Mind Flight:
A Journey into the Future

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with
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"…every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos—by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments that symphony we call the music of the spheres."
Wassily Kandinsky

This is how my thinking begins. This is a first draft. This is how I start to learn and think through a philosophy of the future and begin the journey of wisdom and enlightenment and the pursuit of love.

On the cement floor in front of me is a barbell. It holds approximately 500 pounds of weight (including two giant manhole covers weighing 150 pounds each) and I stand over it ready to do two or three repetitions in the dead lift. My mind is intently focused on the barbell. I am breathing deeply. My muscles are tense. I grit my teeth, clamping my jaws together. I am determined to lift the weight.

Whoever thinks weightlifting is a purely physical thing depending on simple brute force does not understand it—does not understand that one lifts the weight with one's mind as much as one's body. Weightlifting is both mental and physical; the imagery, energy, and feel of your consciousness, of your will, permeate and explode out through your muscles when you engage the barbell.

Further, the barbell is not just a physical thing but a psychological reality as well. It has a meaningful, even willful presence. It confronts you as a challenge, a defiant inertness, and an immense heaviness resisting any force against it.

Your mind has to beat this intimidating presence. In the act of lifting the weight, you must "psych yourself up" and "psych the barbell out." The barbell will pull against you in a tug of war, a war of wills, the might of steel against the might of your spirit.

It is therefore you, all of you, body and mind versus the dark ponderous weight. You overpower it, in determination, concentration, in an explosion of body and will, or the barbell intimidates you, frightens you, beats you, and your mind and body fail together. This is how I see life.

Before reading the philosopher Nietzsche and his concept of "the will to power," I intuitively understand him through weightlifting. I know how to completely give everything I have to the act in the moment when the weight exerts its force most strongly against me, to roar against the barbell. I know how to extend my will and bring all my strength into the act, far beyond where most people simply give up, far beyond where most people find nothing left to give. As a weightlifter, I see people as having weak wills as much as weak bodies.

But I also understand the Yin and Yang of it—of force against will—again long before I can give it a name. That which opposes you makes you stronger. Because the barbell is my adversary, it is also my ally and teacher, that which gives me my strength and resolve. In the extreme opposition of the weights against my mind and body, the barbell has taught me and nurtured me. It has pushed and pulled me, challenging me to extend myself further and further. In the ongoing confrontation with it, year after year, I

have grown, becoming more determined, focused, and powerful. By challenging me, it has become the instrument of my empowerment.

I set myself, muscle and will, in opposition to the barbell; the Gestalt of my being is ready. I bend over the huge weight, my feet and legs balanced and positioned, ready to support—to brace against—the intense pull that will come from my torso, lower back, and shoulders. I grip the weight squeezing tight as hell, my hands holding onto the barbell like two iron clamps, raise my head to the heavens above (in this case the ceiling of the small basement room where I am working out) and pull upward.

The weight comes up in a flash—in a giant thunderous groan against the force of gravity. I breathe outward in a great whoosh and stand erect. I lower the weight and do another repetition and then a third one, and finally drop the weight in a heavy thump and clank, further indenting the cement floor below. I am the east coast dead-lift champion, having lifted the past summer 575 pounds at a bodyweight of 190. The year is 1966 and I am nineteen years old.

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I have been regularly lifting weights for over four years. At fifteen, I was just under six feet and at 145 pounds pretty thin. Since beginning to work out, I have added fifty pounds of muscle to my body, seven inches to my arms, eight inches to my thighs, and fifteen inches to my chest, in spite of the fact (or maybe because of it—thus provoking my oppositional nature) that many people told me I would never get really big or muscular because of my “thin frame.” They were wrong. I got big with a vengeance.

As this transformation took place, sometimes looking in a mirror I would feel astonished at what I saw. I would feel disoriented. My God, is this me? This sure isn’t the kid I remember from a few years ago. Something strange, almost alien was emerging, sending me on a whole new trajectory in my life.

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It is a different universe and a different time, the early summer in 2006. The temperature is approaching 110 degrees Fahrenheit. The sky is cloudless, a brilliant blue, and a hawk circles overhead toward the mountains as we head up the trail. Due to the intense heat, we aren’t going to hike that far, but it feels great to get out for a while and absorb the energy and the light. We are out in the Sonoran Desert near the base of the McDowell Mountains just northeast of Phoenix, Arizona. We talk as we move through the desert, over the hills and through the gullies, among the cholla and saguaro cactus, over the hot red rocks under our feet, with rattlesnake and prairie dog holes scattered about. As is usual, we are talking about the challenges of life.

Jeanne strides forward, ahead of me, eager to stretch and exercise the muscles in her long, exquisitely shaped legs. As she puts it, I saunter, the philosopher in shorts and sandals in the desert, semi-lost in thought as I go along. I love the feel of the sun on my body. I feel like one of the desert lizards. I revel in it and so I saunter a bit, taking it all in. Jeanne charges along across the gravel and hard-packed dirt. But I will stay with her, with my steady pace and determined mindset. By the time we come back down the trail, I will be in the lead.

Jeanne and I frequently talk about finding the time to do all the important—as opposed to bothersome, trivial, and distracting—things in life. We discuss the forces of order and chaos, of realizing order amidst the chaos. We reflect on our mortality and the finite amount of time we have left to realize our dreams. We talk about focus and getting into the flow, about tenacity, and about confidence versus fear and anxiety. We talk about the monsters of the id and the angels who visit us from above.

As we move up the hill, among the myriad dried and brittle creosote bushes, I am telling her, half joking, half serious, that everything I learned about being disciplined and successful I learned through weightlifting in my youth. I talk about "the will to power"—about strengthening one's will—about the power of the mind and self-determination. As in hiking or weightlifting, life is a steady, incessant push up a psychological mountain. The barbells first taught me this in the dark, cramped basement of my parents' home in Waterbury, Connecticut.

I explain to Jeanne what sounds like a universal equation for success, for realizing one's goals and creating a positive future. I tell her that everyday after high school let out, I would come home, head into the basement, meet up with my workout partner George McCary, and we would lift weights from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. five days a week. (Incredible George—always there knocking at the door, ready to go!) There were no excuses—that is, absolutely "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" no excuses. No try, as Yoda would say, we simply did it. The question never crossed our minds "To lift or not to lift?" We were lifting weights today, a primordial decision without thought or equivocation.

I also tell Jeanne that my success as a student in college derived from the discipline and focus I learned from weightlifting. In college, every night after dinner in my dorm, I would gather up my textbooks and go into the empty cafeteria, get a cup of coffee, and read and study from 6:00 p.m. to 1:00 or 2:00 a.m., Sunday through Thursday, again no excuses. Instead of doing dead lifts, curls, squats, and bench presses, as I did in high school, in college I studied philosophy, psychology, and science, but still many of the same principles applied. Success, either way, involves focus, determination, and meeting the challenge. Success is an act of mind and body united, in a powerful thrust toward the future, whether it is weightlifting or academics.

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As we are walking under the blazing sun, with plenty of open space for my thoughts to expand and grow in the fire of the day, I go into mental overdrive and start in on describing, systematically and in specifics, what I learned in those days long past.

First, there is rhythm and regularity. If you want to achieve something—to create something, to realize a dream—commit yourself to a schedule for working on it and do not waver from it. There are always excuses. Life is a bottomless pit of rationalizations and reasons for not doing something, so you must simply not allow for any. Regularity is critical; get a rhythm going in your life and keep banging on the drum. Accomplishments are built from a steady, incessant accumulation of actions—literally, of acts of creation.

Second, focus and concentrate on the task at hand. The surrounding world should fade away, there but not there. Forget the world; forget yourself. There will always be things to distract your mind, to intrude on your attention, to take you away

from what you want and what you need to do. Chaos tries to destroy order. Chaos tries to undermine the creation of order. Against this, you must immerse yourself in the object of your desire, your interest, your aspiration, and prevent chaos from taking control of your mind and behavior. You must become lost in the object of your intent.

Third, understand the necessity and importance of challenge. Accept the fact that you will encounter difficulties along the way. Be ready to exert yourself. Relish the sweat, struggle, toil, and intense expenditure of energy you will need to experience in the process of growth and evolution. I told people in college that I wasn't really that smart but that I just worked very hard at learning and understanding things. It did not come easy, and sometimes I just felt stupid. Some days seemed a total wash-out. But I drew energy off of these challenges and set-backs.

Taken together, the last two points—on focusing on the task and reveling in the challenges—describe some essential features of what the contemporary psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi refers to as "flow": the experience of immersion and exertion in a demanding task. In lifting weights, I experienced flow. In studying while in college, I experienced flow. It is important to cultivate flow, to realize it everyday. It creates and amplifies purpose and direction in you. It charges and changes you. It opens the future. Flow is not something you walk into; it is something you must seek out and nourish. Flow requires effort to get to it; flow requires effort once you are there.

Next and critically so, identify an over-arching goal for the future. See what you are doing today—in the present—in the context of the future. You are on a journey through time, the time of your life, and the light ahead of you, the light you imagine and build off of in the future, will give meaning and focus to what you are doing today. Goals give order to things, define a sense of progress, and combat the influence of chaos, distraction, confusion, and apathy that can easily come into your life. Regularity comes through having a goal set in the future. Consciousness of the future works against the inertia of the past and the lethargy of the present. And once you bring the future into consciousness, once you set the light of the future burning, you must stoke it and keep it burning. You must nourish and grow your image of the future everyday.

But success is more than goal setting and focused and determined behavior; it is fueled by passion. Fifth on the list, your goals must align with your desires and deepest interests, with what you intrinsically value and love. Your goals must be passions. Rules for success mean nothing without love and emotional energy. You must love what you pursue; you must love the pursuit.

Finally, we come to tenacity, which ties together several points already made. Tenacity comes through having a powerful goal for the future. Tenacity connects with the cultivation of rhythm and regularity and plowing through adversity and challenges. I have seen many people who seemed to possess talents and strengths equal to my own fall by the wayside because they gave up along the way. But there is no such thing as a smooth and steady ascent upward. Roads are rocky, filled with holes and crevices, and we frequently stumble, fall, and slide backwards along the way. Tenacity is maintaining long-term determination and continual action through monotony, failures, backslides, and outright attacks against your integrity. As the psychologist Abraham Maslow pointed out, even self-actualizing people feel anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, and depression on the journey of life, but they pass through it, swallow it up, and keep growing and living.

Tenacity is not letting the dark side beat you; tenacity is swimming through and ascending out of the nothingness, again and again.

Regularity, focus, struggling through adversity, flow, future goals, love and passion, and tenacity: these are some of the key factors behind the realization of excellence and the achievement of one's dreams. This is the road to a preferable future. These are the things I learned in weightlifting and that I practiced and further exercised in college.

As I go over these ideas with Jeanne, I sound like a teacher. I lecture, I preach as I plod along through the desert. I get into it. There is passion and fire in my being. The sun has heated me up. I create a network of thoughts now floating and swirling about through the hot air and mind-space around me. My words enter into the noosphere—the atmospheric, ambient realm of ideas surrounding us all.

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We reach the end of our climb for today and circle round heading back down the hill. In front of us now, the flat, expansive valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area extends off as far as the eyes can see. Right in the middle of the valley to the south is Camelback Mountain, defining with its sharp triangular peak the center point of Phoenix and surrounding towns. I climbed that mountain years ago with my sons. It was life and death on the way down.

Gazing toward Camelback, high on this hill overlooking the valley, I wonder how I got to be here after growing up in a street-tough, old industrial town on the other side of the continent. (Can I explain this with my philosophy of self-determination and "will to power"?) I look at Jeanne and feel a similar bedazzlement and perplexity. She is my muse, a being first formed in the intense heat of the southwest and then sculpted in a whirlwind spin around the world. Feeling metaphysical about everything—the desert will do that—I ask myself, who is this woman who hikes with me, who discusses philosophy, psychology, and cosmic evolution with me, who makes intense and passionate love with me? Who is this woman with luminous red hair, this bird spirit who has flown down out of the bright blue heavens above? Where did she come from? I have plenty of answers about everything, but down deep I am amazed by it all.

Ultimately, what I think is that it is all very, very strange. The rich colors of the rainbow, the mesmerizing sounds of the symphony, the stark beauty of the desert, the engulfing manifestation of what we call the physical world, the wondrous and complex human hand, the luminance of consciousness and sense of self—the raw fact of existence—my mind reels. Everything around me has the quality of the miraculous. I see this now. This goes beyond what I saw—what I knew, what I concluded—as a teenager and college student. It goes beyond what I have been telling Jeanne about success this day in the desert sun.

There is the mystical. It stares you right in the face. Each unique presence in the world is mysterious, inexplicable, and mind-boggling. When you really see—when you really understand, when you really wake up—you experience a sense of bafflement, a sense of the oddness of everything. This is enlightenment. As my old friend Wittgenstein said, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make*

themselves manifest. They are what is mystical." There is no need to invent something supernatural. Reality is strange enough.

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But aside from the mystery of being, there is also the mystery of becoming. The universe is overflowing with creativity—with the novel, the new, the emergent that pops into existence in front of you right out of the blue, unannounced, unanticipated, out of the vacuum space of nothingness, out of the soul of God.

As a weightlifter and a college student, I saw life as an arena in which one sets goals and then realizes these goals through tenacity and self-discipline. What we get in life is the result of our own actions. We can predict it as a consequence of what we intend and what we do. But this is too simple, too one-sided and naive a way of looking at things.

As I see it now, life is more than a simple, straight ascent up a mountain. Life is more than a set of principles for success. Life is more than some abstract formula by means of which you can compute the nature of existence and predict what will be. Life always surprises you, always goes beyond whatever you think, anticipate, or intend. And this is quintessentially important to understanding the flow of things into the future.

The great modern philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said it: "The ultimate metaphysical ground is the creative advance into novelty". Olaf Stapledon, perhaps the most prodigiously inventive mind of the twentieth century, described this fundamental cosmological principle in his science fiction masterpiece, *Star Maker*. In this titanic epoch of the evolution of intelligence in the universe, God even surprises God.

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A case in point:

As a teenage weightlifter, I got big with a vengeance because I got beat up. This drama—this catastrophe to my ego—played itself out on a dark back street late at night after a high school dance in Waterbury, where, lacking sufficient street smarts and aggressive fighting skills, I walked into being sucker punched and battered about in a fist fight.

The point, bitterly learned: Never attempt to take your jacket off ten feet away from a street fighter who has no scruples. There are people who do not play fair, who will hit you when you are not looking and your arms are stuck inside your jacket sleeves.

This was the culture though, the social reality in which I grew up. In Waterbury, a rough, blue-collar factory town, young teenage males achieved and maintained social status by beating up other young males. Your self-identity was determined by the power and velocity of your fist. What was good—what was esteemed—could be summed up in the philosophical dictum, "Might makes right."

Given such a mentality, one that had been imprinted on me, losing the fight left me humiliated and determined to transform myself physically, to never let it happen again. Once my two black eyes healed, I bought my first set of weights. The memory of the fight—the jolt to my sense of self-worth—provided the escape velocity and propellant energy to get me going and keep me going, regularly working out and

pumping iron as I slowly but steadily grew and thickened all over—chest, arms, thighs, and back—becoming bigger, more solid, and more sharply defined.

Yet oddly, what I did not bring into my formula for life—the view I expounded to friends as a teenager and college student—was the immense and totally unforeseen significance of getting punched in the mouth in the first place. Yes, the ugly experience was seared into my brain, but if I explained to anyone how to realize success, how to grow, how to find the good in life, I never said to them, “First go get punched in the mouth.” I never explicitly and seriously considered how the unexpected—indeed, the unanticipated disaster—worked itself into my equation for life. Out of the darkness on that backstreet long ago, the unpredictable came flying into my face, sending my life, my being, in a different direction thereafter. Why didn’t I see this? Perhaps it is too scary a fact to face head on—the necessity of the Devil knocking unannounced at one’s door. Only later did I begin to really appreciate such strange and wondrous and often terrifying things.

