, due to the strong mental skills you'll bring with you from this side.

And they will keep you in their company for a very long time.

OUR FINAL ASSUMPTIONS

And so we are left with these final logical and practical assumptions:

13. The longer you spend on this side the more time you have to develop your ability to be trustworthy and creative.
14. Your efforts to survive in this world can help you to strengthen your skills at trustworthiness and creativity.
15. Trustworthiness and creativity are mental skills that belong to your mind.
16. Your mind is the only thing you will take with you to the other side when you die.
17. When you die, the skills of trustworthiness and creativity that are contained within your mind will come along with you.
18. The stronger you have developed skills at trustworthiness and creativity, the more welcome you will be on the other side, and the more effective you will be at pursuing enjoyment.

IS THERE A HEAVEN ON THE OTHER SIDE?

WE'VE MADE LOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS that there is life after death, and some of these assumptions have given us an idea of what the other side is like. Now let's develop these ideas further, and see whether or not a heaven would fit into our logical assumptions about what lies beyond.

By "heaven," I mean a pleasant enjoyable abiding in the hereafter. A place where our minds rest and play and fulfill our fullest potential for change, life and enjoyment.

THE OTHER SIDE IS BUSY

I described the other side as something like a wild raucous party, in the last chapter. And this is how I suspect it might seem to a new arrival. Consider the countless number of beings that must be living over there. And they are all busy interacting with each other. The place is probably swarming like a great beehive, to the untrained eye.

But I believe it's logical to assume that there's a certain order to the other side that allows for the sustaining of a heaven.

FILTERING MESSAGES

Beings on the other side probably communicate with each other frequently. This is a logical assumption because beings would need to communicate with each other in order to share creativity amongst themselves. And so it's likely that there are many billions of billions of messages being constantly transmitted from being to being at all times.

Now consider how confusing it would be like if you were inundated with billions of billions of messages constantly flying at you and around you. Your mind can only focus efficiently on one thing at a time. It would be impossible to focus on any one message if you were distracted by billions of others. Your mind would experience a meltdown in this kind of environment. The superoptimal focus required of you to comprehend a message without distraction would be so painful that you'd likely go insane and lose all ability to reason and function.

It's impractical to contemplate this kind of afterlife, because eternal insanity would serve no useful purpose. Your assumptions must be both logical and practical if you want to spend your time wisely when contemplating the hereafter.

So I believe it's logical and practical to assume that in the hereafter you'll be able to selectively block incoming messages, and only receive those messages that you want to focus your attention on.

Let's assume that life on the other side will be much like life in this world, with regard to your ability to selectively block most messages and selectively receive only those messages you want to receive. In this world, when you're in a crowded room full of talkative people, you can focus your attention on the words of just one of the talkers and be able to discern what is being said. At the same time the words coming from all of the other talkers will sound like background noise to you.

You can even take it a step further, in this world, by taking the talker away from the crowded room and into a secluded room. The walls of the room would block the sound of the other talkers and make it much easier for you to communicate and focus on your conversation.

On the other side there may be different methods available for tuning in on one message while blocking out others. The method is not as important as the ability. It's important to assume that when you are on the other side you can filter incoming messages and block out those messages you don't want, so that you can focus on the messages you do want.

Therefore our first logical and practical assumption about the possibility of heaven is:

1. You can selectively receive and block incoming messages, on the other side.

TARGETING MESSAGES

And it is also logical and practical to assume that you can direct outgoing messages to a specific target. You may only want one other being, or one group of beings to receive the message you're sending. This may be necessary because you may need to prevent confusion. If all beings could receive your message some of them may try to respond, mistakenly believing that it was meant for them.

Just as in this world where you can target your messages, I believe it's logical and practical to assume that you can do the same in the next world. Which leads to our second logical and practical assumption:

2. You can target your outgoing messages to specific beings.

THE FORMATION OF GROUPS

These assumptions imply something very important. They imply that on the other side you'll be able to choose the company you keep. When you can selectively receive incoming messages, then you can block out messages from beings you don't want to associate with. And when you can target your outgoing messages to specific beings, you can avoid communicating with beings you don't want to associate with. It's logical to assume that this would encourage those beings to gravitate away from you and toward other beings who are more willing to interact with them. And it's also logical to assume that you'll gravitate toward beings with whom you want to interact, and who are willing to interact with you in return.

Therefore, it's logical and practical to assume the following about the other side:

3. You can choose whom you will try to interact and associate with.
4. Others can choose whether or not they will interact and associate with you.
5. You will eventually join a group of beings who are willing to engage in mutual interaction with each other.

And so it will eventually come to pass on the other side that you'll find yourself belonging to a group of beings. And there will be other groups of beings that you'll either choose not to join, or that will not be willing to allow you to join.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

It's logical and practical to assume that exclusionary groups exist on the other side. Even on this side, "birds of a feather flock together," as the old saying goes. We form our own groups in this world amongst people whom we have things in common. And we form multitudes of groups, in accordance with the different kinds of things people can have in common. Most of us belong to more than one group, and travel from group to group, interacting with different people.

Your workplace is a group of people that you belong to. So is your church. And so is the clique you may hobnob with in your church. Your family is a group. Your friends are a group. Your neighborhood is a

group. Your country is a group. In this world there are groups, groups of groups, and groups within groups. Why would things be any different on the other side?

Let's summarize this with another set of logical and practical assumptions about the other side:

6. You will find many different groups on the other side.
7. You will be able to join more than one group.
8. You will be able to travel from one group to another.

THE CREATION OF PERCEPTIONS

Now what will you do in those groups? Interact with other mutually-interested beings, of course. We've learned that interaction involves sharing what has been created and making new creations from the creativity that has been shared. The creation of change is the ultimate result of any interaction. Change is life. Therefore interaction creates life. Therefore you'll create change and life within the groups you belong to on the other side.

Change may be life, but perception is required in order to detect change and cause the experience of life. Without perception, change and life cannot be experienced.

Therefore it is logical to conclude that perception is change.

Nothing can be perceived except change. This is because everything is constantly changing, so there is nothing else to perceive but change. So perception cannot be anything else except change. Where there is perception there is change. Therefore perception is change.

But change is not perception. Something can change, yet that change might not be detected. If a tree falls in a forest and no one is present to hear it, it will still make a noise. The noise is not the perception of noise. But if someone does hear the noise their perception will be the noise. At least from the standpoint of their own conscious awareness. For they will be able to say to themselves, "I perceive a noise."

And so when you are on the other side and interact with a group to create change and life, you'll also be making possible the creation of perceptions. And when someone perceives a change that your group creates, then a perception will be created. The perception will be directly created by the being that perceives the change. But it will be indirectly created by your group, due to the change that the group creates which makes the perception possible.

Therefore it is logical to assume the following:

9. The groups you belong to will indirectly create perceptions by creating change.

PERCEPTIONS ARE CREATED IN MANY WAYS

The indirect creation of perceptions involves more than belonging to an ethereal think tank where new ideas are developed by an assortment of ingenious minds. Each and every moment of your life, here in this world, you are creating new perceptions. For instance, when you awaken from sleep you create the perception of being awake. This is a perception that may seem familiar to you at first glance, but really it is not. Because when you awaken from sleep it is a new day. Therefore the perception you will actually create is that of being awake in a new day. And it will be a new day that will be different from the day you woke up to the day before, and that will be different from the day you will awaken to the next morning.

When you inhale you create a new perception that is different from the perception you created the last time you inhaled. This is because the world you live in will have changed ever-so-slightly from the world you lived in during your last breath. And so the perception you create will be that of breathing, while living in a world that is slightly different.

Each and every moment of your life is a new perception. The creation of perceptions comes automatically with the passage of time, because the creation of change is an automatic process that is constantly occurring in your mind. Each and every moment of your life your mind automatically combines perceptions to create more change and new perceptions. And these new perceptions stimulate even more change and more perceptions with every new moment of passing time.

In fact the passage of time itself is change. And so perception is the passage of time. Therefore a new perception occurs with each passing moment in time.

And when you interact with the minds of other beings, you take in their perceptions and they take in yours. You each use the new perceptions you've taken in to develop more new perceptions, which you again share to create more new perceptions, over and over.

STRUCTURES OF PERCEPTIONS

Perceptions can be combined in order to form structures of perceptions. For instance, a field of study is such a structure. If you study cooking you're studying a structure of perceptions that are all related to

preparing food for eating. If you study architecture you're studying a structure of perceptions that are all related to the construction of buildings.

When you die and pass to the other side you may decide to join a group that specializes in a particular structure of perceptions. As a member of that group you may be expected to assist in developing perceptions related to its specialization. But this doesn't mean you'll just sit around and study or think up new ideas all the time. Most, if not all of what you do will likely involve practical hands-on work.