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"Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness...
when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual.
Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it...
this is the condition of children and barbarians,
in whom instinct has learned nothing from experience."
George Santayana

It is the late fall of 2006; the universe has changed once again.

We are on the patio in the belly of a warm November afternoon. The sky above is its usual bright, rich blue—cloudless, cosmic, and dreamlike. A golden glow washes across the patio, galvanizing each leaf and stone and cactus pot until everything around us seems surrealistic, like a painting by Maxfield Parrish. We sit surveying the Mexican beauty of this house we will soon leave.

The sun has turned the needles on the potted barrel cactus into a blood red, as if time has trapped all our sunsets in this house there in the slim and treacherous barbs. They echo the blood and tears of our recent conversations here. A dozen wind bells dangle from the fuchsia eaves, impervious to the move they will soon be making. The towering oleanders which we believed guarded our privacy stand ignorant beside the placid pool. The block wall I transformed into a Mondrian pattern of bright southwest colors—of yellow, tangerine, magenta, lime green, and deep purple—the hundred potted plants, the violet-petaled bougainvillea and Yin-Yang laid out in pink and white gravel in the backyard: all this beauty…. We will take what we can and leave the rest to the insidious evil beyond the walls.

But at the moment my mind and my gaze are captured by her. She smiles at me—those cat eyes, the slight look of mischief on her face. Tall and thin and still built like the ballerina that she once was, with auburn hair emblazoned in fiery red and orange highlights in the sun, she is animated and excited as we talk. I ask myself, who is this person sitting across from me? (Have I thought this before? Will I think this again?) I tell her that one morning I woke up and realized that I was intensely in love

with the person I had been sleeping with—her—as if it were some kind of unexpected and profound revelation.

Now she is telling me how I am going to write the book. She says it should be a novel—a futurist novel—but non-fiction. I'm not sure what this means, but I agree. I tell her I want it to be a book about the future but built upon the past. I want it to be a history, a narrative, of how my philosophy of life has grown these last forty years, describing my quest for wisdom and enlightenment. The book should recount my discovery of the study of the future that became the center of gravity for all my thinking. It should weave together the intellectual with the personal fire and drama of existence. It should be a journey out of the past into the future.

Our minds go in multiple directions. Thoughts swirl around, attempting to take shape.

I tell her that there are people along the way who have deeply influenced me. I tell her I should include in the book the seventeenth-century rationalist philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who tried to understand God and whose soul reached out to me as I reached out to him across the centuries. Also, I need to describe my dear, wonderful, flamboyant teacher J. J. Gibson and his ecological theory of the mind and the world, which redefined for me the nature of who and what we are. And I must discuss Robert Pirsig, his classic book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and his search through madness for the elusive nature of quality, a theme I connect in my own life with my personal search for love. And there is J. T. Fraser, the philosopher-scientist-poet, my meeting with him, while searching for a red-headed woman from a science fiction story I was trying to write, and his metaphysically unnerving vision of order and chaos and the evolution of time that turned my sense of reality upside down.

She says that is a large order, and I say that it is just the beginning.

Later comes Frank Tipler and his theory that the universe is evolving toward God rather than emerging out of God (God is in the future, not in the past—an idea I will embrace, reject, and wrestle with over the years.). And I must include the fantastical futurist realities of science fiction writers—of the galactic Internet, of re-engineering the cosmos, of the promise of immortality delivered by the Devil of technology, of the Second Coming through time travel, and the ultimate yet futile battle of the light and the darkness at the end of the life of the universe. One must see the possibilities of the future as an amazing array of visions and philosophies.

And besides such journeys into the far distant future, to the boundaries of space, time, and mind, I need to recount my discovery of Martin Seligman and his theories of optimism and human happiness, which led to my rediscovery of Aristotle, which in turn led me to the issue of the good life and how to connect psychology, ethics, and the future, and then ultimately to the study of wisdom.

I tell her I must also describe in this adventure the great vortex of existence—the Yin-Yang—and connect its quintessential symmetry and turbulent energy and force to the whole saga. I must recount how this ontological whirlpool pulled me in and sent my mind reeling. Out of the East—out of the intuitive and mystical traditions of ancient China—this archetypal form took hold in my mind long ago and did not let go, has never let go. The universe, my life—macrocosm and microcosm—arranged and defined itself as a great balancing act of opposites, of contradictions that were not contradictions, of Yin and Yang.

She tells me that the book should also be about my search for love—about all those other women that set the stage for her presence now: beautiful Laura, a long-legged Elke Sommer, my first love, my first true friend, who has now become a ghost in my dreams; and scintillatingly erotic Suzanne, a being of perfume and cashmere and jewels, my second love who suddenly appeared and then quickly disappeared into the night; and dark-haired, bright-eyed Lisa, my nervous and child-like third love, whom I cried and agonized over to the point of emotional death; and ultimately, Jeanne, who turned out to be my only true love. The future changes the past.

I tell her the book should chronicle my journey westward, with all its circles and twists every which way, from the northeast to the frigid winters of Minneapolis, to those dark years under the gray repressive skies of northwest Indiana, to Chicago, and a dozen other places in between, and finally follow me on my odyssey to the southwest. It must move on a timeline from all those cold and gloomy places to this sunny patio in Arizona. Arizona—the crystallization of a distant dream I once had—a dream that brought forth this woman who is now planning out with me how to write this book. The book should dramatize the struggle and search for this magical and brilliant future, this magical and brilliant love.

Along the way, giving some color and craziness to the whole thing, I should also recount my journey to the Rockies and how I fell off its precipitous slopes, rolling all the way back to the Midwest. I should describe how I spent seven years, off and on, talking to psychotics, drug addicts, criminals, and paranoid saviors of the world—identifying with all of them—and why I went to confession with a Baptist minister for thirty days straight. I should recount seriously contemplating both suicide and murder and how one night I talked to God and God talked back. Enlightenment without the bizarre and the fantastical is not enlightenment at all.

I tell her that I cannot write the book alone. She must write it with me. We have talked for endless hours about God, science, and the evolution of the universe and of love, beauty, and the power of sex. We have talked about our pasts, about our sins and stupidities, about our ever-transforming philosophies of life, and about our future. I tell her—and she knows—that we are on the path of wisdom and enlightenment together and that this new book will be an expression of that creative and inspirited drive. To follow the advice of the philosopher George Santayana, it is time to gather the past together, to clarify and understand it, and learn what lessons need to be learned that will guide us into tomorrow.

Sitting in the intense sunlight on the patio, I tell her that in the final analysis I want to write a book that points toward a preferable future. I want to create a vision of something better than the world we live in today. (All utopian visions are ignited by a discontent with the present.) We have both looked the Devil in the eye. It is time to envision something better and figure out how to live it. I tell her that this vision of the future must be inspired and guided by human virtue and the ideal of wisdom.

We discuss all of this, sending our thoughtful and impassioned vibrations out into the surrounding garden we have loved so much; into the heavens above to make contact with the forces of the universe.

I tell her it is time to begin a new chapter in our life. In fact, we have no choice but to do this. Through the writing of the book, we must carry the momentum forward of

all that has happened to us. The book is the vehicle—the thinking space—for our ongoing act of creation.

We have been thrown into the future by the hand of God. (Has this happened before?) We have been abruptly awakened from the dream, kicked and jolted into consciousness. Reality, once again, has been brought into question, and once again, reality has been revealed. Life has shown itself more than ever as a Yin-Yang, a great polarity of colossal contradictions, as the Dance of Shiva of destruction and creation, of evil and good, of fire and chaos and harmony and love. In the darkness I have been sucker punched again, and out of the darkness has once again come the light.

We have decided to leave. We cannot stay here.

We are moving. We are going to write a new book. We are heading toward the fire on the mountain.

It is time to travel into the past to find our way into the future.

Chapter One
Eros and Enlightenment

"All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."
Baruch Spinoza

Discovering Reality

It is very quiet, very still. It is midnight. Everyone in the house is asleep but me. It is the summer of 1967. I am immersed in the material world, trying to search it out, but I can no longer find it. I am looking at the hassock under my feet. I can feel its solidity and see its shape and its color. But it is no longer what I once thought it was; the solidity is no longer really solid. It is a perception of the mind, nothing more, nothing less. I understand this now. I gaze around the room at all the familiar pieces of furniture made up out of wood, stuffing, metal, and embroidered cloth; the physical substantiality of the chairs, sofa, tables, and cabinets have become insubstantial. I look at the walls painted a pale green and softly illuminated by the two lamps in the living room. The walls are no longer "out there"—there is no out there—it is all "in here." I pay particular attention to the floor below me and the warm beige carpet covering it, the floor that supports me, that physically grounds and connects me to the earth. But what is the floor? What is the earth? What is this great orb of physicality that holds up my body and everything else around me? It is a constant perception giving me a sense of stability and security. And for that matter, what is my body but yet another perception—one, in fact, that follows me everywhere, that is always in my conscious mind. All of this substance and physical reality to which I am so accustomed has been challenged and undercut. It has evaporated before my eyes. The world is not what it appeared to be.

On my lap is a book. (More precisely, there is a perception of a book overlaid on a perception of my lap.) On the perceived page before me is the line: "To be is to be perceived." (Existence is equal to conscious perception.) It makes perfect sense to me. My universe has been changed. The universe I see around me—that I feel and sense—is actually all in my mind.

In one sense everything looks and feels the same, but if I follow the argument of Bishop Berkeley, the eighteenth-century philosopher whom I am reading, then everything I perceive is nothing but experiences in my mind. The colors, the shapes, the smells and tastes, the feelings of texture and hardness of objects are mental experiences, objects or "ideas" (as Berkeley calls them) of perception, and nothing more.

Berkeley's argument is deceptively simple. Is there a world beyond what we experience or perceive? How can we know or make any sense out of the idea that there is something beyond our experience when all we know is what we perceive? We say that there is a world of matter, of physical reality existing independently of our perceptions, but what is this, and how can I know it? What would this even mean? For Berkeley, a world beyond perception—independent of perception—is a meaningless notion, and there is no way to discover its reality (whatever that would be) for whatever I may do to try to "discover" or "demonstrate" such a thing, all I find are my perceptions. I

can not kick a rock to demonstrate that it is “there” because the feeling, the sight, the sense of motion are all part and parcel of perception.

For Berkeley, all of the qualities, objects, and surfaces we perceive are manifestations within consciousness, even the sense of hardness and resistance when we touch something. Our perceived and felt body is an experience, an experience that is always present in our minds. Even the space that I see and feel with my senses of sight and touch is an experience in my mind. The entire three-dimensional arrangement of colored, solid-looking objects with all the accompanying sounds, smells, tastes, feelings of touch, pressure, motion and temperature, and my sensed body positioned in the middle of it all, with all its sensations and feelings, is nothing but a complex array of objects of perception. So all the world is still “there,” but it is all mental. There is nothing but the mental. The world has been transformed.

The most central insight I have in thinking through this philosophical position is not so much whether Berkeley’s argument is valid or not, but rather that in understanding his philosophy—in contemplating existence within his mindset, in seeing how convincing his argument is—the world ends up looking totally different. It is a fundamental Gestalt switch; the whole of things is transformed. Whereas before I saw a world of independently existing physical objects, now I see everything as experiences of the mind, and it makes perfect sense.

Further, what was commonplace and unquestioned is raised to consciousness; there is, in fact, a heightening of consciousness. I have stood back from my awareness of the world and considered the reality of it all. In doing so, I experience enlightenment. I see, I understand something, where before I was unconscious. Did I ever question what the chair that I see really is? Did I ever think that my experience of the chair required an explanation?

This is how I encounter philosophy. It wakes me up. It is as if someone shone a light—many different lights in fact—on the world I have been living in. Questions are asked where I have never asked such questions before. What is reality? What is the self? What is knowledge? New perspectives are thrown on to things. Thoughts are expressed about things I have never thought about before. The world goes from two-dimensional to three-dimensional. I see depth where there was no depth. I see color, where everything was black and white. I stand back from myself and my world and observe and contemplate it all. Again, philosophy is enlightenment, waking up to the universe. The realization is very clear: I have been walking and talking in my sleep.

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So to begin the story, let me go back a few years to explain how I came to doubt the independent material existence of chairs.

I coast through high school with a B+ average. I make a point of completing whatever homework I have to do at school, without ever bringing any textbooks home. My passion is weightlifting, not books. Only social retards and bookworms bring books home. I won’t be caught dead carrying textbooks while waiting with my friends to take the bus home after school has let out.

During high school, I spend most of my free time hanging around with my male friends, going out at night, walking the streets, cruising around in cars, looking for girls,

drinking alcohol (including warm bottles of *Southern Comfort* in deserted parking lots) and going to dances on weekends. Of course, during weekday afternoons I lift weights, but this fits into the high school mentality and culture. Having big biceps is respected and admired by my buddies on the street. It is something my own teenage vanity gets into as well, whenever I flex my muscles in front of the bathroom mirror.

Yet, when I start college in the fall of 1965, I decide to become more serious about my studies than I was in high school. College has a mystique, an aura. Something inside is telling me that college is much more important, of more value, than high school—it is my transition into adult life. College is going to be more demanding—so I think—so I need to give it more effort if I am to succeed. I decide to take everything I learned from weightlifting—the mentality of discipline, self-determination, and goal-setting—and apply it all to my coming life in college. (Is this a conscious decision, or does it just happen? It is hard to say.) I am going to get focused. I make the decision to stay at home during weekday evenings and read my college texts, with the intent of getting good grades in my studies.

One could ask: Does fundamental change come from within the person, or it is triggered by important external events? Perhaps a punch in the mouth will do it? In this case, though, in moving from the universe of high school (the world is a street corner for smoking cigarettes, chatting with my buddies, and trying to hit on girls) to the universe of college (the world is assimilating knowledge, the study of history and science, and the cultivation of heightened self-awareness), a deep transformation of my being-in-the-world occurs, and this change is a consequence of both inner and outer factors interacting with each other. I make a series of decisions but in the context of some important life-changing external events. A resonance—a back-and-forth chain reaction from the inner to the outer—brings forth a new ecological alignment, a new being in a new world.

One big external factor sets the stage for everything that is to follow: I graduate, and the depressing and repressive ambience of high school disappears in a flash. The values and culture of the place are no longer there to influence me, to suffocate me. I am no longer surrounded by an aggressive male culture of strutting baboons, by clusters of pretty young babes hanging out in the hallways laughing and chatting and smiling and giving you the eye as you walk by.

Still, I have to struggle against this old world—the world of my teenage youth—to break free of it, even after I graduate. Following through on my decision to focus and do well in college requires effort and tenacity. One of my best friends from high school, Tony Masini, still calls me up frequently during the week, after I first start college, asking if I want to go hang out, and I tell him no, that I need to study. I feel like I am breaking up with a long-time friend, ending a relationship (which I am), and I frequently feel guilty saying no to Tony, but going downtown to play pool in the local pool hall or listening to records in the record shop has lost its importance. It does not contribute to my new goals and aspirations.

My resolve to become more studious begins to change my environment at home as well. I turn my bedroom into a study and a different ambience begins to emerge and engulf me in that small sparse room. My father provides a desk for me by attaching a long waist-high shelf to one wall. Notepads and textbooks begin to stack up. I have a new study lamp. And the growing assortment of colored pens and pencils in a glass jar

stand ready. There are weekly lists of chapters to read, upcoming test dates, and assignments laid out on my desk. The world I increasingly attend to is a world of books.