In this world you live in now a carpenter is a member of a group that specializes in architecture. But most carpenters don't sit around all day developing new methods for constructing buildings. Instead, most spend their day hammering nails, cutting wood and following a blueprint that someone else has drawn. Nonetheless, each and every moment of a carpenter's day involves creating new perceptions. Because each moment of a carpenter's day involves building something. What the carpenter builds is then perceived by others. Therefore the carpenter indirectly creates perceptions of what he builds. This creation of perceptions involves hands-on action rather than sitting around developing ideas, or participating in some sort of think-tank.

When you are on the other side and you interact within a group, you'll be constantly sharing and creating many new perceptions, and it will often be through participation in a hands-on activity. And these new perceptions will be related to the specialty that your group involves itself in.

It could be that your group will involve itself in the creation of physical things, such as architecture. But we've discussed the nature of physical things already. Physical things may or may not exist on the other side. Whether or not they do exist is irrelevant. This is because physical things are always perceived in a mental way. Perception is a mental act. So all things physical are perceived mentally.

Therefore everything you and your group create on the other side will ultimately belong to a mental structure of perceptions, even if the things created are perceived to be physical.

This gives rise to an important logical and practical assumption, so let's take special note of it, as follows:

10. The groups you belong to will create mental structures of perceptions, whether or not those perceptions are perceived to be physical.

WORLDS OF PERCEPTIONS

These structures of perceptions could grow to be quite enormous and sophisticated if the groups that create them are large enough. And it's logical to assume that there are many large groups of beings on the other side. After all, the amount of living beings in this world that have died is astronomical. Therefore it only stands to reason that there are countless myriads of living beings occupying the other side.

I believe it's logical to assume that a structure of perceptions could grow so large it would be more accurate to refer to it as a "world" of perceptions. By this I mean that it would become so large and detailed that only a tiny fraction of it could be comprehended at any given time. And it would grow so large that the group of beings creating it could also occupy it as residents.

They could occupy it as residents of their own world, that they created themselves.

It is not only logical, but it is also practical to assume this. This is because it changes the other side from a wild, chaotic and confusing place, to a place that is orderly, and easy for your mind to occupy and thrive in. Your mind needs to have a sense of order, because you need to be able to think clearly. I doubt you could be satisfied very long with living in a state of constant chaos and disorder, due to the superoptimal focus that would be required in order to make sense of anything. So it's logical and practical to make assumptions about the other side that involve beings who create and occupy their own worlds, composed of structured perceptions.

Therefore it is logical and practical to assume the following:

11. You will occupy worlds that are created from enormous structures of perceptions by the groups you belong to.

HEAVEN

With all the many different groups that likely exist on the other side, it stands to reason that there are many different worlds there also. Just like there are groups, groups of groups, and groups within groups, there are also worlds, worlds of worlds, and worlds within worlds.

I defined "heaven" at the beginning of this chapter as a pleasant enjoyable abiding in the hereafter. But no place of abiding can be pleasant and enjoyable unless the occupants are pleasant and enjoyable.

Birds of a feather flock together. Just as there are pleasant enjoyable beings that group together in this world, so it will be in the hereafter. This

is because all beings in this world, whether pleasant or not, will one day die and pass on to any hereafter that exists. The pleasant ones will join pleasant groups, and the unpleasant ones will join unpleasant groups.

It stands to reason that pleasant enjoyable beings who are formed into a group on the other side, will create a world that is also pleasant and enjoyable. And it stands to reason that if they allow you to join their group, you'll be able to occupy their world. And this of course would be heaven for you.

So we can finish with these final two logical and practical assumptions about the possible existence of heaven on the other side:

12. You will find many different worlds to occupy.
13. You might be allowed to occupy worlds that will be pleasant and enjoyable, and seem like heaven to you.

IS THERE A HELL ON THE OTHER SIDE?

WE'RE ASSUMING that you can't get into heaven unless you're allowed in by those who occupy it. If it so happens that you can't get into heaven, where will you go on the other side?

NON-HEAVENLY WORLDS

It's logical to assume that there will be other worlds besides heavenly worlds to go to. What I mean by this is that there will be other worlds you can occupy that might bring some measure of enjoyment to you, but not as much as you'd like. You may find yourself on the outside, looking in, when it comes to worlds you'd prefer to reside in. Nonetheless, the world you end up joining may still bring some level of satisfaction to you.

It's also logical to assume there will be alternative heavens. This is because heaven is a subjective experience. What brings you uniqueness, change and enjoyment is not always what brings uniqueness, change and enjoyment to others. A perfect heaven for one being may be a living hell for another.

DIFFERENT AREAS AND LEVELS

Also it's logical to assume that the beings on the other side will all possess different levels of mental skills. Some beings will have trained and disciplined their minds to be more trustworthy and creative than others.

Those who are the most trustworthy and creative will tend to live in worlds separate from less-skilled beings. This is because those who are highly-skilled can be more creative when they collaborate with other highly-skilled beings, than when they collaborate with those who have less skills. So those who are well-skilled usually don't want to waste their time and efforts dealing with those who are poorly skilled.

Therefore it's logical and practical to assume that there will be worlds at different areas and different levels on the other side: Different areas for different preferences, and different levels for different skill levels.

CHOOSING YOUR WORLD

Finding a heavenly or non-heavenly world to suit your preference may be a matter of trial-and-error. I believe the occupants of different worlds will probably allow you to try out their worlds to see how well you like them, as well as to see how well they like you. And it's logical that initially you'll have the freedom to come and go, to and from different worlds, as you please. Gradually you'll find yourself spending more and more of your time in those worlds that you like best, until you're finally able to choose your preferences.

But finding a heaven that matches your skill level may involve being tested. You may be allowed to temporarily reside in a world that requires high skill levels of trustworthiness and creativity. But if your skills prove to be less than the standards established by the occupants, you may find yourself forced out quickly.

This would require you to try out places with different standards, or less-high standards, until you finally are accepted by a world with standards that match your own mental skill levels of trustworthiness and creativity.

WORLDS WITH LOW SKILL LEVELS

But suppose your mental skills are grossly lacking? Suppose you're very untrustworthy in your relationships with others and you're very incompetent or shiftless when it comes to being creative?

As the old saying goes, "birds of a feather flock together." It stands to logical reason that there will be other beings on the other side with the same low skill levels. You'll want into their world, and they will allow you into their world simply for the fact that some company is better than none. You'll need them for the exchange of creativity that enhances enjoyment of life, and they'll need you for the same. It may be a low level of creativity, but some would be better than none.

This holds true even in the world we live in now. Prison is one of the least desirable environments humans can live in. Penitentiaries tend to be occupied by people who are untrustworthy. And many inmates have chosen a lazy path of crime over a path of hard work and creativity. And yet prisoners crave each other's company. They usually attest that the worst sort of punishment to receive is solitary confinement. Solitary confinement denies them interaction they need in order to maintain satisfactory levels of change, enjoyment and life.

THE WORST HELL

It stands to logical reason that when you reach the other side you can choose to remain alone, and not join any world or interact with any living being. But this would be like choosing solitary confinement. You might enjoy solitude for a short time if you're in need of peace and rest. But after awhile your mind will develop an overwhelming hunger for interaction with the minds of others. You'll want to join a world, even if it's the lowest world available.

Yet some living beings that go to the other side may have skill levels of trustworthiness and creativity that approach zero. You've probably heard stories of nefarious villains whom nobody, not even other villains, desires to have anything to do with. You may wonder what will happen to such beings when they die.

I believe it's logical to assume that they will have the greatest difficulty finding a lasting place to stay in any world or group of beings on the other side. And in fact they may find themselves completely unwelcome to remain in even the lowest of worlds.

And beings who are this low in their skill levels may find it impossible to group together with similar beings. This is because they're so lacking in skills of trustworthiness and creativity that they can't even tolerate each other. This will force each one of them into a state of solitude.

A sort of solitary confinement in the hereafter will be the fate of these beings.

And that will be the worst sort of hell any being can encounter on the other side.

WERE YOU ALIVE BEFORE THIS LIFE?

PERHAPS YOU'VE WONDERED if you ever existed before you were conceived and born into this world. We refer to this phenomenon using a number of different concepts. The most common is that of reincarnation. This is where you may have been an animal or human in a previous life, then returned to this world to be born into your current form. Another concept is that of transmigration. This can mean reincarnation. Or it can mean existence in a different world other than this one, where your mind may have transmigrated from that world to be born into the world you're currently in. And another concept is rebirth. This includes living on the other side, then being born into this world, then returning back to the other side after you die (and possibly repeating this cycle over and over again).

Reincarnation, transmigration and rebirth are interchangeable concepts. The name given to one can apply to the concept of another. This is because we tend to use the semantics of this phenomenon rather loosely.

THE FAILURE OF HYPNOSIS

But looser still is the available evidence to prove that this phenomenon actually occurs. Just like life after death is impossible to prove scientifically, so is life before life.

A common way this phenomenon is investigated is through hypnosis. Someone is hypnotized and then regressed backward to memories of their youth, through hypnotic suggestion. Then they are regressed further back, to the time of their birth. Finally they are given the hypnotic suggestion to remember events before they were born.

The subject will sometimes report memories of past lives, once they are regressed to a time before their birth. Hypnotists and psychics point this out as proof that reincarnation occurs. But most scientists disagree. Hypnotic regression does not provide sufficient evidence to scientifically prove the phenomenon of life before life. It certainly provides a form of anecdotal evidence. But anecdotal evidence is not considered to be weighty enough to prove something scientifically.

And so you're left with another big agnostic "I don't know," type of answer, this time to the question, "Were you alive before this life?" It's possible that you were. But it's also possible you were not. You can never know the true answer so long as you are alive in this world.

WHY IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW

If you could know that you were alive before this life, it would strongly imply that life after death does actually exist. This is because if you knew you were alive before this life, then you would be able to conclude that you must have died in your prior life in order to be born into this life. And if you died in your prior life, then the fact that you're currently alive would prove that there is life after death.

But you've already seen in prior chapters that it's impossible to know if life after death exists, and probably for good reason: It would eliminate your incentive to struggle hard to survive in this life. That good reason would be defeated if you could prove that life before life exists. So if there is a grand plan in place that prevents you from proving life after death, that same grand plan would also have to prevent you from proving there is life before life.

LOGICAL AND PRACTICAL ASSUMPTION

But it does not prevent you from speculating and using Logical and Practical Assumption. Speculating on this subject can be useful. You can learn from your past. And the further back you're able to look into your past the more you can learn. There is a saying that those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. If you have past lives, but don't know anything about your past lives, you might be doomed to continue being reborn into this world over and over again.

Yet it's impossible to know about any past life you may have had. So how can you begin to speculate? I believe the best way to approach this problem is through Logical and Practical Assumption. You must find a logical way to fit your past lives into a reasonable scheme that would explain why you have come to this world and where you will go when you die.

This logical scheme must also be practical. It does you no good to speculate on possibilities that would serve no useful purpose. For instance, if you speculate that you were an animal in your immediate past life, how would that help you in knowing how to live your current life? You would have to find a useful purpose for such a speculation.

Otherwise it would only serve to feed your idle curiosity, but not serve much practical use at all.

A HEAVENLY SCENARIO

I believe that the most logical and practical way to begin speculating on the issue of past lives is to return to the speculation we did in previous chapters, concerning life after death.

In that speculation we assumed that when you reach the other side you will find yourself in the company of other beings who have died before you. We also assumed that you'll interact with those beings. And we assumed that the success of your interactions will be dependent upon the strength of skills you have developed at being trustworthy and creative.

Now suppose you have died and gone on to the other side. And suppose you take with you strong mental skills that enable you to be very successful at your interactions with the beings on the other side. These skills would enable you to be welcome in worlds occupied by other beings that are highly trustworthy and creative. And so you would enter heaven rather than hell.

In such a scenario you'll find yourself having a lot of fun in your afterlife.

HOW YOUR SKILLS COULD WEAKEN

But it seems logical that your mental skills could weaken over time. For instance, you may observe another occupant in heaven and notice that this being has some advantages you don't have. And this may lead you to dwell in the emotional state of envy.

Now you may realize that dwelling in envy could lead you into behavior that would reduce your trustworthiness. But you'll also know that you're immortal. And so you may conclude that a reduction in trustworthiness is not something to be very concerned about. After all no matter what the consequences could be for behavior that damages your trustworthiness, you'll know that you cannot die. And this knowledge of your own immortality could embolden you enough to fall for temptation.

This could then lead to actual behavior that damages your trustworthiness. And this could be followed by problems for you, when you're confronted by other beings over your behavior. And if the problems are severe enough, you might actually find yourself forced out of the world you currently occupy and into a world requiring lesser skills at trustworthiness.

THE EFFECT OF KNOWING YOUR OWN IMMORTALITY

An important thing to note is that knowledge of your own immortality can embolden you to do things that decrease your trustworthiness skills.

And it can work the same way with your creativity skills. You may decide to stop contributing as much creativity as is desired from you. Your decision to do this may be based on many different motivations. It could be a way of reacting to a dispute with others. Or it could be because you've grown bored with the world you're in, and no longer want to participate in it. Or it could be that you like the idea of taking a long rest.

Regardless of the motivation, the danger from succumbing to the temptation to create less is, the potential for a weakening of your creativity skills. But you'll be in no danger of dying. It will be unlike this world where you run the danger of starvation if you quit your job. On the other side there's no danger of starvation. You cannot die simply because you refuse to work. In fact, you cannot die at all. You are immortal and you know it.

This knowledge of your immortality may lead you to feel emboldened to create less. Your creativity skills could then weaken due to their reduction in use. This in turn could lead to problems with other beings when they notice that they're not getting as much enjoyment from you as they've been accustomed. And these problems could become so severe that you're forced out of the world you're in, and have to resort to occupying a world requiring less skills at creativity.

And so in the same manner that untrustworthy behavior will reduce your skill at being trustworthy, uncreative behavior will reduce your skill at being creative.

And knowledge of your own immortality can lead you into this weakening of your mental skills.

THE DIFFICULTY OF IMPROVING YOUR SKILLS

When your mental skills weaken you'll have to occupy a world with lower standards for trustworthiness and creativity. It's logical to assume that this less-skilled world would be less enjoyable for you than the world you previously occupied, due to it being less creative. But you wouldn't be allowed to return to your previous world until you improved your mental skills.

It's also logical to assume that it would be very difficult to improve your mental skills while living on the other side. This is because you'll

possess knowledge of your own immortality. So long as you possess this knowledge you won't have sufficient motivation to stop engaging in untrustworthy and uncreative behavior.

You could still attempt to improve your skills. But just as this is difficult to do in this world, it's logical to assume that it's at least as difficult on the other side. You may find yourself feeling frustrated and disappointed with your behavior, time after time after time.

You would be similar to people in our own world who acquire a bad habit. Overeaters, smokers, alcoholics, and drug addicts all have great difficulty kicking their bad habits, and often experience setbacks.

But they have one advantage over those living on the other side. They are ignorant of their own immortality. Therefore they have a greater incentive to quit their bad habits than you'll have when you're on the other side. They want to avoid death—the fatal outcome that their habits could cause. But you won't have such incentive on the other side, since you'll know you're immortal.

A DESPERATE WAY TO IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS

And so you'll likely find yourself sinker deeper and deeper—going from lesser world to lesser world as your mental skills continue to decline. And the deeper you go the less you'll be able to enjoy your afterlife experience. This will increase your thirst for a better world. You'll become desperate to the point of being willing to do anything to improve your situation.

And this is where rebirth into the world we currently live in comes into play. You'll choose to come back to this side and be reborn. You'll make this choice because in this world you'll have the unique and special advantage of being ignorant about life after death. And this will give you sufficient motivation to work hard enough to strengthen your mental skills.

HOW THIS WORLD IMPROVES YOUR SKILLS

There are so many dangers in this world that can snatch your life away. You must work hard to develop your trustworthiness so that you can rely on others to help you survive. You must work hard at acquiring knowledge so that you can create the situations you need to help you survive. You must work hard at constantly being alert for hazards so that you can protect yourself from danger.

You must do all of this hard work in order to create your own survival. And these efforts at creating your own survival also strengthen your skills at creativity.

If you develop your skills enough to live a long time, you'll be able to die old. And then you'll be able to leave this world strongly skilled at trustworthiness and creativity. And with such strong skills you'll regain admission into the heavenly high-level worlds of the afterlife that you enjoyed so much before.

YOU ARE ON A CYCLE OF REBIRTH

It's logical to assume that there is a process of birth, transmigration to the other side, then transmigration back to this side through rebirth, that may repeat itself over and over again, possibly for an eternity. And the cause of this cycle of rebirth is the knowledge of immortality that beings possess on the other side. Or rather, the cause is the way beings react to such knowledge. When they react in such a manner that they allow their skills of trustworthiness and creativity to lapse, they remain in the cycle and continue to transmigrate back and forth from this world to the next.

So it's logical and practical to assume that you were indeed alive before this life. You've been caught up in a repeating cycle due to the way you react on the other side to the knowledge of your immortality. If you did not react in such a way you would not be here reading this book. You would still be on the other side enjoying a heavenly realm.