Replacing the old with the new beyond my room at home, I quickly discover that the feel of a college classroom is dramatically different from that in a high school—no more spit balls or *Life Saver* candy being thrown at teachers; no more humming in the back rows; no more unscrewing desk tops and stealing the teacher's chalk. My home room in my junior year in high school was such a reality; we had four home room teachers that year, the first three quitting out of frustration and despair. In college classrooms, to the contrary, people don't mess around; students are taking notes and focusing on the matter at hand rather than looking for distractions and negative attention to stroke their egos. The teachers are now professors with Ph.D.s; they are not caretakers, disciplinarians, or surrogate parents; they focus on stimulating minds and communicating knowledge.

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In my senior year in high school, another very significant thing happens in my external world that changes things. I finally find a steady girlfriend, one whom I really like and who really likes me back. When Laura comes on the scene, she brings much more stability, calm, and maturity into my life. I am enthralled, mesmerized, giddy in love, and the streets begin to lose their appeal. My new-found love takes me away from my previous state of teenage wanderlust. Over the period of a year, as I move from high school into college, Laura takes the place of Tony and George (my workout partner) and all the other friends I chummed around with as a teenager.

I meet Laura in my senior year of high school at a Saturday night dance up by a lake to the north, a place my buddies and I go every weekend. In a drive of approximately half an hour, we usually down a six pack of beer each between Waterbury and the lake. Such are our values and aspirations at the time. Hence, the night I meet Laura I am drunk, but so what? I'm pretty good at holding my liquor—my big muscles absorb it all—and, if the situation demands it, I can come off not sounding stupid and inebriated. In this case, the situation does demand it. When I first see her, I find her incredibly beautiful–in fact, she is the loveliest young woman I have ever met in my life. I talk with her a bit at the dance, get her phone number from a mutual friend, and call her up, chatting for at least a half an hour—no mean achievement for a teenage male. I ask her out, and within a short period of time we are seeing each other regularly. I spend most of my last semester in high school with Laura. She becomes my best friend. She has her own car and we go places together—drive-in movies, restaurants, the seashore, lakes and parks, and shopping plazas. We often end up parking in secluded places and talking and kissing till midnight.

Laura is tall and slim and reminds me of Elke Sommer. She is relatively soft-spoken and shy. Her long, light brown hair is streaked with blonde; her waist is exceedingly thin; and her skin is very fair and soft. There is something Scandinavian about her looks, which really turns me on, and I find her cat-like eyes and feline grace very provocative and appealing. When we first start going out, I go to church and pray to God (I am a devout Catholic at the time) that I will win Laura's heart. I don't think any further than that. I want to be in love; I want to be loved. Nothing is too much trouble if it

means spending time together. On one occasion, I walk through a snowstorm and hitchhike along the way to see her on a Sunday afternoon. In the first year of our relationship, we become inseparable. I have found romance.

As the summer comes, we go to each other's senior proms and graduate from high school. I start college in the fall, and Laura goes to a local business school. I am going to stay in Waterbury at the local branch of the University of Connecticut for the first year. Though I continue to religiously lift weights with George on weekday afternoons, I get myself on a regular schedule of reading and studying on weekday evenings. On weekends, Laura and I spend all our time together. My life is changing. I have love and now I am "hitting the books."

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Leaving high school behind and becoming more serious and organized in my studies, I do moderately well in my first college courses in the fall semester. In my second semester the tempo and the energy level pick up. The neurons in my brain start firing faster. Mental connections build on mental connections, new synapses forming at an exponential rate. I am learning to learn. That second semester, I take introductory philosophy and introductory psychology and dive into the minds of Plato and Freud.

It is a hell of a trip—a shock to my hold on reality—at the age of nineteen to start reading about the eternal realm of abstract forms, about the absolute ideal of the "Good," about ego defense mechanisms and the unconscious id filled with sexual and aggressive desires buried deep in the interior of the mind. Where did all this come from? Where had all this been before? Plato and Freud, two of the most important thinkers in Western history, mark for me the real psychological and philosophical rupture with the mental universe of high school. Plato and Freud mark the end of my childhood and adolescence, and emerge as central figures and driving forces in the awakening of my mind.

I did not see this coming. How could I? I opened a door and there they were.

Reading Plato's *Republic,* I am introduced to philosophical argument, to the principled and conscientious quest for truth and a deeper, more penetrating understanding of reality. What is ultimately real? What is knowledge? What is the good? What is beauty? What is justice?

With Freud, I encounter the idea that one can systematically describe the basic structure and workings of the human mind. Freud has such a strange and eye-opening, provocative theory of the human psyche. Through Freud, I am introduced to the idea that we may not know what is really going on in our own minds, that we may be "unconscious" to the deepest workings of our soul. If Plato introduces me to the reasoned pursuit of what is most high, Freud introduces me to the primordial, the dark side of humans, the id.

As I begin to study Freud and Plato, and am introduced to other psychologists and philosophers as well, I go back and forth on which discipline I think is more primary and more interesting—psychology or philosophy. There is a tug of war for my allegiance.

On one hand, I think that in order to understand how to lead a good life (a basic question in Plato), it makes sense to understand what motivates people and why they

think and behave the way they do (Freud's question). What makes people happy? What are the conditions under which we flourish? We need to understand ourselves before we can determine what is best for us. Hence, from this angle, psychology comes before philosophy and ethics. Understanding the mind is the key to understanding all aspects of human reality, from civilization to morals to religion and everything else.

At other times, debating with myself, it hits me that philosophy deals with the most fundamental questions, questions that come before psychology or any other topic: How does one define what is best? How does one ascertain what is true? How does one distinguish between reality and appearance or illusion? What is really real? What is wisdom and what is enlightenment? This is philosophy. And from this line of reasoning, philosophy seems to come before psychology and all the other sciences and academic disciplines.

One thing I do clearly see, though, right from the start, is that psychology and philosophy, taken together, open up my mental space, my sense of the depth and expanse of existence. It is not just that I am learning more facts, more information. I am seeing that there are dimensions and spheres of existence that I never looked at or thought about before. I realize I have been living in Plato's Cave (a metaphor used by Plato to describe the world of everyday appearance—of illusion—where people live most of the time). Before, I believed that the shadows on the walls of the cave were reality. It hits me that there are things that I totally missed—big things—and I feel that my eyes have now been opened, both to the universe and to what is going on inside of my own mind. I am caught and enraptured by what I see.

But let me explain in more detail the ideas of Plato and Freud and how I react to them.

Plato argued that there were two different realms of reality, a timeless realm of eternal abstract forms or ideas—of what is ultimately true and beautiful and good, and a temporal realm of imperfect particulars—of flux, uncertainty, physicality, and moral corruption. The eternal is on a higher plane than the temporal, and the temporal derives its existence off of the eternal.

In separating existence into two realms, Plato was a dualist, that is, one who thinks that reality consists of two different dimensions or types of existence. The eternal realm, in Plato, is mental or spiritual; the temporal realm is physical. For Plato, the rational soul (part of the spiritual realm) is immortal and, through reason and insight, can access the eternal realm of abstract ideas—it can find the "Truth." The temporal realm, on the other hand, is revealed through sense perception, a psychological function grounded in the physical body. Because the body is not immortal but perishes, the world revealed through perception is a world of relative obscurity, of "becoming and passing away." The impulses and desires of the body also belong to this impermanent temporal realm. Grounded in the body, perceptions and desires are transient and fluctuating. One could also say that the eternal realm is the sphere of order, whereas the temporal realm is one of relative chaos.

This dualism in Plato—of mind and matter, of eternity and time, of reason and thought versus perception and desire—became the metaphysical core, the philosophical foundation of much of later Western thought, including the Christian theory of reality. Plato is, above anyone else, the architect of the Western mind.

Plato also developed a psychological scheme in line with his theory of reality. He divided the soul into three parts: reason, appetite, and spirit. Appetite refers to the desires and impulses of the body whereas spirit encompasses the norms and customs of our society. The harmony of the soul (the good life) is realized through the judicious rule of reason (the eternal part of the soul) over appetite and spirit. Reason needs to hold in check and balance appetite and spirit. Reason is the highest part of the human psyche—it reaches and touches the absolute—and should rule over the impulses of the body and the particular customs and tastes of society.

Plato was a philosopher and, aside from studying his theories, I also learn through his writings how to argue philosophically. Through his *Dialogues*, in which Socrates serves as the spokesman for Plato's ideas, I see how the views and opinions of others can be questioned, interrogated, clarified, and often pulled apart. Plato teaches me how to apply the principles of rationality and clear thinking to ideas and arguments. As a consequence, I become more verbal and engaging around people and friends, always ready to get into a debate and practice my philosophical skills. These new skills clearly bring me a sense of personal empowerment, and I revel in it. They also bring a sense of clarity and illumination I have never experienced before. I feel like my mind has expanded through the study of philosophy, like it has gotten sharper, cleaner, quicker, more focused.

Freud—who lived over two thousand years after Plato—turned the Greek philosopher on his head. Interestingly, Freud developed a three-part theory of the mind that mirrored Plato's theory, but he rearranged the power structure in the human psyche, and that's how he turned Plato's vision upside down.

For Freud, the mind can be divided into the id, ego, and super-ego. The id, which corresponds with Plato's appetite, is the primordial and biological source of basic human desires and instincts. In Freud's thinking, there are two fundamental drives in the id—Eros and Thanatos, the life instinct and the death instinct, the biological forces of creation and destruction. Then there is the super-ego, which consists of the values of society internalized in the human mind; this concept roughly corresponds with Plato's spirit. Finally, there is the ego—the conscious sense of the self that, using principles of reason and practical intelligence, attempts to deal with the challenges of external reality while at the same time addressing and balancing the impulses of the id and the moral imperatives of the super-ego. The ego is the "man in the middle," analogous to Plato's reason, attempting to find balance and harmony between the other two parts of the soul. This is no easy task since, according to Freud, the id and super-ego—the wants and shoulds of our psyche—inevitably clash; desire and morality frequently butt heads and it is the ego that must find ways in life to satisfy biological desires in a moral fashion. Freud called this "sublimation," one of the fundamental ego defense mechanisms.

Where Freud fundamentally disagrees with Plato is in arguing that the ego, at best, is a servant of the id; that the power, the energy, the impetus of the human psyche resides in the id; and that the ego can never conquer or transcend this fountainhead of the human mind. Plato believed that reason should find ways to address and satisfy appetite and spirit, but that reason ultimately needed to be in control—that the highest controlled the lowest. For Freud, this was impossible, a delusional aspiration of the conscious mind.

Hence, the fundamental issue between Plato and Freud is whether we are ultimately creatures ruled by our primordial urges—Freud's view, or higher beings ruled by reason—Plato's view. Are we aspiring angels or voracious beasts? Is it the most primitive element that controls us, or the most elevated and advanced? (Assuming reason is the most advanced.)

Either way, as seen by both thinkers, there is clearly a tug of war going on in the human mind. Each of us is a house divided against itself. (Similarly, Christianity—adopting many of Plato's ideas—describes this conflict as the war of good and evil within us.) Given this inner opposition, can we realize order, harmony, and unity (what, for Plato, constitutes the good) within ourselves and, if so, how do we do this?

Another key point in Freud—one related to his understanding of inner conflict—is his theory of the unconscious. We are, of course, conscious beings: we have experiences, we are aware of our thoughts, emotions, and desires, and we are perceptually conscious of our bodies and the world around us. But Freud believed that the human mind was much more than consciousness, that "below the surface" there was the unconscious mind. The desires of the id, traumatic memories, and deeply internalized values and thought patterns exist in the unconscious. The realm of the unconscious stays below the surface because its content conflicts with the conscious sense of self and the moral precepts of the super-ego. Anxiety is fear of the unconscious. (To be crass but to drive the point home, the id would fuck anyone, anytime, anyplace and kill anyone or anything that got in the way. Our moral selves find this repugnant and terrifying, and push it out of consciousness.)

Since the source of psychic energy lies in the id, what really drives or motivates us is not open to consciousness. We do not know why we do what we do. We may tell ourselves various things to rationalize, justify, and explain our behavior, but this is to placate our super-egos and not threaten our egos. Even if we think that we are behaving rationally and believe we understand why we do what we do, it doesn't necessarily follow that this is true. We are blind to our inner psychological core. In Freud's view, the Devil (the Devil of the id) can quote Scripture (the Scripture of reason and morality) to his or her purpose, and so we tell ourselves pleasing lies to keep peace with our super-ego.

Freud believed that the pathway to mental health was becoming more conscious of what lies below the surface in our minds, to stop fighting against our deepest feelings and thoughts. For Freud, a critical part to enlightenment and wisdom was increasing self-awareness—knowing oneself—which in his mind was no easy task. It is hard to look at what you don't want to see, what you most fear and dislike.

Understanding Freud's theory of the unconscious—which to me makes perfect sense—I am compelled to look below the surface, to ask myself why I do what I do and equally to ask why other people do what they do. Freud really gets me thinking about human motivation. If Plato gets me to dig deeply into the meaning and validity of ideas and the views of others, Freud teaches me about digging deeply into the motives, minds, and behaviors of people, including myself.

If Freud sets me on a road of discovery about myself, in particular about the motivational impetus behind this new intellectual adventure in my life, the nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (whom I also discover about this time) raises equally unsettling questions about our deepest impulses. Nietzsche pushed the envelop

of self-honesty even further. Nietzsche believed that the fundamental motive in humans was the “will to power.” Now, Freud was influenced by Nietzsche, but Freud identified the procreative/sexual desire and the destructive/death-inflicting desire as the two basic human motives. He did not explicitly highlight the motive for power, though one could argue that Eros and Thanatos are power motives—the power to create and the power to destroy. It seems to me, though, however we interpret Freud, that Nietzsche was onto something essential about humans: that power is a core human motive; and that much of our behavior and thinking is geared to achieving and maintaining power—over ourselves and over others and the world. (Isn’t this, in a sense, what Plato believed in arguing that reason needs to control the unruliness of the soul; and isn’t this the motive force behind the id, ego, and super-ego, each pushing toward power and control?) Further, it seems to me that the power motive, to some degree at least, exists below the surface, since to consciously acknowledge that we strive to control others would conflict with our super-ego values of respect and sensitivity to the autonomy and wishes of other people. We define a psychopath as someone who, motivated by power and selfish needs, neither feels sensitivity toward others nor shows respect.

Now, Freud and Plato can be seen as providing pathways to enhanced knowledge and enlightenment. But equally, each of them provides a source of power: the power to argue philosophically and the power to psychoanalyze a person’s mind. As Francis Bacon said, “Knowledge is power.” Being honest with myself, part of the exhilaration I feel at this time from learning Plato and Freud has to do with exercising these new sources of mental power. I feel more enlightened but I also feel mentally more powerful. I find a new source of strength in psychology and philosophy. (It is not lost on me that I felt a sense of power with weightlifting as well.)

Yet, at the same time, my study of philosophy and psychology, which begins with Plato and Freud, takes me to a place that feels pure and uncontaminated by personal pathologies and problems—by the messiness of life. It is the world of abstract thought and ideas, the world of the mind. When I am there simply trying to understand, I feel a spiritual and ethical elevation. (I am sure this is what Plato felt.) I participate in the “good”—the acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of thinking. The insights of intellectual discovery are their own reward. When I am in this state there is no need—no desire—to use such knowledge to questionable ends or, for that matter, toward any ends at all. I am in flow. I simply want to learn, to think about what is being said. The experience of the light justifies itself; it brings intrinsic satisfaction. This is enlightenment. The acquisition of knowledge, the exercise of thinking, pure and simple, is the good life.

Plato and Freud also introduce me to the issues of certainty and doubt. In particular, both of them get me questioning things I never questioned before. Plato believed that one could achieve certainty through reason and knowledge of eternal ideas. But he also believed that opinions based on perceptions of the physical world were fallible and confused. Perception was unreliable and the physical world was transient, only as intelligible as indistinct shadows on the walls of the cave. Hence, although Plato believed in the possibility of certain knowledge and aspired to it in his philosophy, he undercut all belief systems based on observation and the physical world—a primary source of human ideas. Additionally, though the presumed purpose of discussions between Socrates and other individuals in Plato’s *Dialogues* was to arrive

at certain knowledge, the tactic used by Socrates was frequently to question and critique the philosophical views of those individuals with whom he argued. His approach was to doubt and to interrogate, to ingeniously reveal the unexamined assumptions, illogicalities, and ambiguous ideas in his adversaries. All told, Plato taught me as much about how to critique and doubt as how to realize or find certainty.

Through his theory of the human mind and the therapeutic techniques of psychoanalysis, Freud attempted to uncover and reveal the deep truths of the human psyche. Yet, since the truth of things lay below the surface of consciousness, often occluded from view by our psychological defenses, our conscious thoughts and desires were always to be doubted and examined with a skeptical eye. Though Freud aspired to the Greek maxim of "Know thyself," the effect of following his ideas was invariably to "Doubt thyself" and to doubt others.

For better or worse—and clearly it is both—Freud and Plato open up for me the systematic effort to understand reality and the human mind, but in so doing, they teach me how uncertain the journey into this new vastly expanded universe is to be. The unconscious certainty—the obliviousness of youth—is gone.

As one final point and it is a big one indeed, Plato and Freud introduce me to the "Apollonian" and the "Dionysian" views of life. (The terminology used in this distinction is, in fact, first coined—or appropriated from the Greeks—by Nietzsche.) Is it reason or is it emotion that rules (or should rule) the soul? Plato believed that rationality was the key to realizing truth and that reason can and should rule the soul—should, in fact, rule society and human life. This emphasis on reason (and also on order) is Apollonian (after the Greek god Apollo). But Freud argued that reason is the handmaiden of deep a-rational desires. Throughout history the Greek god Dionysius has frequently been identified with the emotional, passionate, impulsive, primordial, uncontrollable, and chaotic dimension of the human psyche, to a great degree capturing Freud's idea of the id.

Since ancient times, different writers have pondered and debated this polarity within the human psyche. There are, in fact, many different philosophical perspectives on the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Does reason rule? Or is it the passions? Which, in fact, should rule, if we have any choice in the matter? Can reason and passion find a way to realize harmony or union within the mind? Or perhaps we are indeed "a house divided against itself" and there is no way to bring the two sides together. Yet, perhaps the distinction is a false one to begin with; perhaps reason and emotion are always tied together. The Apollonian and the Dionysian philosophies of life played themselves out in the modern philosophical conflict between the rationalist vision of the European Enlightenment and the Romantic counter-reaction. The Apollonian and the Dionysian will also play themselves out in my mind and in my life as well.

Beginning with Plato, philosophy teaches me the ideal of rational discourse and investigation—the idea that one should strive to reason out the best answer to a question and not let emotion, bias, mere appearance, unquestioned assumptions, or personality get in the way. Beginning with Freud, psychology teaches me that there is an emotional underbelly to the human mind, and that we cannot stand above an issue totally objective and impersonal to the dialogue or investigation being pursued. All human reality is filled with blood and guts and visceral pulsations. Further reinforcing this point, from Nietzsche I get the idea that all conversations and modes of inquiry are

really about personal power and not so much about the truth. We are out to conquer, not to discover.

Plato aspired to what he saw as the highest and most elevated dimension of human nature. Freud and Nietzsche pull me back down to earth by the power of their perceptive intellects and their analysis of the human psyche. These three thinkers captured in their insights the struggle of the path to wisdom and enlightenment, revealing the conflicts within us between the ideal and the real; between the visions of heaven and hell; between rationality and feeling; between objectivity and ego-centricity; and between the aspirations toward truth and conscious self-control, on one hand, and delusion, deception, and the primordial beast within us on the other.

However construed, it is through such thinkers that the light of the mind within me is first switched on and, as I realize early on, it is a dazzling and sometimes blinding light indeed. As Plato noted in the *Republic*, in the telling of the "Myth of the Cave," if one is used to living in the darkness, when one first looks at the light, it is disorienting, confusing, baffling, in fact, even frightening. But the promise that I will follow shines forth: The truth will set me free.

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It is the late winter of 1966 after I have begun studying Plato and Freud. The incident is a lesson in humility, so I tell myself at the time, thinking that although my mind and public persona are percolating with high abstractions and grand theories, I stupidly get myself into a practical pickle that requires my father rescuing me. Though I am turning into a philosopher, because of this episode I end up feeling like a jerk, like a child who doesn't use common sense and can't control his impulses.

Laura and I have a favorite parking place. It is out in the woods down a long, hilly winding road. At night, it is very dark, quiet, and secluded. One evening we take a ride in my father's long and sleek 1959 black *Dodge* with its giant chrome-trimmed tail fins up to the top of the road, intending to go park. But it has been snowing for the last few days, and the road down the hill, canopied in high overhanging trees and infrequently traveled, is covered in snow. At the top of the hill, I stop the car and debate whether to go down the steep decline or not, but there is nowhere to turn the car around—I have approached the point of no return—and so I drive down the hill hoping I can get back up. Laura and I quickly realize, as we start down the hill, that we are in a jam. I immediately turn the car around at the bottom of the hill and try to drive back up. To hell with parking and kissing. The wheels of the car spin and shimmy back and forth in the snow. We go nowhere. Of course, neither Laura nor I want to call our parents for help, since we would have to admit that we were out parking in some dark, obscure place and that we were stupid for having driven down this snow-covered road in the middle of no-man's land. But we are stuck—in the pre-cell phone era, really stuck—and so in the pitch black we start walking up the hill and finally come to a house and ring the doorbell. Though clearly suspicious, the man who comes to the door lets us use his phone. I call my father and tell him I have gotten his big, beautiful, rocket ship of a car stuck at the bottom of a road in the woods. I explain where we are—a difficult enough thing to do—and once he finds a neighbor's car to borrow and grabs some tire chains, we meet him at the top of the hill. The whole time walking down the hill with him, carrying the tire

chains, I feel guilty and embarrassed. What am I doing with Laura way out here? Why did I drive the car down this road? My father walks along with us, shaking his head a bit back and forth, but basically saying nothing; he is a man of action, not words. Eventually we get to the bottom of the hill where he puts the chains on the tires of his car, and it works. He is able to drive the car back up the hill. We have been rescued.

When we get home, I sit in the warm living room with my parents, a stark contrast to freezing out in the snow and the night and the cold, and I start to cry, this big weightlifter and budding philosopher who needs to call his father to rescue him since he didn't have the brains to avoid the proverbial "slippery slope."

And all of this is a haunting lesson that sticks in my mind. Though in one way I feel very intelligent, I clearly acted very foolishly and got myself into a jam that I couldn't get out of. Though I feel very capable and mature, my father (who is a bus driver and not a philosopher by any means) has to save my ass. Though I am ascending upward into the ethereal realm of Platonic ideas, my gut impulses at the time—to sit and make out with Laura on a dark empty road—are more powerful and, however foolish, clearly determine my actions. Freud is right.

All of this has to do with the nature of wisdom, what it is and how one acquires it. At nineteen, I am still at the bottom of the long climb toward the light; at the bottom of the dark hill, ready to be pulled this way and that in the ongoing dialectic of passion and reason.

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Speaking of my father, a story I frequently tell people is that I owe my life to a pig. While in my own reality at this time I increasingly value the intellect, my father clearly traveled another path, that of the warrior. In World War II, he served as a platoon sergeant under the command of George Patton, and he actually fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Well, the story I tell people—which indeed is true since I have seen the newspaper article in the *Waterbury Republic* (which my aunt Nellie, my father's sister, saved)—is that one day during the war, somewhere in Europe, my father was leading his platoon across an open field when a pig ran right in front of him just a few feet ahead. The animal ran right over a land mine which blew up, totally obliterating the pig and sending shrapnel every which way, a piece of which hit my father in the neck, wounding him. But if the pig hadn't run in front of him, my father would have stepped directly on the land mine and that would have been that.

When I was a kid, my father would show me his Purple Heart, one among many medals he was awarded during the war. He would also show me the German pistol he took from a Nazi captain who surrendered to him. Yet he didn't want to talk about the War at all, a dark memory perhaps too difficult to verbalize or discuss.

I have always been fascinated by the whole thing though. Though a child of the idyllic, romanticized fifties, I was born in the aftermath of the most destructive, bloodiest human conflict in all of history—a war in large measure provoked by a madman, a psychopath, following through on his own peculiar and demented interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power. There is, in fact, deep evil in the hearts of some men. And how are we to understand this? How are we deal with it? Does Freud

have the answer? Does Christianity, or any religion for that matter? Whatever the case, the innocent suffer. Where, my dear Plato, is the justice in such things?

My father had a younger brother who also fought in the War. He was killed somewhere in Europe in 1944. (Fate, luck, or chance did not save him.) He was twenty years old at the time. I am named after him. I have visited his grave in Waterbury, Connecticut, the grave of Tommy Lombardo.

There are times when life seems to be determined by chance, the luck of the draw. There are times when those same significant events—because they seem so capricious and accidental and important—feel like destiny, like actions guided by the hand of God.

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My personal transformation in the year 1966 moves in steps and spurts—splattered with the necessary chaos, passion, and foolishness like a painting by Jackson Pollack—with new attitudes and behaviors replacing old ones over a period of time.

Sometimes it takes a year or two for an important idea—a new impetus and feeling—to take root in your spirit, grow in strength and clarity, and permeate out into all the different aspects of your life. In point of fact, I enthusiastically continue my weightlifting through the spring and the summer of 1966, reaching my peak in physical strength that summer and the following fall, right after I have first studied Plato and Freud.

Although I am pursuing a college degree and am clearly motivated toward doing well in my academic studies, my goal when I start college is to become a physical education teacher (a reflection of my dedication to weightlifting). I am thinking that I want to become a track coach.

But I do really well in my second semester (when I first study Plato and Freud), much better than in the first, and a dissonance is growing in my mind between my stated goal of teaching physical education and my emerging interests in psychology and philosophy, and more generally, the world of ideas. Increasingly, I do not feel like the same person that I was in high school.

As a physical education major though, I need to transfer in my second year from the local campus of the University of Connecticut in my home town to the main campus in order to begin to take courses in my major—there is no gym at the local campus. This means having to move from the industrial town of Waterbury to a college town, Storrs, and this change in my environment further contributes to the change going on inside of me.

Instead of living in a city of pool halls, record shops, hamburger and hot dog stands, old grey factories, crowded neighborhoods, and city streets with teenagers cruising in their jazzed up *Chevys* and *Fords*, I am now in a rural environment with large wooded areas, tall oak and maple trees, open hilly lawns for reading and thinking, and old colonial brick buildings filled with classrooms and vast collections of books. No one cruises around in Storrs. No one hangs around on street corners. People read books sitting by the lakes. (In Waterbury I never saw anyone reading a book on a street corner; you would have been stoned for such an action.) In Storrs, professors stroll

along curving walkways discussing the issues of the world. I am in a place dedicated to learning, education, and the ideals of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge. Storrs is beautiful, but it feels very strange. Having dived into this new universe, I feel homesick the first few months.

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In the first semester of my second year in college (the fall of 1966), I take three physical education courses and three academic courses. I find the physical education courses excruciatingly boring. I find the academic courses existentially invigorating. I keep lifting weights, but now I have to go to the gym in the college athletic facilities; I have left my parents' home and my familiar basement where all my barbells and weights are. After throwing the discus and shot put in high school, I am now learning to throw the hammer in college, but I don't like having to go to the gym everyday, and there is something calling me toward the dorm where I am living and where I am reading and studying, something that I feel at a gut level that is pulling me in a different direction.

In the fall semester, my teacher in the history of physical education gives a lecture one day about following your passion in life and making sure that you find value in what you decide on as a career. Without knowing it, he convinces me (or let's say, provides the straw that breaks the camel's back) that I shouldn't be in physical education.

Coincidentally, or perhaps in psychosomatic resonance, in the late fall I develop mononucleosis, after having peaked, at twenty years of age, at 210 pounds. Bigger and stronger than I've ever been and less than fifty pounds away from the world record in the dead lift for my bodyweight, I lose thirty pounds in one month, stop weightlifting, and—once I have recuperated from the illness—am not able to re-establish the passion and determination for weightlifting I sustained for the five previous years. I have found a new love and a new life goal. In the winter of 1966/1967, Waterbury—high school, weightlifting, the whole thing—finally collapses in one big crash and descent into oblivion.

The spring semester of my sophomore year is much different from the fall. No more physical education courses, no more serious weightlifting. I switch my major to psychology with a minor in philosophy. I am no longer all that homesick and I especially dive into my first upper-level psychology classes, which include the study of the brain and the study of perception. And that spring I first encounter a man who, from across the centuries, speaks out to me and creates a resonance that will last a lifetime. I meet Spinoza.

Through the Eyes of Eternity

A strange new rock group is playing in the background—Pink Floyd. We are listening to *A Saucerful of Secrets*. The music is as spacey as John. As usual, John is highly animated, and as he talks he reacts to his own words as if someone else were saying them and he is listening and absorbing it all. He amazes himself with the new truths coming out of his own mouth. Repeatedly John goes "Wow" and hits himself on

his forehead with the palm of his hand as the insights come fast and furious. It is very late, after 3:00 a.m., but we are exploring the cosmos, the outer reaches of the infinite and the absolute—the deepest of all things—which overrides the need to sleep. We are discussing the meaning of life, the nature of existence, and the question of what we should do with our lives.

John is a Vietnam vet, five or six years older than I, with very, very long sandy brown hair—a total shock to my Waterbury gender stereotype of males. He is tall and lanky, my first Hippie friend, and he sports a goatee. Oddly, John is also one of the best ping-pong players in the dorm. As we chat, I move through ideas with him with a sense of ongoing profound revelation. I get in the zone, in resonance with the velocity and multiple trajectories of his thinking. We are like two premier ping-pong players of the mind. We are in a state of reciprocal flow. The night passes into morning as the ideas keep bouncing back and forth, spinning this way and that, at lightning speed.

The next day, John and I feel a sense of deep epiphany after our conversation. I am sure something significant has happened to both of us. The following evening I explain some of the ideas John and I have been discussing to another guy in the dorm, Barry. Barry is a real smart cookie, and when I start to elaborate on one of the ideas from the night before—the fundamental order and determinism of the entire universe—Barry tells me that I sound like Spinoza.

Spinoza? Who is Spinoza?

The name itself has an evocative and lyrical quality. Over the next couple of days, I search out Spinoza in the college library and start to read his major philosophical work, *The Ethics*. I read historical accounts about him as well.

Baruch Espinoza was born in 1633 and died in 1677. He is one of the most admired Western philosophers of modern times, not simply for his ideas, which are profound enough, but for his character and his behavior. He epitomized the true quest of the wise man: he was someone who really lived the ideas that he espoused and he did so against great social pressure and adversity. And this point—integrity of character—is critical to the nature of wisdom, to the whole spirit of philosophy.

Living in the mid-seventeenth century in the Netherlands, Spinoza was one of the most important early spokesmen for the European Enlightenment and the modern era. Spinoza had a vision of a better future. He stood for reason against the tyrannies of tradition and authority. Spinoza rejected many of the teachings of European religion (both Judaism and Christianity) on the grounds that the teachings were superstitious and not based on logic or scientific evidence. He did not believe in miracles. He did not believe in the immortality of the soul. He did not believe in the Trinity or the absolute moral righteousness of religious figureheads and institutions.

Because of his outspoken nature and defiance toward the status quo, at the age of twenty-four he was ex-communicated by the Jewish community, cursed for his views, and labeled a heretic and an atheist. If Spinoza came walking down the street, all pious and religious people, under threat of spiritual damnation in hell, were instructed to move to the other side of the street and look away. No more a believer in Christianity than Judaism, Spinoza changed his name from Baruch to Benedictus in a mocking and ironical response to his Jewish ex-communication.