We therefore can conclude this chapter with the following logical and practical assumptions:

1. You were alive before this life.
2. Your mental skills weakened in your prior life because you engaged in untrustworthy and uncreative behavior.
3. You fell for the temptation to engage in skill-weakening behavior because you knew you were immortal, and thus had no fear of death.
4. You transmigrated to this world and your current life so that you could be ignorant about life after death, and thus have sufficient incentive to re-strengthen your mental skills.
5. If you do not change the way you react to the knowledge of your immortality, you will continue to repeat this cycle of transmigration, back and forth to this world and the next.

DO ANIMALS HAVE AN AFTERLIFE?

HUMAN BEINGS are a species of animal. We've already covered the question of whether or not humans have an afterlife. We've determined that it's impossible to know for sure, one way or the other. Because humans are animals, and because there's no scientific evidence proving that non-human animals have an afterlife, I believe it is logical to draw the same conclusion for all other animals as we've drawn for humans. That is, it is impossible to know for sure whether or not any animal has an afterlife.

But in earlier chapters we've made logical and practical assumptions, assuming that human beings actually do have an afterlife. So we can do the same with animals. We must be logical, so we must find a reasonable way to fit them into the birth, death, afterlife, and rebirth scheme that we've speculated upon for humans. And we must be practical. We want to spend our time wisely when we ponder the afterlives of animals, so we have to find a way to fit them into a scheme that teaches a valuable lesson for how humans should live their lives.

SURVIVAL IS SIMPLER FOR ANIMALS

I believe a good place to start is to compare the struggle for survival that animals undergo with that of humans. Animals are equipped with physical bodies that are well-adapted for life in this world. For instance, many animals have fur coats. This enables them to withstand the elements of cold, wintry weather. On the other hand, human beings have bare skin that is not well adapted for winter. And animals are born with strong instincts. These instincts contain pre-programmed instructions for their brains that enable them to survive with little or no training from other animals. But humans are born with weak instincts. Young humans must undergo extensive training from older humans in order to learn the skills they need to survive in this world.

Survival is simpler for animals than for humans. Consider the cow. All it has to do is graze on grass and drink water to survive. Grass grows plentifully. The cow doesn't have to plant it, water it, mow it, or harvest it. It only has to pluck it from the ground with its teeth, chew, then

swallow. But for humans survival is complicated. Wheat is a species of grass that is consumed by humans. But a human cannot consume wheat with the ease of a cow. The wheat must be planted from seed in ground that must first be plowed. It must be fertilized, sprayed with pesticide and irrigated with water. It must be treated to prevent ergot poisoning. Finally it must be harvested, sold, processed in a mill, and then sold again to human consumers in the form of flour. These human consumers must then mix the wheat flour with other products and then bake it in order to produce edible food.

And so the process of eating, that is so simple for cows, is very complicated for humans.

It's the same way when comparing any other animal to a human. Processes that are very simple for animals are very complicated for humans. Therefore humans must use copious amounts of brain energy in order to survive in this world. We humans must navigate our minds through complex and carefully planned methods to create the conditions we need for survival. We must gather and learn vast amounts of knowledge. And we must specialize our knowledge, and then interact with each other in complicated ways so that we can successfully interdepend upon each other.

It's this way even for so-called "uncivilized" humans that live directly off the land in tribal communities. Their way of life may be simpler, but it is still far more complex than that of animals.

ADVANCED BRAINS GIVE MINDS MORE EXERCISE

It's logical to assume that when an animal dies it will not have improved its mental strength as much as a human. The simpler lifestyle of an animal requires its brain to use far less mental energy than that used by human brains. And the less mental energy that the brain of a creature uses, the less exercise the mind of that creature will receive. So the minds of animals are not exercised as much as the minds of humans. Therefore it's logical to assume that the mental skills of animals do not strengthen as much as that of humans.

Then again some animals are more advanced than others. For instance as a general rule we consider a mammal to be more advanced than a bird, and a bird to be more advanced than a fish, and a fish to be more advanced than an insect. The more advanced an animal is, the more mental energy it requires to survive. Therefore it's logical to assume that the more advanced an animal is the more exercise its mind gets, and the more it will improve its mental strength before it dies.

A brain is like a gym. It offers equipment for exercising mental skills. And the more advanced a brain is, the more equipment is contained in its “gym.” So it only stands to reason that an advanced brain will exercise and strengthen the mental skills of the mind that occupies it, more than a primitive brain will.

MENTAL STRENGTH OF ANIMALS AFTER DEATH

At first blush this would seem to indicate that when an animal passes to the other side, it arrives there with less mental strength than that of a human being that has passed. And it would also seem to indicate that the more advanced the animal is in this world, the more mental strength it will have after it passes to the afterlife.

But this would be too great of a leap of logic. It’s safer to conclude that when an animal passes to the other side it will have received less mental exercise than when a human passes to the other side. But its resulting strength from the exercise received before dying would not necessarily be less than that of a human.

Consider an insect that has died and passed to the other side. With the leap of logic stated above, the former insect would have very weak mental strength compared with the mental skills of former humans. It therefore would not be allowed into heavenly worlds, and thus would not be able to enjoy its afterlife experience nearly as much as a former human. So it’s doubtful it would want to remain on the other side. Instead it would want to return to this world in a more advanced form so that it could get more mental exercise and thus gather more mental strength.

And it would have something of a license to return in a more advanced form. After all, even though it would have very weak mental skills compared with humans, it would still have stronger mental skills than it had when it first became an insect. The process of living its life as an insect would have helped it to improve its mental skills, even if that improvement was only slight. With these improved mental skills it would have the ability to return to this world as a more advanced species.

So let’s say the former insect comes back as a fish. Then after serving a stint as a fish, let’s say it comes back again as a bird. After this let’s assume it is reborn as a non-human mammal. And in its final rebirth it would graduate to a human being—considered to have the most advanced brain in our world.

And then, passing away as a human being, it would transmigrate to the other side with the strongest mental skills possible, be admitted into

heavenly worlds, and be able to enjoy the afterlife to its mind's fullest potential.

THE NUMBERS DON'T CRUNCH

A major problem with this logic is that the numbers don't crunch realistically. There are far more insects in this world than there are fish. There are far more fish than there are birds. There are far more birds than there are mammals. And there are far more non-human mammals than there are humans.

It seems that as a general rule, the more advanced the animal the less populous it is in this world.

But if every insect reincarnated as a fish, the insect population would rapidly deplete while the fish population would rapidly explode. And if every fish then came back as a bird, the fish population would then rapidly deplete and the bird population would undergo an explosion. Then suppose every bird came back as a non-human mammal. This world would see a rapid die-off of birds and a huge explosion in the number of non-human mammals. Finally this gigantic amount of non-human mammals would die and reincarnate, populating our world with trillions upon trillions and more of human beings.

Of course our world is not equipped to handle that many humans. And the ecology of our world would no longer be able to sustain life if it experienced such a rapid die-off of less advanced creatures at the base of the food chain.

COUNTERING A COUNTER-ARGUMENT

You could try to counter this argument by arguing that the populations of the less advanced creatures would be replenished by beings returning from the other side, as they lose their mental strength and transmigrate to this world to exercise and grow strong again. And you could speculate that those beings would be so weak they would have to start at the bottom, as less advanced creatures, then gradually work their way back up.

But this argument has a flaw. It's logical to assume that there would be different levels of weakness within the beings that reincarnate from the other side. And it's also logical to assume that the weakest beings coming from the other side would be in the smallest minority. These would be those that have gone to the greatest extremes in the weakening of their mental skills of trustworthiness and creativity.

But it makes sense that most beings that find their mental skills weakening would notice the problem rather quickly. They would want to fix their situation as soon as possible by reincarnating before their mental skills deteriorated down to the lowest levels of strength. And so it's logical to assume that most beings would reincarnate after experiencing only slight levels of weakening.

These slightly weakened beings on the other side would be much like people in our own world who skip a meal. When you skip a meal your hunger pangs tell you rather quickly that you need to eat. And so you eat the next chance you get. This prevents you from growing weaker and weaker to the point where you can no longer fend for yourself.

In the same vein, on the other side, it seems likely that those beings whose skills at trustworthiness and creativity have been undermined would begin feeling the ill, weakening effects of this rather quickly. This would likely occur when they find themselves being evicted from advanced worlds and falling to lesser worlds. Most of them would immediately realize the problem and quickly take measures to return to full strength so that they could return to the advanced worlds. They would reincarnate to this world seeking a quick rejuvenation, but would only need a small amount of improvement in their mental strength before dying and going back to the other side to reclaim occupation in a higher heavenly realm.

But under the counter-argument above, all beings reincarnating to this side would have to be so weak they would require rebirth as some of the least advanced creatures. It makes no sense that so many reincarnating beings would be this weak. It makes more sense that most of them would be much stronger, and would thus qualify to reincarnate as more advanced creatures, such as human beings.

Yet the most advanced beings living in our world are in a tiny minority compared with the least advanced.

So again the numbers simply don't add up. And so the theory that we graduate to more and more advanced creatures as we reincarnate is a theory that defies logical explanation. We are trying to be logical in the assumptions we make about the afterlives of animals.

COMING BACK AS A WORM

So let's try a different theory.

Imagine living on the other side and having strong mental skills. You would find yourself in a very advanced world, requiring high levels of trustworthiness and creativity. But you would be able to meet that

challenge and thrive and enjoy yourself, due to your strong mental skills. Life would be like heaven for you, and you would have a great time.

But suppose you indulged in activities that slightly weakened your mental skills at trustworthiness and creativity. And suppose this resulted in being expelled from the wonderful world you enjoyed to a world slightly less wonderful. It would be obvious to you that your skills had weakened. And you would want to improve those skills to get back to the world that offered more enjoyment. But you would know just how difficult this can be for beings who are aware of their own immortality. So there's a good chance you would immediately decide to reincarnate to this world of immortality-ignorance for a quick program of mental exercise and strengthening.

You wouldn't need a whole lot of exercise—just a small amount would do fine to get you back up to full mental strength. This is because your mental skills would only be slightly weakened.

Now suppose you could choose to reincarnate either as a human being or a worm. If you came back as a human being you would get an immense amount of mental exercise, because the task of human survival is mentally arduous. You probably wouldn't want this because you wouldn't need that much exercise.

But if you came back as a worm, life would be easy. Worms don't have to make much mental effort at all to survive. They have strong pre-programmed instincts in their brains and they are physically well-adapted to this world. Their learning and decision-making tasks are extremely simple compared with that of human beings. Worms get very little mental exercise.

So it's likely that you would choose to be a worm rather than a human being.

And after one lifetime as a worm you would return to the other side exercised and strengthened sufficiently to return to the advanced world you previously enjoyed.

COMING BACK AS A HUMAN

Now imagine a different scenario. Suppose you live on the other side and possess strong mental skills. But these skills lapse as you indulge in activities that weaken your trustworthiness and creativity. You notice the ill effects immediately, due to being expelled from the advanced world you enjoy. But you ignore the problem and continue to engage in activities that weaken your mental skills.

After a long time, and after multiple expulsions to lower and lower worlds, you would eventually find that your mental skills have weakened significantly. And you would find yourself forced to live in a primitive world of low-skilled beings. It would be very difficult for you to enjoy such a world, due to the lack of trust and creativity that would pervade that kind of environment. At some point this would force you to stop ignoring your problem of weak mental skills and you would become determined to improve yourself. But you would have little choice on how to improve yourself except to reincarnate to this world of immortality-ignorance.

Now when faced with the choice of reincarnating as a human or worm you would likely choose the human life. Human beings have advanced brains. So the human life offers an opportunity for strenuous mental exercise and vast improvement of mental skills. You would need such strenuous exercise because your mind would require a great amount of improvement in skill. You would not want to reincarnate as a worm, because worms get far less mental exercise than what you would need.

So you would decide to come back as a human. And after one lifetime as a human there's a good chance you would return to the other side with full mental strength, and could once again claim residence in a heavenly world requiring advanced mental skills.

THE LOGIC AND PRACTICALITY OF THIS THEORY

This theory is logical because the numbers match up to the amounts of different creatures that exist in this world. There are far less human beings than there are worms. And it's likely that only a tiny minority of reincarnators would require a strengthening of mental skills so significant that they would need to reincarnate as human beings.

And this theory makes it seem logical that far more beings would reincarnate to this world as worms than as humans, because far more reincarnators would only need the minimal mental exercise that worms get. So that would explain why there are far more worms than human beings in this world. And it goes further to explain why there tends to be more creatures that are less advanced than more advanced, in this world.

Also this theory eliminates the need to graduate in rebirths to a more and more advanced creature. And so it eliminates the dilemma of trying to understand why the populations of advanced creatures do not explode, to the detriment of the populations of less advanced creatures.

This theory is also practical. It teaches the importance of taking advantage of your advanced brain to develop your skills at trustworthiness and creativity as much as possible. And it teaches that you came to this

world in an effort to escape a desperate situation. And now that you're here, all you have to do is give your advanced brain the exercise it's built for. By doing so you'll be able to escape the desperateness of living in a lower world with weak mental skills.

Also it teaches the importance of guarding your mental skills with vigilance. When you take immediate care of any slight weakening of your mental skills, you can prevent yourself from sinking into a lower and lower state of existence that eventually leads to misery.

By exercising your brain sufficiently you'll be able to take strong mental skills with you after you die, and use those skills to gain entry and residence into an advanced heavenly realm on the other side.

LOGICAL AND PRACTICAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ANIMALS AND HUMANS

And so we are left with the following logical and practical assumptions:

1. Animals have an afterlife.
2. Animals were once beings living on the other side that possessed strong mental skills. But their skills became slightly weakened.
3. Humans were once beings living on the other side that possessed strong mental skills. But their skills became greatly weakened.
4. The more advanced a creature is in this world, the less mental strength it possessed before reincarnating to this world.
5. One lifetime is usually all a creature needs in this world before returning to full mental strength, whether that creature be human or animal.
6. Human beings that develop and maintain strong mental skills of trustworthiness and creativity will pass to the other side completely prepared to join an advanced heavenly world, where they will enjoy life to its fullest.

WHAT ABOUT PLANTS AND BACTERIA?

This chapter has addressed the situation of animals, and speculates on what happens to them after they die. It has not yet addressed plants, bacteria or any other type of non-animal creature. But I believe that the same set of assumptions applied to animals, listed above, can also be applied to other organisms.

Plants and bacteria are considered to be among the least advanced organisms in this world. So when the above list of assumptions is applied to them, it would indicate that the beings that reincarnate into these organisms are beings that are the least weakened when arriving from the other side.

Now consider the astronomical amount of plants and bacteria currently living in this world. For instance according to the science of microbiology, there are five nonillion bacteria (5×10^{30}) on earth. Five nonillion is the number 5 followed by 30 zeros. And that is an astronomical number. By comparison there are only about eight billion human beings on earth. That is an 8 followed by just 9 zeros. For the human population to surpass that of bacteria, it would have to multiply one billion times, then one billion times again, then about one thousand more times.

The sheer number of these organisms suggests that there are a vast amount of relatively superior beings from the other side constantly being reborn into our world.

The life cycles of many bacteria are extremely short. A bacterium may only survive for a few minutes or hours in this world before it divides, creating two new bacteria. Therefore it would seem that many relatively superior beings on the other side catch on quickly to their need to replenish their strength, even before being expelled from the worlds they reside in. It would seem that they detect the problem so quickly that their need for re-strengthening is very slight. These beings only have to return to this world for a few minutes or hours, as bacteria, in order to get all the exercise they need.

We can even suppose that a huge multitude of beings on the other side engage in a routine process of reincarnating as bacteria, as part of a regular mental maintenance program. This would prevent them from weakening to the point of being at risk of getting expelled from their worlds.

And so we can assume in a logical and practical way that animals, plants, bacteria, and anything else that lives in this world, will have an afterlife after they die. Not only that but we can assume that any being that passes from this world to the next may quite likely return over and over again as part of a regular process of rejuvenation and renewal of strength.

*HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE**FOR YOUR AFTERLIFE?*

WE'VE MADE ASSUMPTIONS that there is an afterlife. And we've also made assumptions about what the afterlife is like. But it's important to remember that these are only assumptions. They're not scientifically proven fact. Remember: It is impossible for anyone alive in this world to know for sure whether or not there is an afterlife. And if there really is an afterlife, it's impossible to know for sure what it's like. The best we can do is make assumptions based upon logical and practical reasoning.

THE FOOLISH AND WISE GAMBLES

But it's important to make these assumptions. You need to find some way to prepare for the afterlife just in case there is one.

Some may argue that this is a waste of time. They may wonder why anyone would want to prepare for the possibility of something that may never occur at all. They're willing to take their chances living life as if there is no afterlife, simply because nobody can prove that it exists.

But if you do this you'll be like someone who makes a foolish gamble:

If you live your life gambling that there is no afterlife, and without preparing for a hereafter, then there are two possible outcomes for you. The first possibility is that you may win, and the second is that you may lose.

If you win then you get nothing. Because if there really is no afterlife you'll have nothing after you die. You'll lose all conscious awareness forever and never experience change, enjoyment and life again. But if you lose your gamble then you may find yourself in a hell world after you die, due to not preparing for the afterlife. So with this gamble, the best you can do is break even and the worst you can do is lose big by going to hell.

The reason why you would break even by winning the foolish gamble is because after you die you'll get exactly what you had before you were conceived and born: nothing. There would be no gain nor loss from the transaction of going from no before-life to no after-life.