Defending to his death the principles and ultimate value of reason, he became one of the greatest heroes of modern rationalist philosophy, willing to endure a life of

social condemnation and isolation for the principles of reason and enlightenment. In reading about him, I am immediately attracted to him, in large part because he was such an individualist and intellectual rebel. Living in an era, perhaps no different than today—of groupthink and great pressures toward social conformity—Spinoza stood his ground and searched for the truth and the good.

In fact, Spinoza had incredible intellectual balls. Beginning from a set of fundamental axioms and definitions, in *The Ethics* he attempted to logically and very methodically deduce the existence and nature of God, of reality, of knowledge and truth, of the psychological make-up of humanity, and of the good life and how to realize happiness. Spinoza deduced that God—the totality of existence, an infinity of being—necessarily exists (this notion is neither Christian nor Judaic); that everything that has been and will be is completely determined (which of course includes God); that there are no miracles, no immortality of the soul, or free will; and that one should (in the intellectual sense) love God but not expect a reward from God in return for such love.

For Spinoza, loving God is its own reward, as a life of virtue is also its own reward; in fact, the love of God is the highest virtue. To lead a virtuous life in hope of reward in heaven or fear of condemnation in hell is inauthentic. Virtue has no real value in such a mindset; it is simply a means to an end. According to Spinoza, there is no reward for being good, except the state of goodness itself.

Further, he thought that ethics and morality derive from acting in accordance with one's own self-interest, and that it is when one does not know one's own true nature (or other people or events interfere with true self-perception) that one becomes unhappy and less than completely virtuous. Evil is ignorance and misery. On the other hand, virtue equals happiness equals self-awareness and enlightened self-interest.

Ultimately, what this comes down to is this: What serves our best interests and provides the greatest understanding of ourselves is the intellectual love—the deepest understanding—of God. According to Spinoza, the true perception or understanding of anything is to see it "through the eyes of eternity"; to see oneself, the other, or whatever the thing is, in the context of God or the cosmos. (For Spinoza, God is the cosmos.) We are all part of God—God is not something separate from us—and our true nature is revealed through God. It is in understanding God that we come to understand ourselves.

Right from the start, I resonate with Spinoza's idea that everything makes sense, that everything fits together and that for everything there is a reason or cause. Spinoza speaks to my view of nature as orderly and coherent, a view of the universe that gives me a deep sense of psychological security, structure, and meaning. The macrocosm shapes the microcosm. There is a grand scheme that can be grasped and understood and to which we can be attuned.

After assimilating his ideas, I often argue Spinoza's determinism with others, attempting to demonstrate that whatever we do—whatever actions or thoughts we engage in—there is always a cause, and a cause for that cause running backwards in time. Even if we say we decide upon an action, the action and decision follow from our own inner nature and psychological make-up—from the causes within us—and those causes go back to other causes, both within us and from the outside world and our history. Eventually it all goes back to God, nature, the universe as a whole.

Obviously, Spinoza's determinism collides with the traditional Western concept and belief in free will. Yet, beginning in the time of Spinoza, science adopted a deterministic approach to all of natural reality. In fact, that is the point of science. Science attempts to explain and understand reality by identifying why things happen the way they do, what the natural laws and causes are behind the patterns of events in the world. And if you apply science to humans (which modern psychology does), then it follows that what people do, what they think and what they feel, is strictly determined. There are no choices in life; even if I feel a sense of choice in making decisions, this is part of the causal sequence of events. Spinoza anticipates and embodies the modern scientific, deterministic attitude toward human psychology.

Even though I debate and defend Spinoza's determinism with others, I grapple with the issue of freedom versus determinism. Am I free? Or is everything I do part of a necessary causal sequence of events—even the thought that I am free to choose? Though philosophy can seem like an abstract and impersonal discipline, divorced in relevance from "real life," the issue of freedom and determinism is something I live and feel within me. Of course, if you understand philosophy, you realize that its ultimate source—its impetus and inspiration—is "real life," what it means and how one should live. (Spinoza surely saw this.) Clearly I feel a practical and personal relevance to philosophy over the issue of whether I am free or determined. Given that nature is explicable in terms of cause and effect, in terms of laws and patterns of order, how can I possibly be free? How can this idea make any sense?

Of great relevance to the issue of freedom and determinism is Spinoza's idea that the nature of things is to be found within the context of God. Nothing stands alone and the only complete and true way to see something is to see how it fits into the grand scheme of things. Such a view is philosophical holism carried to the extreme. Everything exists in a cosmic context, and it is only in the context of the cosmic whole that the thing can be defined, that it has any reality at all. The part does not exist independent of the whole. Further, all causality goes back to God. This obviously runs totally counter to the idea of autonomous and distinct individuality. For Spinoza, there are no distinct individuals in the cosmos; all are part of the One. Hence, if the idea of freedom requires that there be distinct individuals that exercise choice and self-determination, then in Spinoza's system there is no freedom, since we do not stand separate in any fashion from the whole—from God.

There is, of course, something uplifting in seeing oneself or seeing humanity in the context of the cosmos; it elevates our existence. Such a vision gave Spinoza deep cosmic meaning for his own life. One could argue that it is critically important for each of us to see how we are connected to everyone else, and for humanity as a whole to see how we all fit into nature rather than feeling separate from or above nature, lest we abuse, disregard, or destroy the hand that feeds us. Spinoza, though, pushes this basic point to its ultimate expression. Not only is no man an island; in all of nature there are no islands anywhere. It is God that provides the ultimate meaning and underpinning for everything, and for Spinoza, his life and his identity were unequivocally dedicated to seeing himself in resonance with this absolute all-enveloping reality. Spinoza was in intellectual love with God. The spiritual or philosophical power of this image is truly awesome.

So at the center of Spinoza's philosophy is God: God as the core of being, as being itself, as the only valid context for true knowledge, and as the anchor point for the good life and human happiness. Yet, it is clear that Spinoza's God is not God as normally understood in a Judeo-Christian framework, the religious mindset of my own youth. For Spinoza, there is one and only one substance—an infinite substance; there is only one being that is the reason or cause for its own existence, and that is God. God is the totality of nature and the cosmos, and nature or the cosmos is self-caused. God/nature necessarily exists, and necessarily exists exactly as it exists. God has no free will. As Spinoza put it, "God, or substance, consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality, necessarily exists." Spinoza's God, as a separate being, did not create the universe. God did not create us as beings separate from Itself. All finite beings, which include each of us, are modifications of the infinite substance of God. Hence, Spinoza rejected the duality of God and nature, or God and humanity, as found in Judaism and Christianity. Spinoza rejected duality in anything. All is One.

This pantheistic vision in Spinoza (Pantheism is the view that God and the universe are the same thing) corresponds with what many "enlightened" individuals throughout history have stated that they have experienced: Everything is a great Oneness; there is no real distinct self separate from the Oneness; we are all part of God or the cosmos; God or the great Oneness is manifested in everything. Those who are enlightened presumably see this.

Nothing in my past is a match for Spinoza. If Plato and Freud pointed the way out of the cave, Spinoza shows me the possibilities of what lies out there amidst the stars and the expanse of the heavens. If I am losing my sense of the past, a big part of my intellectual past is my Catholic upbringing, and Spinoza, though preserving the idea of God, challenges many of the Christian ideas I learned in my youth.

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Pulled free and physically disconnected from the place where I grew up, I completely change my direction in life in my sophomore year. Having my mind seeded by Plato and Freud the previous year, in the second year of college I come to fully appreciate the exhilaration and excitement of the world of the mind. I continue to discover new perspectives on reality. I keep reading new writers. The insight—the conclusion, the personal revelation—that I love learning new ideas, new facts, new principles, and new theories rises up in me. Increasing knowledge and understanding become the central desires in me, the prime motivator, whether the new knowledge pertains to psychology, philosophy, history, science, literature, or the arts. It is all fascinating. There is so much to learn—this itself is a revelation, a discovery that does not frighten me but rather draws me in—and I am drinking it up. I value it all, value how it is expanding my consciousness. A vast and infinitely deep universe has opened, and I am exploring it with great passion and purpose.

I also increasingly come to value developing my mental skills and capacities: my abilities to analyze, to synthesize, to reason logically and clearly; to argue, debate, and discuss all these new concepts with others. I am always getting into debates and

intellectual conversations with other people in the dorm. (I have acquired a reputation as a “head.”)

In particular, I realize that I am perpetually obsessed with putting the pieces together, with seeing patterns and connections across disciplines, with getting the big picture of things. I have an intense desire to see the whole, which is why I find philosophy so interesting. Philosophy asks the big questions and gives big answers. I am driven to make sense of it all. I have no ready explanation regarding how or why this obsession with mental synthesis and big theories—this searching for the general, the abstract, and the holistic—emerges so powerfully and quickly in me. I am simply following Spinoza.

Expanding my understanding, sharpening my mental skills, and looking for ways to synthesize and abstract on what I am learning: all of this intuitively seems to be an expression of a drive toward excellence within me. Perhaps it is a carry-over from weightlifting. Perhaps it is deeper. Whatever the case, again Spinoza is my guide: Excellence is to be valued and pursued; it is critically important in life to do things well, to believe that there are standards and values defining the quality of life and to attempt to realize these ideals.

The growth of knowledge and the improvement of thinking become the central guiding virtues in my life, the central points of excellence. In my mind, the pursuit of knowledge is a virtue. The pursuit of knowledge tremendously enhances the quality of one’s being. In my own case, the search for knowledge gives me a much deeper and more powerful purpose and meaning for living than ever before. And thinking well becomes a virtue also: it is a quality of character that contributes to the pursuit of excellence and the elevation of life and consciousness. Thinking—the exercise of my mind—stimulates me and makes me feel more alive and real than ever before.

These ideas and accompanying feelings regarding learning, thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge form the intellectual foundation for my ongoing inquiry through life into the nature of wisdom, enlightenment, and the meaning of education. From early on, it seems to me that the broad, systematic, passionate, and ongoing acquisition of knowledge and the development of fundamental thinking skills are essential features of an educated mind. All of this defines my trajectory into the future.

By “broad” I mean knowledge encompassing both the humanities and the sciences, ranging from art, music, and literature to philosophy, psychology, the social sciences, history, biology, physics and cosmology, at the very least. Broad should also include the religious and spiritual traditions.

By “systematic” I mean the ongoing process of connecting, relating, integrating, and abstracting upon this diverse array of areas of knowledge, in an attempt to gain a big picture of things. This, in fact, is an obsession in me.

I include the word “passionate” because the pursuit of knowledge and the experiences of discovery and increased understanding are not cold intellectual states. There is excitement, astonishment, exhilaration, and awe infused into the process. I feel this energy—this fire in the soul. This passion, I believe, is absolutely necessary. Knowledge acquisition is intrinsically motivating and energizing.

Finally, I use the term “ongoing” because I realize from the start that there is no end to the process, no final state of knowing it all and seeing the truth, and the person who truly appreciates the experiences of learning, discovery, and understanding will not

want the process to end. To be enlightened is to see widely, see holistically, see with emotional energy, and always with a desire to see something more. Enlightenment and education are flow.

In my mind, the concept of thinking skills covers many different ideas. Given the necessary element of skepticism and caution in all intellectual pursuits—what I start to learn through Plato and Freud—I intentionally include the word “strive” in the following points because there is no guarantee that one can achieve the stated ideals, only that one can work towards them. Thinking well and with skill means to strive for clarity; to work at making one’s ideas intelligible and communicable; to strive for synthesis, coherence, and systematization and to bring order to one’s thoughts; to strive for logical and rational sequences of thought; to strive for objectivity, open-mindedness, and fairness; to work at examining, comparing, and evaluating multiple points of view; and reciprocally, to be critical and in pursuit of the best approximation to the truth one can realize, that is, not to just accept any idea, but to have standards of evaluation and to believe that one can separate intellectual junk from what has validity.

There are people who are critical and disdainful of the intellectual pursuit of knowledge, who see “book learning” as either unnecessary or even counter-productive to leading a good life or reaching happiness or enlightenment. Perhaps “true” knowledge isn’t to be gotten out of books at all; perhaps academic learning gets in the way. Perhaps enlightenment or wisdom is to be found in the streets, in the messy realities and practicalities of everyday life. People frequently throw this kind of argument at me, perhaps to create self-doubt and conflict in my mind and cover up their own insecurities. Indeed, I would agree that academic knowledge is not sufficient for either wisdom or enlightenment and it does not necessarily generate a good life. Yet, having lived “on the streets,” it seems to me that the wisdom and enlightenment to be found there is limited and meager, frequently obscure, confused and mistaken, and filled with vanity, fear, narrow mindedness, hostility, and ignorance. Most importantly, there is no passion, no vision, no wonder in the face of existence out on the streets.

I think part of what confuses many people regarding knowledge gained through books is that they see the book as a bounded physical entity, a contained thing with printed words in it. What they don’t see is that books are really portals into multiple and extremely diverse dimensions of reality, and books are also portals into other people’s minds. When you enter a book you go someplace else; you are no longer there in your chair or at your desk; the book disappears. You are traveling through space, time, diverse cultures, the minds of the writers, and even alternative universes.

Of course it is true that there are intellectual nerds, megalomaniac scholars and teachers, and socially and emotionally inept “geniuses,” but the solution is not to throw the baby out with the bath water, but to take what one learns in books and apply to it life—to test it out and use it to enrich one’s existence, one’s experience and understanding of the world. Books illuminate the world; books expand upon it. To toss aside the works of Plato, Aristotle, Dostoyevsky, Freud, and Confucius is to retreat back into the cave of obscurity, darkness, and the underground ruminations of the mole.

Clearly there is significant challenge and struggle in integrating the knowledge gained in study and thinking with action and life. This is critical to the nature of wisdom. If one thinks, as I begin to do at this time, that understanding and knowledge must be broad—from art to science—one must go even further than that and pull in the living of

life with an understanding and appreciation of it all. And further, how does one get all this “book learning” to penetrate into the deep psyche, into the sense of self and one’s inner feelings and desires? How does one become enlightened and wise within? I am aware of this challenge right from the beginning and very conscious of the difficulties involved in realizing these goals. Certainly I am aware of all of this when I find myself—a student of Plato and Freud—stuck at the bottom of that hill in the dark woods.

Sex and Science Fiction

During the summer of 1967, I read a lot of books and I lose my virginity. First, let’s discuss the books.

I am back in Waterbury for the summer break, but Waterbury feels strange and alien, receding into the fogginess of forgotten dreams. My friends from high school have disappeared. I have disappeared. I work in a hardware store on weekdays to save money for college. The job reinforces in me the desire to move beyond that kind of reality to the life of the mind.

During the summer break, I read classic works in philosophy for pleasure. It is this summer that I read Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley’s theory of reality has a big impact on me. I find his idealism (the idea that all reality is mental) amazing in the power and originality of his insight, and yet disconcerting. It gets me thinking and questioning the nature of what I perceive. Can we make conscious contact with the external world? Is there an external world to make contact with? Do we all simply live our lives within the confines of our conscious minds, never connecting with anything or anyone beyond that? How can we realize love if we never make real contact and resonance with another human being? At best, we love the images we have of people. After having found myself lost and immersed in the absolute Oneness of God, with Spinoza, I now find myself lost and isolated in my own island of consciousness, with Berkeley.

I also read David Hume, the greatest philosopher of the English language and the ultimate skeptic. Hume repeatedly asked the question “How can we be sure?” How can we be sure that the sun will rise tomorrow? Just because it has always happened in the past, does it necessarily follow that it will happen again? And the answer is that we can’t be sure. All of our beliefs about the world are contingent; there are no absolute certainties. Even if A follows B a thousand times, this does not logically imply that A will follow B tomorrow. We do not observe necessity; we do not observe cause and effect; we observe sequences of impressions and ideas, sequences that may or may not repeat themselves.