On the other hand suppose you gamble that there is an afterlife, and you prepare for this possibility by strengthening your skills at trustworthiness and creativity. This is a wise gamble. With this, there again are two possible outcomes. The first possibility is that you may win, and the second is that you may lose.

If you win then you gain admission into a heavenly world. But if you lose, you get nothing. So with this gamble the best you can do is win big, and the worst you can do is break even.

Isn't it wiser to take the gamble where the worst you can do is break even, rather than the gamble where the best you can do is break even?

If you agree with my gaming instincts then I would like to offer some suggestions on how to take this wise gamble, and prepare for the possibility of an afterlife.

STRENGTHENING TRUSTWORTHINESS SKILLS

I have made a logical and practical assumption that trustworthiness is the highest virtue in the here and hereafter. Therefore I believe that the most important way to prepare for the afterlife is to build upon this virtue and strengthen your skills at being trustworthy.

There are a lot of ways to do this and we can thank religion for some help. Every religion offers a set of behavioral rules to follow. Many of these rules relate to building trust. Let's take a look at some of them:

The Jewish and Christian religions offer the Ten Commandments (which are also found interspersed within the teachings of Islam). Five of these ten commandments prohibit you from committing murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and coveting. It's easy to see that following these rules can help you build trust and avoid distrust among people with whom you interact.

The Christian religion also contains the Golden Rule, in Mathew 7:12 of the Bible. It states that you should do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This rule offers an excellent guideline for learning how to build mutual trust with others.

The Buddhist religion offers five precepts, where you vow to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and use of intoxicants.

Eight of the Ten Traditional yamas of Yoga relate directly to methods for building trust. These are depicted in a code of action that is framed in positive wording. Followers of Yoga are encouraged to be non-violent (Ahimsa), and to be truthful, non-stealing, faithful to their spouse, patient, compassionate, straightforward, and moderate.

These religions and these rules have been around since ancient times. They've helped countless people down through the ages to prepare for their afterlives by teaching them how to build their trustworthiness. You don't have to belong to any of these religions to find value in their rules. All you have to do is try to follow their rules. When you discover that following a specific rule helps you to build your trustworthiness, then you know it has value for you. Then you can adopt it for your own. And in this way you can build your trustworthiness.

WATCH YOUR MOTIVATIONS

It's important to keep your motivations clear when you follow the rules of religion, or any other so-called "moral" rules. Avoid the motivation to be "moral," or to do the "right" thing. And avoid following the rules to do what "God" or any other supernatural being has purportedly dictated. This kind of motivation will lead you into a competition over piety with your fellow human being. You'll strive to be more holy than other people. And this can lead you into behavior that will damage your trustworthiness rather than build it. You can find yourself picking at the behavior of others in a trifling way in order to bolster your own image in comparison with theirs.

Remember that your motivation is to build trust, not damage it. You want to cultivate relationships of mutual trust with others so that you can increase your potential for creativity. Also you want to strengthen your skill at cultivating trust so that it will be strong when you die, and help you to gain admission into a heavenly world. Remember to keep that as your motivation when following any rule for behavior.

BE FLEXIBLE

However rules for behavior offer only a rough guide toward building your trustworthiness. They're most useful at times when quick decisions are necessary. Sometimes you'll find yourself in a situation where you must decide quickly but are not sure which course of action is the most trustworthy to take. You may not have time in these situations to ponder over whether or not your trustworthiness would be damaged should you make one choice over another. At these times a set of rules comes in handy. You simply choose the action that most closely follows your rules.

But usually you do have time to ponder your decisions. So a rigid set of rules is not usually necessary. And it can actually make it difficult for you to build your skills at trustworthiness, if adhered to too rigidly.

For example, suppose you're in a situation where someone's life is in danger. And suppose you realize that the only way that person's life can be saved is for you to tell a lie. In this case you would build more trustworthiness by telling the lie and saving a life than by telling the truth and allowing the person to die.

Life presents you with an infinite variety of situations and an infinite amount of decisions for dealing with every unique situation you find yourself in. You therefore need flexibility in order deal with life effectively, while at the same time building trust with others. It's important to avoid being too rigid, so it's important to avoid relying too heavily on a set of rules for behavior.

You can be flexible when you have time to ponder the situations you're in. And when you have this time, it's helpful to ponder the following two questions:

1. What kind of behavior will help me build trustworthiness with all people involved in this situation?
2. What kind of behavior will damage my trustworthiness with anyone involved in this situation?

You then choose the behavior that best builds your trustworthiness, rather than causes damage to it.

MONITOR YOUR BEHAVIOR CLOSELY

Every time you engage in a course of action that builds your trustworthiness with all people you're interacting with, you strengthen your skills and make yourself more likely to behave in a trustworthy manner in the future. And every time you choose an action that does otherwise, you weaken your skills and make yourself less likely to behave in a trustworthy manner in the future.

This is because you feel the most secure with that which you are most familiar. And you are intimately familiar with your own behavior. Therefore the more you engage in a certain type of behavior, the more secure you'll feel with it, and then the more likely you'll be to continue it in the future.

This makes it important for you to monitor your behavior closely. Know when your actions cultivate trust and know when they damage trust. When you detect an action that cultivates trust, take special note of it and get in the habit of performing that action as much as possible. And when

you detect an action that damages trust, take special note of that action and try to discontinue doing it in the future.

This will eventually make you an expert on trustworthy action. But you won't just become an expert. You'll also become familiar and secure with trustworthy action and find yourself habitually engaging in it all of the time.

When you develop this habit, your skills at trustworthiness will improve to top strength. And this will make you well-prepared for dealing with the afterlife.

STRENGTHENING CREATIVITY SKILLS

Trust is the highest virtue. But creativity is the highest goal. In addition to trustworthiness you must also build your strength at creativity, in order to prepare for the afterlife.

Creativity can't be taught. It comes naturally to every mind. You are automatically creative. Your mind is constantly perceiving change created by others, then combining its perceptions to create new perceptions. These new perceptions cause more change. And change is life. In fact creativity is the very engine of life, because creativity causes change. This engine cannot be shut off. You have always been creative. You are creative now. And you will always be creative. Creativity comes as natural to your mind as life itself.

But there are techniques you can use that can make you more creative. I've already described three techniques in Chapter Nine of this book. These are: Learning, Forced Action, and Random Subconscious Inspiration.

You can also learn techniques from others. And you can develop more techniques on your own. Since different techniques work differently for different people, it's important to find what works best for yourself.

But it's also important to be moderate at creativity. Don't attempt to be too creative, or you'll cause too much stress for yourself. This will result in superoptimal focus and reduce the amount of uniqueness, change and enjoyment that you'll experience. So trying to be too creative will actually cause a reduction in creativity. Be careful to find a balance between too much stress and too little stress. Only carry an amount of stress that allows you to feel comfortable, yet interested in the efforts you make at creating life.

IMPROVING LONGEVITY

This is an important way for you to prepare for your afterlife. I'm assuming that you came to this world to strengthen your mental skills at trustworthiness and creativity. So it only stands to reason that the longer you live here, the stronger these mental skills can be once you leave. And so you need longevity in order to strengthen these mental skills as much as possible.

Longevity depends partially on luck. Bad luck can cause you to die from an accident, malignant disease, or some other cause, at a young age. Yet deadly bad luck is necessary. It instructs those who remain living that life can end at any time. And this can motivate them to waste no time, by spending every moment of their lives strengthening their skills at being trustworthy and creative.

If you die young from bad luck, you may find yourself quickly returning to this world in human form, or some animal form, to try again. But if you're lucky enough to survive into old age, there's an excellent chance you won't have to return to this world at all. At least not for a very long time.

There are things you can do to increase your chances at longevity and live into old age. One obvious method is to take care of your health. You can eat healthful foods. You can exercise. And you can visit your doctor for checkups.

You can also avoid the vices. These are bad habits that damage your health. You can abstain from smoking, drinking and overeating. You can stay away from narcotics. You can learn how to control your temper (which may help keep your blood pressure down). And you can avoid anything else that is harmful to your health.

LIVE LONG WITH THESE TWO SKILLS

But there are two even more valuable ways to increase your longevity. Strengthen your skills at trustworthiness and creativity. Consider that people must trust you in order to give you a job or keep you employed. Having a livelihood is important for maintaining survival.

And you must be trusted in order to avoid being harmed by others. The more others trust you the more likely they are to protect you rather than harm you. Trustworthiness is an absolute necessity in order for you to increase your chances at longevity in this world.

Creativity is also an absolute necessity. You must learn, do and otherwise create, in order to have something valuable to offer others. Your survival in this world requires that you interdepend on others. But you cannot interdepend very effectively when you fail to be very creative.

BE PRACTICAL, OR NOT

You have a wide range of choices concerning the things you decide to create. But I believe it's wise to limit most of your choices to things that are practical for survival purposes. The more practical you are in the things you learn, do, and create, the greater are your chances for surviving in this world.

For instance, suppose you have a choice between learning carpentry or sports trivia. Of course carpentry is the most practical choice. Human beings have a need for shelter in order to survive. When you learn carpentry you learn how to build a home for yourself. This can save you a lot of money over paying someone else to build a home for you. Thus you become able to provide shelter for yourself more easily, and improve your ability to survive in this world. You also learn a trade that can provide you with a livelihood. This too improves your ability to survive.

On the other hand humans really have no need to know sports trivia. So learning carpentry is a more practical choice.

I believe it is important to distinguish between the practical and the impractical when it comes to things you can learn and do. The more practical your choices, the greater chance you'll have at surviving a long time. There may be no direct difference in the amount you will strengthen your skills at creativity between something that is practical and something that is impractical. The difference is indirect. When you live longer by pursuing the practical, you get more time in this world to continue strengthening your creativity skills.

This doesn't mean you should always avoid impractical things. Creativity depends upon uniqueness. The more unique something is the more change, enjoyment and life it creates. But sometimes you can create much more uniqueness by doing something impractical—such as whistling a tune or sketching a portrait—than you can by engaging in a practical but familiar activity. And sometimes the impractical is actually necessary in order to produce sufficient uniqueness to keep you interested and entertained with life. When the impractical is the best thing around to keep you enjoying life, then the impractical actually becomes practical. This is because you must enjoy your life in order for you to stay interested in living a long time.

But whenever you can create at least as much uniqueness by being practical as you can by being impractical, choose that which is practical.

And try to be as creative as possible with the practical things you choose. For instance, find more innovative ways to perform your chores,

or learn new skills in your employment. This will help maintain uniqueness and enjoyment in your practical pursuits.

The more practical your creativity, the greater chance you have of living a long time.

And that's the idea. Live a long time. Living long is very important when it comes to preparing for the afterlife.

SUICIDE

So let me now give a few thoughts about suicide:

Suicide can be a disastrous decision. I hope I've made this obvious by now. The assumptions I've made in this book about the afterlife may actually be true. If so, a person who kills himself is likely to be in for a big surprise and a deep disappointment when they travel back to the other side.

There they'll learn that they voluntarily chose to come to this world and be a human being so that they could strengthen their mental skills. They'll learn that their reincarnation was part of an exercise program that they chose to enter. And so they'll discover that they have cut their exercise program short by killing themselves.

Worst of all, they'll discover that they cut off their exercising at a time of personal crisis. Times of personal crisis offer the most fertile ground for improving mental strength in the skills of trustworthiness and creativity. So they'll discover that they deprived themselves of a ripe opportunity to grow strong in their mental skills.

I believe that those who commit suicide will usually feel so disappointed with their decision that they'll immediately choose to return to this world and try again. This is not so bad, because at least it indicates that you have a chance to come back here over and over again until you get it right. But why not get things right the first time? It's a waste of time to keep trying over and over again when all you have to do is stick things out right now, and get your exercise program over with.

I don't believe suicide is always a bad choice. You may be terminally ill and in great physical pain. Or you may be in some other dire circumstance where you have no hope of living much longer. Or you may be faced with a choice of sacrificing your own life so that another may live.

If you commit suicide in a circumstance where you have no hope of living much longer, you probably will have little chance anyway, of continuing to improve your mental skills by staying alive. And so it's likely you'll feel very little disappointment over your decision, when you

reach the other side. And if you've lived long enough, there's a good chance your mental skills will be powerful enough to help you gain admission into a heavenly world.

Suppose you sacrifice your own life so that another may live? In this case you may reach the other side with one huge success. You may have succeeded at greatly improving your skill at being trustworthy. An act of self-sacrifice can instill a mental resolve to be considerate of the well-being of others. This resolve can strengthen your mental skill at being trustworthy, sufficiently enough to help you gain admission into a heavenly world.

But there's a problem with self-sacrifice. Although it may help you to be trustworthy to others, it can damage your ability to trust yourself. You must be able to take care of yourself before you can take care of others. But if you can't trust yourself to do that, then others will have a difficult time trusting you to take care of them. They may be able to trust your intentions, but they will not be able to trust your abilities.

Also, sacrificing your own life will shorten your life. And this could leave you with insufficient skills at creativity. For these reasons there's no guarantee that such an act will gain you admission into heaven. But it can improve your chances.

FALLING SHORT

The way to prepare for your afterlife is to build your skills at being trustworthy and creative. Live as long as you can so that you can keep building and strengthening these skills. If you're fortunate enough to live to old age while working diligently to build your skills, there's an excellent chance you'll gain admission into a heavenly world.

But if you fall short, you will still have strengthened your skills to some extent. Nobody, not even the most hurtful or lazy person around, leaves this world without having strengthened themselves to some degree. You have to strengthen your skills to some degree in order to survive for any significant length of time in this world.

You may have to return as a human being again so that you can continue your exercise program. But the next time, life will probably be easier for you. This is because you'll have already strengthened your mental skills somewhat during your previous life. So you won't need the same amount of challenge as before. Therefore it's likely you'll face challenges that are less severe and easier to cope with. Also you'll bring with you the mental strength you've already developed from your prior

life as a human. And this mental strength will enable you to be more successful at meeting the challenges that you do face.

And it is likely that your next life will provide sufficient exercise, so that after it's over you won't have to come back at all for a very long time.

Or you may gain enough strength after leaving this life so that you'll only need just a little more exercise to get up to full strength. In this case you can return to this world as an animal or some other less advanced creature. This will be easier and less challenging than living as a human being. And once your life as an animal is finished there's a good chance you'll find yourself admitted into a heavenly realm.

But of course the more effort you put into preparing for your afterlife, the less likely you'll fall short, and the more likely that you'll find direct admission into a heavenly world after you leave this world.

And then you will have fulfilled your goal and satisfied your purpose for coming here.

CONCLUSION

SO HOW SHOULD YOU LIVE your life? That is the question that began this book. And I hope that by resolving the Deep Mysteries of life and death, you've been able to come up with many answers to this question.

I'll give you my answer, but your answer is up to you. First, let me reframe the question to reflect the way it was posed in Chapter 3:

How should you—the awareness of an infinite array of perceptions that are constantly changing, within a vast matrix of infinite creativity—determine what changes you will be consciously aware of?

My answer: You should endeavor to create as much change, of any kind, as possible, while avoiding as much harm as possible to yourself and others.

If you don't care for my answer then I hope you can take the logical explanations presented in this book and form them into one cohesive picture in your mind. And I hope this picture enables you to clearly understand and resolve the Deep Mysteries of life and death.

And may you use this understanding to find your own answer to the ultimate question of questions.

GLOSSARY

Agnosticism Acceptance of the reality that it is impossible to know whether or not there is life after death. This is the most profound and important metaphysical concept you can ever grasp and accept.

Awareness A factor of change. A mental force that shifts from one perception to another at lightning-fast speed, and that can be focused, so that it shifts more frequently to one thing and less frequently to other things.

Background Awareness Your awareness of things that your mind is not focused on. The stronger your focus, the less background awareness you have. Background awareness is a kind of perpetual suboptimal focus. But technically, it really isn't focus. So it would be more accurate to call it suboptimal awareness. As discussed in Chapter 5, background awareness contains a significant part of your awareness. So when it is forcibly drained by a strong stimulus that takes command of your focus, you will lose a significant source of enjoyment.

Change Equation Determination of your likelihood of gaining more or less change than you will lose, from dealing with another being.

Creativity The highest goal of life. Life is created whenever anything happens that causes change. Creativity occurs whenever perceptions are combined to create new perceptions.

Death When things stay the same and do not change. Theoretically this is impossible, since all things change. For living beings, death is of two kinds—Physical death and mental death. Physical death occurs when your heart permanently stops beating. Mental death occurs when you cease being consciously aware. Physical death is inevitable. Mental death may never occur at all.

Emotion A feeling that occurs in response to the uniqueness of your perceptions. The more unique your perceptions are, the more pleasurable the emotion that will be produced, whereas the less unique your perceptions are, the more painful the emotion that will be produced. Positive emotions are pleasurable while negative emotions are painful.

Factors of Change The two Factors of Change are Awareness and Stimulus. See Awareness and Stimulus.

Focus A method that involves directing your attention to one thing, thus forcing your awareness to shift to that one thing more often than it shifts to other things. This increases your awareness of that one thing while decreasing your awareness of other things.

Forced Action A technique of creativity. When you force yourself to perform a routine chore, your mind experiences the forgotten fine stimuli and details associated with that chore. This enables your mind to “get into it” and experience a level of uniqueness, change and enjoyment that it did not anticipate when contemplating the chore.