Hume even questioned whether there was a self—a “me”—beyond the thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves. Perhaps we just think we have an inner self. The idea or belief that we have a self does not imply that we indeed do have a self separate from all these beliefs. Is the self something we can observe? Or is the “me” or the “I” simply a figment of our imagination? In critiquing the reality of the self, Hume raised doubts about our very existence. Finally, Hume questioned the existence of God. Is there any real evidence for God? Hume critiqued all the classic arguments for God and found them wanting. There is no real proof or evidence. In many of these points, Hume—who lived a century after Spinoza—throws doubt on the conclusions of Spinoza,

as well as common sense and traditional religious doctrine. He goes after everyone and everything.

Hume was the greatest and most extreme of the empiricist philosophers: Trust only what you can strictly and unequivocally observe, Hume urges us, and do not draw any unwarranted conclusions beyond that. And as it turned out, much of what we believe, according to him, was based on unjustifiable assumptions and uncertain inferences. Hume went much further in his empiricism than Berkeley (who was also an empiricist). Hume went much further in his critique of common sense. Hume freed the mind of dogmatism and unwarranted beliefs. He left the mind (including my mind) floating, unanchored in empty phenomenal space.

To balance things out, I also read St. Thomas Aquinas, the most influential of all Christian philosophers and one who, of course, definitely believed in the existence of God and the tenets of the Bible. Aquinas had half a dozen ways, so he believed, to prove the existence of God. Aquinas created, in the thirteenth century, a monumental philosophical and theological system that provided answers to all the central questions and issues of life. If Hume doubted just about everything, Aquinas had answers for just about everything. That's how the world had changed over a period of five hundred years. Where there was certainty, now there was doubt.

That summer I study Aquinas amidst nature. One day I am reading the *Summa Theologica* sitting in a boat on a lake while Laura is fishing. (Fishing bores me and Laura loves it, so whenever we go out fishing, I always take along a book to read.) This day it especially strikes me that this is an odd combination of things, me reading Aquinas and his attempt to synthesize Christianity with Aristotle, while Laura puts worms on her fishing hook, hoping to catch some big perch for supper. From one perspective—perhaps the artistic or romantic perspective—it might all fit together: nature, God, philosophical abstractions, the quiet of the lake, me sitting in a boat lost in thought, and beautiful Laura fishing for perch. From another perspective, it is total incongruity. But to be frank, I find Aquinas tedious, ponderous, and uninventive and fried perch much more stimulating and exciting to the senses.

That summer I also re-discover science fiction. As a youth, I had read H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, but in 1967 I come in contact with the "New Wave" of contemporary science fiction. I am blown away by Harlan Ellison's anthology of new stories *Dangerous Visions*.

Science fiction further fuels my adventuresome spirit, and the new science fiction not only challenges my imagination but many of the conventions of contemporary society and culture ingrained in me. The "New Wave" is part of the cultural revolution of the 60s; the new writers are exploring the possibilities of alternative social values and cultural norms as much as the possibilities of technology and science. Philip José Farmer, who first became known in the 1950s for bringing sex into science fiction, writes in *Dangerous Visions* what is probably the best story of the collection, "Riders of the Purple Wage." The line in the story "There are universes begging for gods, yet he hangs around this one looking for work" jolts me. The boldness of this flippant assertion shocks my religious sensibilities, yet stimulates my own desire to break free of my own mental constraints and religious taboos. (It is one thing to logically critique the idea of God; it is another thing to make fun of it.) The "New Wave" goes way beyond the Victorian proprieties of Verne and Wells. As Farmer says at the beginning of his story, "If Jules

Verne could have really looked into the future, say 1966 A.D., he would have crapped in his pants. And 2166, oh, my!"

That summer I stop going to church. Over the previous couple of years, I have become increasingly discontent with church doctrine and practices. In particular, I can no longer accept the story of the Garden of Eden and the whole book of *Genesis* as an accurate account of the creation of the universe and the origin of humanity. Science and evolution seem to me to be a much better, more detailed and comprehensive explanation of things. Science is based on evidence and honest reasoning; religion is based on unfounded hearsay backed by dogmatic authority and the weapon of guilt.

By now, and influenced by Spinoza, I find the practice of attending mass on Sunday to make sure you go to heaven rather than hell morally suspect. Shouldn't people strive toward ethical behavior and character because the good is good? Do we need to be motivated to be moral beings by the carrot and the stick? (It seems like it is the id that moves us to believe in God—our deepest needs for survival and pleasure—rather than something about God.)

Further, sitting in church and listening to the priest sermonize has become a mental straight-jacket for me. Whatever he has to say is intellectually impoverished relative to the great philosophers and thinkers I have been studying. Spinoza, Plato, and Berkeley elevate my mind and teach me things; the priest makes pronouncements, often simplistic, frequently repetitious, and exceedingly repressive of the human spirit. You can't talk in church; you can't discuss and debate; you can't question or think. You are supposed to shut up and listen. This is the opposite of a philosophy class. This is the opposite of the pursuit of enlightenment.

Yet, having been raised a Catholic, I feel guilty underneath about missing church once I stop going. (It is a "mortal sin.") In spite of my intellectual convictions, I worry that I am doing something wrong and that the Catholic God is watching over me, disapproving of my actions. I cannot help but feel this at times; I am indeed a house divided against itself.

But Freud is right more often than people care to admit, and there is more going on in my life than just a confrontation of old and new ideas in my head. There is sex—but of course. The year is 1967 and the sexual revolution has exploded on the scene. The idea that sex should be reserved for marriage is under attack. It is a time of challenging visions and dangerous behaviors. The church definitely disapproves of premarital sex, and for me, at the robust and sexually charged age of twenty, this prohibition seems unnatural, unjustified, and repressive. It is the proverbial war between the id and the socially sanctioned super-ego being waged in my mind and in my gonads.

Yet reason (the ego) serves the id, and when you feel the urge, you find ways to justify and rationalize your desires. Didn't Freud teach me this? If I really want to have sex, I sure as hell can find reasons for doing it. Or perhaps it is as simple as what Heinz Pagels said: "When the penis goes up, reason goes out the window." Who needs a reason? Who needs to consider the consequences? Just go for it. Whatever the case, am I going to participate in a religious tradition that conflicts with and bottles up this powerful, burgeoning desire within me? I have plenty of arguments bubbling up in my consciousness to justify my lust.

And then there is the fact that Laura is beautiful and sexy, with those long, lovely legs and those mesmerizing eyes. And she loves me and I love her. We are very close friends, better friends with each other than I ever have been with anyone, male or female, before. And so I pursue. I tell her that I really desire her. We have been going out for over two years. I have always been respectful of her. We are twenty years old; aren't we adults? And so, after much discussion and much rubbing against each other, in the summer of 1967 we cross over the line.

I come to realize, though, that sex is a double-edged sword; it is anything but free. At twenty years old, engaging in sex can be seen as an expression of freedom, a reaction against the authority of the church and the morals of middle class society. But sex changes everything. Raised as a Catholic, sex is connected somewhere deep in my psyche with commitment, with marriage. I may espouse "free love," but my mind reacts to the experience much differently. I now feel a growing sense of obligation. Somewhere inside, I feel that I have made a bigger, deeper commitment and it gets me squirming around.

And that is not the end of it; things get even more complicated in my head. Many ideas and feelings are cascading through my mind in the summer of 1967. I feel like I am changing and growing. I feel like this great intellectual adventure is opening up in front of me. I feel like a child of the Enlightenment, having the shackles of authority and intellectual tyranny cut free from my being. I am a child of the 60s. If premarital sex is no longer a taboo, then why should I or anyone be constrained to just one sexual partner? There is Laura, alluring and loving, but Laura, I increasingly realize, is very traditional and is thinking about marriage and children. Not that I don't love her, but my mind is becoming increasingly ambivalent, pulled one way and then the other. Do I really want this traditional life? Should I want to stay with just one woman for all of my life? Yet Laura is dedicated to me (she makes that very clear) and now I feel this good old-fashioned sense of responsibility to her. We are lovers. Laura is a good person. Laura is my best friend. Laura loves me. But does she understand the intellectual universe which I have entered? Is it good that she doesn't? Are we mentally compatible? But how important is that? I feel guilty over this ambivalence and I feel guilty over feeling selfish about what I want. I have wanted Laura, but now I also feel—increasingly so—that I want freedom. Perhaps she is not the right person for this new me. Perhaps I am not the right person for her. Perhaps it is as simple as wanting variety and adventure. Perhaps I just want to have sex with a lot of different women. My mind goes this way and that.

It is sex that symbolizes freedom and emancipation from the church. It is sex that draws me into what becomes a deeper psychological commitment to Laura. It is sex that provokes in me—in a dialectical spiral—the desire to start thinking about freedom from everybody and everything. Sex changes everything.

So one year into my journey of philosophical enlightenment, I come face to face with another perplexity, more like a deep frustration. My mind is filled with lots of new ideas, many of which make perfectly good sense, and I believe in them. These ideas seem to lead me in new and different directions regarding how I should live my life. Shouldn't I behave in accordance with my new-found philosophical ideals and beliefs? But I have trouble following through on them. What am I missing? Courage? Conviction? I feel I have no integrity. Sometimes it is people on the outside that seem to

interfere (yet, am I projecting?) but often my own inner feelings contradict what I think is right or think I should do. Sometimes I feel like two different people, perhaps more. (Contrary to Hume, I not only feel a self, I feel more than one self.) There is Eros (for the moment embodied in Laura) and there is the pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment—the lover and the scholar in me. There is the calm and warm feeling of being with Laura and the security of it all, and there are the energizing impulses toward adventure. It all swirls around, with thoughts and desires and emotions colliding against each other. I have studied Freud and, again, I am feeling him.

My id, using the arguments of reason, has nudged me down that slippery slope, and the power and pleasure of what emerges is intense, pulling me in deeper and deeper. I really love making love with Laura but, on cue, my super-ego has stepped in. New thoughts and ideas and worries percolate around, and my mind is in a dither. I am ready and primed to get shook up some more.

Existentialism and the Hippies

"I am what I am not, and I am not what I am."
Jean Paul Sartre

"There is always some reason in madness,
and always some madness in reason."
Friedrich Nietzsche

"It is no use trying to reason a man out of something
that he hasn't been reasoned into."
Jonathon Swift

The school year of 1967-1968 is a time of intense study in psychology and philosophy; of Marlboro cigarettes and copious cups of coffee; of high academic excellence and performance; of more Pink Floyd but now with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Velvet Underground, *Sergeant Pepper*, and *The Magical Mystery Tour* thrown in; and finally, it is a time of existentialism and a good deal of accompanying existential angst. It is the year that the Hippies invade my college dorm, and I sit and drink beers with one of my professors.

Dr. Joel Kupperman is one of the nicest, most polite and pleasant individuals I have ever met. Mild mannered, gentle, and soft spoken, he comes into class the first day in suit and tie, hair neatly combed, sits down at the front table, and begins to discuss in almost a childlike innocent fashion Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. With great calm, Kupperman examines one emotionally charged topic after another, from death to madness and suicide, and does so without showing the slightest indication of distress. He is one of the original radio "Whiz Kids," a child prodigy now teaching existential philosophy.

On the other hand, Dr. Michael Turvey is the most electrical, exuberant, flamboyant character I have ever met in my life. Filled with great personal charisma and

speaking in a sharp, articulate English accent, he expounds upon the principles of operant and classical conditioning—of how rats and pigeons learn in mazes and Skinner boxes—and why this is extremely important and relevant to understanding human behavior.

I encounter both of these memorable characters—the philosopher and the psychologist—in my junior year in college. Each of them teaches me a lot.

Let's begin with Kupperman and existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom and individual responsibility; of creating your own life and your own identity; of subjectivity without objective anchors; and having to confront a world in which there are no guarantees, no certainties, and no inherent meanings.

Existentialism is Albert Camus's tale of "The Myth of Sisyphus," where Sisyphus is condemned by the gods for all of eternity to push a rock up a hill only to have it roll down on the other side, and yet in this act—in this unending cycle of struggle and rest, in his mindset of inner strength—Sisyphus defies the gods, never giving in, never buckling under the monotony of the action. In the action he finds meaning and purpose.

Existentialism is Kierkegaard's "leap of faith." Rejecting grand philosophical systems, rejecting rationality and objectivity as without value in guiding us in life, Kierkegaard sees the individual creation of values and the unavoidable necessity of personal faith as the core of the authentic life, the courageous life. Life is courage without security blankets; there is no safe place, either in science or religion, to stand. Belief in God is an act of faith—a choice, a diving into the abyss—without rational grounds and so much the better for it.

Existentialism is Nietzsche's going "beyond good and evil," declaring that "God is Dead," that we have killed him. Critical of both science and Christianity as presenting false promises of certainty, Nietzsche sees the bulk of humanity as asleep, as sheep in conformity to social mores, suppressing and rationalizing away their individuality. For Nietzsche, formalized morality controls and represses the human spirit, and we need to go beyond it. As much a psychologist as a philosopher, Nietzsche argues for the promise of the "*Ubermensch*"—the "Overman"—of something better, something superior and transcendent to be realized in the future. Nietzsche, to recall, is also the "will to power." Nietzsche has a vision of the future and it is one of strength and transcendence.

Existentialism is Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the great Russian novelist who wrote *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *Notes from Underground*. From Dostoyevsky, we get the tale of "The Grand Inquisitor," in which Christ comes back knocking at the door of a church one rainy night. The priest who answers realizes who has come knocking and decides to place Christ in a locked and secluded cell in the basement of the church, lest the Son of God upset the status quo of things, the power and rituals of institutionalized Christianity.

Existentialism is Heidegger who asks why there is something rather than nothing. Heidegger defines us as "beings-in-the-world" thrust into a reality that we must confront and deal with. There is "no exit."

And finally, existentialism is Jean Paul Sartre, perhaps best epitomizing and bringing together the whole array of philosophical ideas embodied in existential thought. For Sartre, there is no God. We are alone in the universe and it is up to us to determine our nature and our lives. We create ourselves, define ourselves in our actions. We, in

fact, are condemned to be free, and the greatest sin and travesty—what Sartre calls "bad faith"—is to deny this fact, to attempt to hang our identity on someone or something else. We are, at the core, nothing; we have no inherent nature; we are freedom, pure and simple.

Throw all of this and more into the mind of a twenty-year-old, raised Catholic in a blue-collar factory town in the east, who is worrying about sex and commitment, and whose philosophy of life until recently derived primarily from weightlifting but who now is in search of the life of the mind, and it is amazing that I don't come completely unglued at the seams. Being told you are free and that there is no formula for figuring out what to do with it, that you are responsible and alone in the universe, repeatedly sends my mind and my soul into what Kierkegaard so aptly termed "fear and trembling." Nietzsche makes me laugh, and equally he frightens me, and still I gobble him up, reading half a dozen books by him over the next year. Sartre resonates with the philosophy of freedom being espoused by the emerging Hippie culture of the time, but instead of creating a sense of communal togetherness, as the Hippies aspire to, Sartre creates a deep sense of aloneness within my consciousness. Still, I spend much of the next year arguing for Sartre's philosophy of absolute freedom (as in the previous year I had argued for Spinoza's philosophy of determinism).

I find it strange that if you tell people they are determined, they don't like it, but if you tell them that they are totally free and there are no excuses, no inner nature within themselves to fall back on, they don't like that either. As the psychoanalyst Eric Fromm—whom I also read around this same time—argued, humans do not like freedom. They try to escape from it by following others, by identifying with ready-made doctrines and authoritarian lists of right and wrong—by following Hitler, for example, the focus of Fromm's study. Again, this is basically what Sartre called "bad faith."

I emerge from my class in existentialism more enlightened than ever, with an A, but also an atheist, and yet terrified over the whole thing. Somewhere in this whole experience I killed Spinoza's God and finished off the Catholic one as well. There is blood on my hands.