Forced Focus Occurs when a stimulus is so strong it takes command of your focus, forcing you to focus on the stimulus, against your conscious will. Also known as Involuntary Focus. Forced Focus produces pain.

Foreground Awareness Your awareness of things that your mind is focused on.

Hate Distrust. Hatred occurs in a wide range of degrees, from minor dislike to major disdain. If you have minor distrust for something or someone, you will have minor dislike. If you have major distrust, you will have major disdain. The feeling of hate arises when you place superoptimal focus on your need to protect yourself from someone or something.

Heaven A pleasant enjoyable abiding in the hereafter. A place where our minds rest and play and fulfill our fullest potential for change, life and enjoyment. Pleasant enjoyable beings who are formed into a groups on the other side, create worlds that are also pleasant and enjoyable and seem like heaven to those who occupy them.

Hell A world on the other side occupied by beings with low skill levels at trustworthiness and creativity. But the worst hell is not a world at all. It is a state of solitary confinement that beings endure, because their skill levels are so low no other beings can tolerate them.

IMF Abbreviation that stands for Immediate Familiarity. See also, Immediate Familiarity. A factor of uniqueness. The awareness of your

current experience. The more often your awareness shifts to any one stimulus, the greater degree of IMF you will have of that stimulus. The greater the degree of IMF the less unique it will be to you.

Immediate Familiarity (IMF) See also, IMF. A factor of uniqueness. The awareness of your current experience. The more often your awareness shifts to any one stimulus, the greater degree of Immediate Familiarity you will have of that stimulus. The greater the degree of Immediate Familiarity the less unique it will be to you.

Involuntary Focus See Forced Focus.

Learning A technique of creativity. The more you learn, the more of this world you know. And the more of this world you know, the more capable you are at putting together elements of this world in order to create new elements.

Life Change, and the conscious awareness of change. Automatic enjoyment.

Logical and Practical Assumption The assumption that something is true as long as there is a possibility that it could be true, and as long as a useful purpose is served from assuming it to be true. This is a helpful time-saving technique for addressing metaphysical questions. See also Most Judgment.

Longevity Equation Determination of your likelihood of gaining more or less longevity than you will lose, from dealing with another being.

Love Trust. Love occurs in a wide range of degrees ranging from minor like to major affection. If you have minor trust for something or someone, you will have minor like. If you have major trust, you will have major affection. The feeling of love arises when your ability to trust allows your focus to remain optimal, rather than rise to superoptimal.

Matrix The interaction that occurs between all living beings that gives rise to creativity far exceeding what any one living being can create alone.

Maximum Isolation An imaginary place that lies beyond the edge of the universe, in complete darkness, where nothing—not even starlight—can

reach you or influence your mind. It is zero. It is a place of non-existence.

Most Judgment Using subjective opinion to judge which logical and practical assumption is the *most* logical, and the *most* practical. A method for saving time by narrowing Logical and Practical Assumptions about a metaphysical question to just one possibility. (See also Logical and Practical Assumption).

Negative Change Equation A calculation that occurs when you expect to lose more uniqueness and change than you will gain, when dealing with another being.

Negative Longevity Equation A calculation that occurs when you expect to lose more longevity than you will gain, when dealing with another being.

Non-Optimal Focus Suboptimal Focus or Superoptimal Focus. Can be used to help you to make sacrifices in your immediate enjoyment in order to improve your longevity; or it can be used to experiment with focusing on different stimuli that are vying for your attention, in order to find that stimulus which brings you the most enjoyment.

Optimal Focus A critical point of focus after which any further strengthening of your focus will cause overall losses in change and enjoyment. This is due to increased IMF and decreased uniqueness, that begins to build faster than gains in change and enjoyment from increased awareness.

Pain A feeling experienced when a stimulus is so powerful it forces your mind into superoptimal focus. Pain ranges in degree from mild discomfort to extreme agony. The degree of pain you experience depends upon the degree to which you are forced into superoptimal focus.

Perception A stimulus coming from your sixth physical sense. Perceptions are formed in your brain. Since your brain is part of your physical body it is logical to conclude that perceptions are your sixth physical sense, in addition to touch, hearing, vision, taste and smell. Perception is change, because everything you perceive is constantly changing. But change is not perception, because you must perceive a change before it can become perception.

Pleasure A feeling experienced that requires uniqueness and voluntary focus. A hallmark sign of pleasure is that you can always shift your focus away from a pleasurable stimulation in order to successfully perform a task requiring high degrees of concentration. This helps differentiate between pleasure and pain.

Positive Change Equation A calculation that occurs when you expect to gain more uniqueness and change than you will lose, when dealing with another being.

Positive Longevity Equation A calculation that occurs when you expect to gain more longevity than you will lose, when dealing with another being.

Random Subconscious Inspiration A technique of creativity. Your subconscious mind engages in nonverbal thought that results in the creation of new ideas. When your conscious mind becomes aware of these new ideas, you can be inspired to act on them. Careful acting on some Random Subconscious Inspirations can lead to a significant impact upon our world, creating vast amounts of new life for both yourself and everyone else.

Stimulus A factor of change. A thing that changes, that your mind becomes aware of. The two characteristics of a stimulus are its level of strength and its level of uniqueness. The stronger a stimulus is, the more ability it has to take control of your focus. The more unique a stimulus is, the more change and enjoyment you will experience from it.

Suboptimal Awareness See Background Awareness.

Suboptimal Focus Any focus below the strength of Optimal Focus (See Optimal Focus).

Superoptimal Focus Any focus above the strength of Optimal Focus (See Optimal Focus).

Trustworthiness The highest virtue. This is the key to winning cooperation from others so that you may have positive Longevity Equations and positive Change Equations. It is important to cultivate

trustworthiness in yourself, and it is very helpful to deal with those who have proven themselves trustworthy to you.

Uniqueness A characteristic of a stimulus that makes it different from other things you have experienced. The more familiar you are with a stimulus, the less unique it is, and the less familiar you are with it, the more unique it is. The two factors that affect the uniqueness level of a stimulus are your degree of memory of the stimulus, and your degree of immediate familiarity (IMF) with the stimulus.

Voluntary Focus A necessary ingredient for the experience of pleasure. This occurs when a stimulus is weak enough to allow your mind to voluntarily focus on it, rather than be forced to focus on it.

World A gigantic structure of perceptions created and occupied by a large group of beings on the other side.

You The awareness of an infinite array of perceptions that are constantly changing, within a vast matrix of infinite creativity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, TIPPY GNU

The best education is a self-education. But formal education can be useful too, now and then. Like when you want to convince someone that you're smarter than you really are. To that end, I hold a baccalaureate from Regents College (now Excelsior College), University of the State of New York, where I majored in Psychology and Sociology.

I received my degree in 1998. But instead of going on to graduate school and becoming a psychologist, I continued my career as a letter carrier and union steward. The pay was better.

I applied my knowledge of psychology toward protecting myself and others from abusive postal managers. It didn't help much. Not without some good old-fashioned street fighting, to go along with it. As a union steward, I gouged eyes and kicked balls when I had to, but used diplomacy whenever I could. And this kept those cocksuckers barely at bay, like circling sharks, until such time as I was able to retire.

I'm now enjoying a peaceful, low-stress retirement, and all those postal managers can suck my dick.

I'm married to a dog-lover, and she is married to her dogs. We sleep in separate beds and bedrooms, because of the dogs. But somehow we can't stop loving each other. Same-bed sleeping is overrated. I think it's the cause of many divorces.

I've spent more than half my life braving the elements of the Mojave Desert. I've been chased by rapacious roadrunners, gored by a horny toad, and single-handedly fended off a pride of hungry ant lions. I wage constant battles keeping coon-tailed rattlers from raiding my trash cans. I chum for chuckwallas during flash-flood season, and sustain myself through droughts by chewing the fruit of the prickly pear, and spitting out the thorns.

I find the time to write whenever nature leaves me alone.

I've been writing since my high school days, when I attended a creative writing class. Day after day, assignment after assignment, I tortured my creative writing teacher with nonsensical short stories that deviated far from the assignments' guidelines. I figured, you can't be creative if you stay within a box.

She didn't figure it that way though, and always docked my grades. Even after she kind of indirectly and grudgingly told me I had a talent for writing. Or maybe I imagined she said that. But it didn't matter. You see, talent won't get you good grades. Doing as you're told, and acting normal, is what it takes to win recognition from authorities.

But talent or no, I continued to write. At one time I wrote for fun and profit. But when I found that, like good grades, there wasn't much profit, I decided to just write for fun. It's simpler that way, and it frustrates the IRS. And that's why this book is free.

You can read other ex gratia scrivenings of mine at my blog, www.unicorniks.com.

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