But now on to the psychology of learning and why, in many ways, we are like pigeons in a Skinner box and like rats in a maze. The psychology of learning is one of the most scientific and rigorous areas in psychology. Terms are precisely and objectively defined; experiments are run; quantitative data is collected; hypotheses are subjected to statistical analysis; and theories are formulated that clearly and precisely identify both causes and effects in experimental manipulations.

Turvey is great in this regard, perfect for this course, combining his personal energy and fascination with things with a sharpness of intellect capable of handling all the subtleties and intricate logical connections of each topic he discusses. His mind is crystal clear; his personality sings. He delineates step by step each experiment, each hypothesis, each concept, and somehow he provokes (at least in me) endless discussions about the meaning and validity of the ideas being examined.

The psychology of learning, in the form it is presented in the late 60s, derives from a behaviorist model of psychology. Identify and measure stimuli in the environment and attempt to ascertain how these publicly observable stimuli affect observable behavior. There is no discussion of inner mental states, of subjective experiences in the subjects of the experiments; the focus is on physical environmental stimuli and physical

forms of behavior. No one asks the rat or pigeon what he or she is thinking or feeling; there is no need to.

The key theoretical explanation to emerge from this approach is that changes in environmental stimuli, either preceding behaviors or following from behaviors, affect changes in behavior. The environment determines behavior. If pressing a bar in a Skinner box produces pellets of food, then the rate of behavior (bar pressing) increases. If pressing a bar yields food when a red light is on but not when a green light is on, the rat will show an increase of bar pressing only when the red light is on and so forth.

These are simple examples, but extremely complex and subtle experimental set-ups can be created that provoke all kinds of variations and patterns of behavior in animals and demonstrate how they are under the control of environmental stimuli. If a behavior is reinforced (by giving food for example), every time the behavior occurs but then the reinforcement for the behavior is stopped (extinguished), the animal gives up much more quickly than if only some of the responses were initially reinforced. That is, creating new behaviors with continuous reinforcement produces much less tenacious behavior in the face of extinction than intermittent reinforcement. (To use mentalistic language, which the behaviorists avoided, you value what you have to work for much more than you value what comes easy.) An immense variety of educational implications, including therapeutic approaches and parenting techniques, follows from this line of research and thinking.

A key figure in behaviorist psychology is B.F. Skinner. Skinner thought that the learning principles of behaviorist psychology can be applied to the re-engineering of human society and human nature, improving human happiness and human creativity and productivity. He invented the Skinner box, a cubical container that has a lever within it that when pressed will deliver food into the box. The Skinner box can also be wired to have lights or bells which are activated according to some schedule, or electrified floors which go off and on, shocking the animal in the box.

Skinner used the term “reinforcement” to refer to any stimulus whose presentation or removal, as a consequence of some behavior, strengthens that behavior. Food is a positive reinforcer, since giving the animal food as a consequence of bar pressing increases the strength of the behavior. Shock can be used as a negative reinforcer, since turning off an electrical shock as a consequence of bar pressing strengthens the behavior of bar pressing. Punishment is when you apply a negative reinforcer as a consequence of behavior. Electrical shock following bar pressing is a form of punishment. Punishment suppresses behavior but doesn’t eliminate it. If you punish a behavior, a person or animal will stop doing it in front of you, but given the opportunity someplace else, where there is no threat of punishment, the person or animal will go right back and start doing it again. Instead, Skinner proposed that extinction is the key to getting rid of unwanted responses; the response to be eliminated is simply not reinforced. If you want to get rid of some annoying or negative behavior in someone, totally ignore it. (Giving a person attention for an unwanted behavior—even if it is negative attention—reinforces the behavior.)

Skinner believed that any type of behavior can be shaped and developed through the application of positive and negative reinforcers and extinction. He believed, though, that positive reinforcement is the most effective way to control and strengthen behavior. (It’s love and food and sex that make the world go round.) Skinner also believed that,

once instinct is subtracted out, all of the behavior—no matter how complex—that we see in humans, as well as in animals, is learned through reinforcement. The behavior of humans is a consequence of environmental stimuli, and by changing the patterns and schedules of stimuli, we can change the behavior. Skinner referred to the type of behavioral learning he studied as operant conditioning.

Early in the twentieth century, the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov studied a second form of conditioning which came to be known as classical conditioning. If a bell rings and food is delivered, and this sequence is repeated a number of times in the presence of an animal, the animal will start to salivate and jump around eagerly when the bell goes on even before the food is delivered. The animal has been conditioned to respond to the bell. On the other hand, if a light goes on before a shock is delivered, and this is done repeatedly, the animal starts to shake just when the light goes on (presumably in anticipation of the shock). This is also classical conditioning. Many psychologists made a lot out of this second kind of example; it appeared to them that this was the mechanism involved in the learning of fears, anxieties, and phobias. A neutral stimulus becomes associated with something painful, and consequently the once neutral stimulus now provokes a fearful, anxious response. If one is bitten by a dog, the dog (and similar dogs) thereafter becomes frightening. We shake and tremble at the sight of a dog.

A key point that unites both of these types of conditioning, operant and classical, is that the behavior of humans and animals is basically the result of numerous learned habits. And further, these habits are provoked into manifestation in the context of environmental stimuli. Behavior is not what we would call a rational process; it is basically conditioned habits provoked by reinforcers and other stimuli. The behaviorists were by and large environmental determinists who viewed humans and animals as creatures of habit.

Clearly there's a deep philosophical difference between how a behaviorist understands human nature and how an existentialist understands it. The existentialists believe that we freely choose and create our personal identities and our behaviors, whereas the conditioning behaviorists believe that behavior is a set of habits under the control of the environment.

Is the power within us or outside of us? Are we creative beings or creatures of habit, under the control of stimuli? This issue definitely goes through my mind regarding sex. Am I my own master, or am I provoked into action by very attractive and highly reinforcing stimuli?

Bringing Plato and Freud back into the picture, Plato had argued that reason should rule our lives even if it is a difficult challenge. Freud believed that it was instinctual desires that ruled us, though Freud thought we could at least become aware of our primordial desires and find acceptable ways to sublimate them. The behaviorists basically rejected both of these answers: it is learned habits (not instincts) and it is the environment (not reason or instinct) that control things. Conditioned habits, especially phobias, can appear quite irrational; once bitten, forever afraid, and no matter how much we may reason with someone, the fear remains. The only "cure" is to extinguish the fear behavior by forcing the person to face the object feared and hope it doesn't bite again. Learned habits rule, not reason. In general, the behaviorists think human behavior, though habitual, is quite malleable and can be changed through conditioning,

since most of it is learned that way to begin with. For the existentialists, all of this is baloney; if we choose, we can transcend our habits, our environment, our instincts, even our reason. Reason is a crutch, as Kierkegaard or Nietzsche would argue. It is all bad faith; all excuses, alibis, and security blankets.

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The Hippies have a different answer: sex and drugs and rock' n 'roll. Or perhaps they have a medley of answers, often contradictory in nature: Get out of your head and get into your self (!?); ascend to Nirvana and get back into nature; fuck the establishment and return to a simpler, earlier time (which history teaches was even more repressive); stop conforming but look for acceptance, community, and love; be an individual but become one with all of humanity (including the Nazis?); find the truth underneath all the bullshit and propaganda but accept everyone's ideas as their special truth. But then the Law of Contradiction—that a proposition and its contradiction can't both be true—is a principle of rationalism, and the Hippies have a disdain for reason.

All told, for me the Hippies are a breath of fresh air: exceedingly Dionysian and Romantic (pure id covered in flowers and tie-dye), often superficial, frequently contradictory, exceedingly narcissistic, and highly creative. Though "into the present," the Hippies point to a totally different, spiritually liberating vision of the future.

The drug of choice of the Hippies—the quintessential symbol of the movement—is marijuana. When I first arrive in Storrs as a sophomore, college dorms have a history of high alcohol consumption, especially beer, a boisterous, high testosterone drug that brings out the wild beast in young males. Marijuana—grass, pot, weed—brings out something totally different. It seems to quiet and focus the human mind; to send one off into the metaphysical, into the mystical, into outer space. Young males drunk raise hell; young males stoned seek God and sex (perhaps the same thing). In my sophomore year, it is kegs of beer in the dorm. In my junior year, it is the dark room at the end of the hallway. The smell of the place changes.

I am both drawn to the Hippies and yet never really part of them. I am studious and my hair is cut short. I am rational and controlled in my behavior. I move from my head. Yet, here is something different, rebellious, and adventuresome. I like that. They move from feeling and sensation. They have a different perspective on life, and they have a strong pull on me.

First, I love the music. Their philosophy, in fact, is in their music. After the highly repetitive and simplistic lyrics and rock music of the late fifties and early sixties, which includes even the early Beatles, something happens. Music becomes mystical, eerie, defiant, surrealistic, dissonant, complex, other-worldly, primordial, and erotic. A new picture of reality is being painted; a new philosophy of life is being worked out. As Plato said, "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything." Plato, of course, never heard the music of Jimi Hendrix or the Velvet Underground, but the philosopher's words definitely apply.

I also love the color and imagery of the Hippies. They are bright—they are orange and purple and magenta and lime green and raspberry. They create dreamscapes, alternate realities, psychedelic collages, and visions of heaven and hell

and they put these visions on their clothes and in posters and prints on the walls. They paint these images and colors on their bodies.

Best of all, the Hippies are into sex. They revel in sex. At twenty years old, images of naked women—often naked Hippie women—swim through my mind, calling me, enticing me. I am like one of Pavlov's dogs, salivating, feeling driven. I am like one of Skinner's rats in the box, wanting to press the lever over and over again. And the Hippies say "Go for it!"

If philosophy and psychology have drawn me in through the power of ideas, the Hippies persuade me through the senses.

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I am in the music. But the music also seems to penetrate into me; I have become the music. The music is driven—a harsh, grinding, thumping sound repeating itself, rising ever higher in intensity and tension. Strange sounds are coming at me, emanating from unidentifiable musical instruments from somewhere way out in space, from somewhere deep within the core of existence. It is Jimi Hendrix. It is "Are You Experienced?" I have never heard music like this before. I have never been so totally engulfed in sound. I have never heard notes and harmonies so clearly, so completely, so filled with beat and rhythm. I am listening to Hendrix with headphones on. I am in the dark room at the end of the hallway. I guess one could say that I have become experienced.

Is this also enlightenment?

Passion, Reason, and the Absolute

"Shiny, shiny, shiny boots of leather
Whiplash girlchild in the dark
Comes in bells, your servant, don't forsake him
Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart"
Velvet Underground

The issue of reason versus passion—first played out in my mind in thinking about Plato and Freud, and in obsessing over my relationship with Laura—rises up again in my junior year. I can feel it in the dissonance between my intellectual self and my personal draw toward the Hippies. The tension—the dialectic—of passion and reason also surfaces in my philosophical studies during that year.

While delving into "being and nothingness" (the title of Sartre's central philosophical work), thinking about rats in a maze, vacillating and pulsating through the sexual revolution, and losing myself in the music of Hendrix and the Beatles, in my third year of college I also take a course that is a comprehensive overview of the philosophers of the Western European Enlightenment. It is an Apollonian course that emphasizes precision, abstraction, and order.

The Enlightenment philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were into the study of knowledge, consciousness and the mind, perception, the nature

of ideas, and understanding the laws and structure of the universe. They approached all these fundamental topics and issues emphasizing the central importance of logic, conceptual clarity, observational evidence, and science.

Philosophical rationalism, the belief that reason and logic are the pathways to knowledge, goes back to Plato. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Kant, carrying on this line of thinking and all of whom I study in my junior year, are the great rationalists of the modern Enlightenment. But logic and reason are also seen by many thinkers of the Enlightenment as the road to freedom. Spinoza, Descartes, and Hume, for example, attacked the dogmatic traditions and religious superstitions of their era, believing they could free humanity from the shackles of ignorance, closed-mindedness, and misery through rationality. Human happiness, a better tomorrow, was to be found through reason.

As a second central value of the Enlightenment, it is important to be precise, clear, and accurate in one's thinking and one's statements (a big point in Descartes), and to be critical and reflective regarding the assumptions in an argument or statement of belief. To recall from Hume, one should be mindful of unwarranted assumptions and beliefs.

The third key theme—empiricism—is the philosophy that perception or observation is the foundation for knowledge. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were the great empiricist philosophers of the Enlightenment. For example, according to Locke, "There is nothing in the intellect that is not first in the senses." The rationalists and the empiricists were often at odds with each other, though, debating which was primary and more reliable regarding the acquisition of knowledge: reason or observational evidence. Yet Kant, "awoken from his dogmatic slumber" in reading Hume's extreme philosophical empiricism, attempted to synthesize reason and evidence—that is, rationalism and empiricism—into a comprehensive philosophy of knowledge.

And this brings us to the fourth main pillar of the philosophy of the Enlightenment: science. All the philosophers of the Enlightenment embraced science, and science seemed to combine both logic and observational evidence in its methods for discovering the truth of reality. Supporting the supreme value of science, many of the philosophers of the Enlightenment thought that the world could be transformed through the application of scientific principles and scientific knowledge.

In the late sixties, I see myself as a child of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. I study it and attempt to live and practice it in my life. I find the Enlightenment philosophers and their ideas very compelling; clearly both Spinoza and Hume have a big impact on me. One must follow reason—one must stick to the observable facts; one must reject superstition and dogma. Having been educated in the principles and practices of science, having taken numerous courses in biology, chemistry, and physics, I am very much in tune with the scientific world view and its values.

But life is not so simple—at least, not mine. On cue, as I am absorbing the philosophies of Spinoza, Hume, Kant, and Descartes, in my junior year a counter-reaction—a mirror image of opposing thoughts and feelings—also begins to emerge in me. In particular, I find myself questioning the life of the intellect and the singular dedication to reason as the key to the good life. For one thing, my study of existentialism gets me seriously questioning rationality, emotional detachment, and objectivity. And further, in the late sixties, within pop culture, reason has become the

enemy. Now it is passion, music, Eros, and a return to nature that promise freedom. This is the message of the Hippies, and I am in the middle of it. As part of the temper of the times, perhaps in sympathetic resonance, I experience my own Romantic rebellion.

To explain this further, let me describe Romanticism—which I also study in my junior year. The modern philosophical movement of Romanticism arose in nineteenth-century Europe in revolt to the extreme emphasis on reason and science in Enlightenment philosophy. Romanticism, on one hand, derived off of the Dionysian tradition going back to the ancient Greeks, and on the other hand, served as one key source of inspiration for the development of existentialism. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard could be described as Romantic philosophers as well as existentialists: they both attacked the supremacy of reason and talked about concepts such as faith, will, courage, and passion.

In general, Romanticism emphasized the critical importance of emotion and passion in human life. Many of the central spokespersons for Romanticism were artists, musicians, poets, and literary figures, though there were various philosophers within this movement as well, such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Schopenhauer. For these figures, feeling and emotion were the way to guide one's life. Reason was cold and abstract, impersonal and mechanistic. Love, passion, and the tumultuous ups and downs of personal experience were essential features of human existence and should be pursued and embraced, regardless of what reason said. In line with feeling and emotion, Romanticists also emphasized the creation, appreciation, and quest for beauty. The experience of beauty touches the heart and elevates the spirit in a way that logic and reasoning cannot. Finally, subjectivity and the inner/personal were considered more important than objectivity and abstraction. Reality must be felt and felt at an individual and subjective level, rather than thought through abstractly and objectively.

The Hippies are Dionysian and Romantic, a counter-cultural movement against the perceived rigid, orderly, and repressive modern way of life. The culture of the Hippies emphasizes feeling good; being spontaneous and living for the moment; personal experience and subjectivity; musical and artistic expression; and sexuality and free love unconstrained by tradition and social rules. As I reflect upon the philosophies of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, with the 60s revolution going on all around me, I frequently think that my intellectual life is missing the excitement, color, and adventure represented by the Hippies.

Hence, I am torn between philosophical polarities. I oscillate between reason and feeling, form and beauty, the abstract and the visceral. Although immersed in intense intellectual study, I think to myself that emotion, passion, and love are lost or minimized in a life excessively dedicated to reason, the intellect, and science. As someone who loves art and music, I find myself repeatedly drawn to painting, sculpture, beauty, and music whenever I over-saturate myself with abstract philosophy and science.

And then, of course, there are women and the erotic. The Hippie revolution amplifies the already charged currents permeating through me. How can one possibly incorporate this into a rationalist philosophy of life? Although I can think like a Freudian about women and sex, reducing the whole thing to primordial, procreative urges within me, it seems that my passion for the beauty, earthiness, sensuality, and softness of women reflects the Romantic side of me. Feeling a sense of emotional, personal, and sensual intimacy with another human being is something I connect with the female—the

lover and companion and dearest of friends. For me, a woman is more than simply an outlet for my primordial urges. She is a central archetype—perhaps the central archetype—of the Romantic side of me.

Writers such as Plato (the philosophical father of rationalism in the West) and Spinoza acknowledged human emotion but believed that reason must take the upper hand in life. (There is no sex in Spinoza.) Rene Descartes went so far as to define our distinctive mental reality as our capacity to think, to the exclusion of the passions. Descartes famously said “I think therefore I am” and not “I feel therefore I am.” Also, rationalists throughout history have tended to connect emotions with the body, whereas thought is connected with the mind, the mind being seen at a higher level than the body. (This is part of the legacy of Plato’s dualism, as well as that of modern Christianity.) Mind and reason are also frequently seen as the realm of order and harmony, whereas emotions and sensation are frequently connected the chaotic dimension of human life. In general, within either a rationalist or dualist mindset, emotionality and sensuality are devalued relative to reason and thought.

Yet, one can argue (and I frequently do to myself) that a complete picture of humanity and conscious experience must include both reason (thinking) and emotion (feeling). Though we may believe that reason is sufficient as a way to guide our lives, humans are clearly moved (perhaps even more strongly) by feelings as well, and this side of our inner nature cannot be ignored, trivialized, or suppressed. (This is Freud’s message.) Views which elevate reason above emotion are one-sided and incomplete. A more holistic view would be that life should equally be guided by what feels good, by emotion, and by the recognition that a life of the intellect without love and other feelings is an empty and colorless life indeed. One could even go so far as to argue (as Freud did) that the belief that reason does control or even can control human behavior is an illusion. Underneath the veneer of conscious rational thought lies primal emotions and drives (such as lust and anger) moving the human spirit. Life is not orderly nor can it be. It is filled with sound and fury. Rationalism is unrealistic.

In my junior year, I think that I need to aspire toward a more holistic and complete vision of my humanity, of who I am and what I should be. But how does one do this?

I am disciplined in college, but in the corner of my mind and from deep within my belly, something is calling out to me.

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The study of psychology can be divided into two major areas: the study of knowledge systems, including perception, learning, memory, and thinking; and the study of the personal—of emotion, motivation, the self, and personality. These two main areas of inquiry correspond roughly to the two dimensions of human reality emphasized respectively by the Enlightenment philosophers and the Romanticists. I find both psychological areas fascinating and compelling, and I bounce back and forth between the two in debating which area to focus on in my psychological studies. Thinking holistically, I want to understand them both.

In my junior year, I study personality theory with Dr. Pizarro. Dr. Pizarro is a practicing psychotherapist and a Freudian. He is not a natural teacher, as Turvey is, but

I love his class—his refined, smooth mannerisms, his clear fascination with the workings of the human mind, and his endless array of examples drawn from his clinical practice. Again, I do not simply sit and listen as a student, but I engage the material, the teacher, the ideas. I ask questions and debate Pizarro as he goes through one personality theorist after another, trying to assess who had the best ideas and explanations of the self, of the ego, of human motivation and emotion, of why we do what we do.

As I mentioned earlier, behaviorist psychology, especially in the study of learning, focused on environmental stimuli and bodily responses. There is no mention of mental states, such as thoughts and emotions, in its examination of human psychology. Personality theorists, running back to Freud and up to the present, generally came at it differently. Freud talked about inner desires and the conscious and unconscious; Freud talked about the ego and the super-ego. Other more contemporary personality theorists talk about the self, the male and female sides of the psyche, inner drives, inferiority and superiority complexes, anxiety, subjective experience, states of consciousness, thought processes, and happiness, depression, and self-esteem. Throughout its long history, personality theory has definitely been into the full richness and dynamics of human experience and the mind—going way beyond where the behaviorists thought it was scientifically permissible to go.

Personality theory, in fact, is that area of psychology that attempts to pull all the pieces together, to provide a holistic description of human psychology that includes the mind (thoughts, emotions, and consciousness), self-identity, behavior, the environment, and social influences. But perhaps most importantly, it is the area of psychology that addresses what is most personal. It is the area of psychology that seems to have the most relevance to self-understanding and the concrete reality of human life. If I want to understand myself, this is the place to go. If I want to understand how to live my life and how to direct my own mind, this is where it is at.

There are personality theorists, such as Neal Miller, who attempt to integrate the insights of Freud with the learning principles of behaviorist psychology—having the best of both possible worlds. Freud discovered/was into all of the “defense mechanisms” that people use to protect themselves psychologically against threatening thoughts, desires, memories, and environmental events. For example, according to Freud, we repress—we simply block out of consciousness—unpleasant desires and thoughts. We also displace: we throw our feelings about one person or thing onto something or somebody else where it is safer to do so. We project: we see in others things that we don’t like about ourselves. We rationalize: we attempt to come up with good reasons for our a-rational desires and our fears. We sublimate: we find socially acceptable ways (to keep our super-egos happy) to satisfy socially unacceptable desires (to keep our ids happy as well). We detach and dissociate: we attempt to block our feelings and approach things with only reason, as matter of fact.

Miller attempted to show how each of these defense mechanisms could be explained through learning principles; that defense mechanisms are conditioned habits of thought and behavior for reducing fear and anxiety. Repression is avoidance; it is like being in a Skinner box and getting reinforced for not thinking (not pressing the lever) about something shocking/painful. Sublimation is engaging in reinforcing behaviors that satisfy basic biological drives but avoid social punishment. We learn to ventilate our emotions around people or objects where we won’t get punished for doing so. As a

general principle, we learn through conditioning how to defend our egos and get what we want. We learn how to avoid conflicting with our super-egos. Defense mechanisms, as learned habits, develop because they lead to positive reinforcers and away from negative reinforcers. In all cases, there are reinforcers at work and learned habits of approach and avoidance.

I find Miller's ideas both interesting and convincing. They lend additional credibility to Freud, since Freud could be understood in terms of basic learning principles. Also, Miller helps me to understand myself. I can see how conditioning principles have shaped my personality. Of special interest, Miller studied and wrote about approach-avoidance conflicts, where the same stimulus can provoke both positive anticipation and fear. I can see myself as engaging in behaviors and habits of mind that generate conflicts involving approach and avoidance to the same thing. (This is how I feel about Laura; this is how I feel about the Hippies.) Miller makes sense of my ambivalence. He crosses the chasm between behaviorist thinking and ideas about mind and consciousness. The behaviorist, physically-anchored concepts of learning, such as reinforcement, extinction, environmental stimuli, and habits, can be applied to the human mind, that is, to our thoughts, our emotions and our neurotic machinations over life.

But in personality theory I also encounter Carl Rogers and the concept of self-actualization. Rogers takes a different tact than either Freud or the behaviorists; in some ways he sounds very much like an existentialist. Instead of focusing on the unconscious or how the conscious ego really serves the unconscious id, and instead of talking about publicly observable behaviors and learned habits, Rogers talks about the conscious self and about the fundamental drive in all of us to realize our potential. (In this he also sounds like Aristotle.) Rogers talks about creativity and love and the higher levels of psychological expression. For Rogers, self-actualization is a creative process and a positive, constructive impetus in all of us. Self-actualization is inhibited by internal and external critical judgments—by conditional acceptance—but is stimulated by unconditional positive regard. Rogers rejects the negative picture of the human psyche created by Freud; Rogers highlights what is uplifting and growth-promoting in people. For Rogers, the fundamental drive within us is not sex or aggression, or for that matter any basic biological drive, but rather striving toward self-actualization and the full and joyful flowering of our being.

One thing I learn from Rogers is that anxiety is not so much felt because there is something threatening in the environment, but rather we feel anxiety over ourselves, of what we may do or become that would transcend or challenge our own constraining and confining self-images. We learn how to hold ourselves in a box of what is deemed acceptable; we become our own worst enemies, our own jailor so to speak. Self-actualization is breaking free of our own inhibitions. After studying Rogers, whenever I start feeling guilty about my hopes and desires, I tell myself that all I am really trying to do is self-actualize—to create, to become, both very positive things. I feel better when I say this to myself ; I feel empowered.

I also find Rogers' interpretation of Freud's unconscious very provocative: It is not that we don't know certain things about ourselves; it is that we don't verbalize what makes us uncomfortable. Uncomfortable thoughts and feelings stay hovering around the perimeter of consciousness. We can feel them and sense them, but we don't want

to name them or look directly at them. But we know they are there. I think to myself on this one that I must be frightening myself, with my own bogymen hiding off in the corner of my mind, creating anxiety within myself over “unacceptable things” that I simply won’t fully admit to myself but really want to do.

All in all, Rogers strikes a chord in me. I connect with his idea that the primary human motive is self-actualization. I see myself in college as struggling, aspiring to self-actualize, to realize my potential. I see it as a struggle because I feel, rightly or wrongly, constrained by external forces, by customs, by traditions, by people around me. Perhaps this is some kind of excuse for inaction, a case of Sartre’s bad faith. Perhaps I am afraid to self-actualize and use others as an excuse—a defense mechanism. Whatever the case, I find Rogers inspirational, calling to me to grow, to become, convincing me that there is something dynamic and evolutionary in all of us.

Rogers is not the only personality theorist who talks about self-actualization. Carl Jung, much earlier than Rogers, discussed the concept as well and also made it central to his theory. Along with Freud, Miller, and Rogers, I also study Jung in the personality theory course. For Jung, the normal human psyche is fragmented, and self-actualizing is becoming whole. The “shadow”—the dark side within us—needs to be integrated in consciousness. Good and evil—that is, what we see as good and evil—must come together. The male and the female sides within everyone’s personality need to be raised to consciousness and brought into harmony too. We all are in search of our sexual complement, the anima to our animus or vice versa. The inner self and the outer mask—the “persona”—also need to become one. To be whole and self-actualized, we must realize integrity. Jung liked the symbol of the Yin-Yang, the Chinese diagram for representing the complementarity of opposites. Jung believed that mental health was a Yin-Yang, and that dualism and inner division were our downfall.

In Jung, once again, we see the idea that we are a house divided against itself, but Jung believed that wholeness could be realized, that inner enlightenment could be achieved. One simply had to look—to know how to look.

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After one semester in my junior year in pre-med, with my major in psychology and with the intent to become a psychiatrist, I decide that all the required lab courses in physics, chemistry, and biology are too time consuming. I ask myself if I want to spend my life doing psychotherapy and prescribing drugs. It is obvious: I want to become a scholar, a writer, a college professor. I decide at the end of the first semester of my junior year that I am going to go to graduate school and get a Ph.D.

But I love both philosophy and psychology, and by the time I finish my senior year I have earned enough credits for a double major in the two disciplines. I waver. Which discipline should I pursue in graduate school? I want to continue with both.

Just as I seem to get on a smooth academic track in my junior and senior years, Laura and I also settle into a very pleasant routine. I study during the week at Storrs, and either I go back to Waterbury or she comes and visits me on weekends. Often she brings along a homemade lunch or dinner, and we sit in the dorm cafeteria or out by one of the lakes where we toss bread to the ducks. Sometimes we hang around with other couples or go to one of the dorm’s weekend beer bashes. Invariably, we spend

time in my dorm room, the door locked, alone. Laura is lovely and she feels so good. I'm always happy to see Laura on Fridays, after having been apart all week. Through all of this, while I am thinking about my academic future, we talk about our personal future. The momentum is building.

But inside, I oscillate and I fragment; I approach and I avoid; I am drawn to the anima and to sexuality, and I am drawn to the intellect and the promise of freedom and adventure.

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It is a strange procession. Half a dozen tall, skinny, long-haired characters ramble down the center aisle, laughing, chatting, looking totally zoned out, provoking suspicion from the people sitting on either side of the aisle. They move down to the first row as I take up the rear. Am I part of this entourage? Do I want to be identified with them? But here I am with them, and we sit as close as we can get to the screen, ready to be blown away. But then, my friends are already blown away.

A low, powerful rumbling begins, a church organ playing its deepest bass notes, more mechanical and Newtonian than acoustical, moving through us and vibrating our seats. We feel the music before we hear it. We look upward into space as the earth, a startlingly white and blue orb, appears above us. The music grows in volume and pitch as the moon rises up from behind the earth. We brace ourselves. We surrender to the experience. And then the entire orchestra bursts forth in exuberance, trumpeting, singing, announcing the rising of the sun from behind the earth and the moon. It is Nietzsche: it is Zarathustra; the Overman is coming. But are we ready for this? Was Nietzsche really ready when he spoke of the death of God? How could he have possibly conceptualized the vision we are watching now? What did Nietzsche know about outer space, about the vast mysteries of the cosmos? The intelligence of the universe, the stars, the billions of galaxies extending to infinity, are calling out to us, leading us upward, transforming us, and evolving us. Once we were apes; now we are in the process of becoming ethereal space beings of translucent light. But it isn't God calling out to us. It is aliens. It is 1969. It is *2001*. It is to the infinite and beyond.

This is the second time I have watched this movie. The first time, a few weeks earlier, I watched it with Laura. The first time, I immediately recognized the beginning of the movie as based on Arthur C. Clarke's "The Sentinel," a science fiction story I had read years before. The apes at the start of the movie are new, though, as is the second half of the movie and the grand finale, the surrealistic, psychedelic light show that leaves me totally mesmerized and bedazzled. Laura listens afterwards as I try, rather unsuccessfully, to figure it out. Though she listens patiently, as she always does, I'm not sure if she cares about what the movie means, but I sure as hell do and I am dissatisfied with my grasp of things. The movie is an enigma; the movie is a revelation.

So I watch it again, this time with my Hippie friends, and my rational analytical mind again struggles to find sense in the sequence of ending scenes. Light—all the colors of the rainbow—streaming by, moving across a strange undulating landscape; a beautiful classical setting of white rooms and sculptures with ghostly voices in the background; the astronaut seeing himself age (Is that what's happening?) an immensely old man dying on the bed, reaching out toward the dark mysterious monolith (What are

these things?) Then there is death and transfiguration, a bubble of light emerging on the bed, and those big, round, wondrous, grey eyes, that space child, that angelic face gazing outward, now hovering in space, looking down on the planet earth. It is something. I know it is really something. I can see it and feel it, but my intellectual faculties—my reason, my rational, verbal mind—keep going "What the hell is this?"

After it is over, we all discuss the movie and Bob, my literature major, Hippie, Marlboro-smoking buddy from across the hall, explains his take on it. The movie makes perfectly good sense to him. It is a story of the promise of transcendence. It is a saga of a journey from our past to our future. We are apes; we are children; we are being guided along; we are evolutionary beings. We are living a mystery; of course it is enigmatic. The monoliths are a doorway, a portal into tomorrow. Of course they are dark and unfathomable, but we walk toward them anyway. We must. What else can we do? (A leap of faith?) I think to myself that we are like rats in the maze, being led along by pieces of cheese at juncture points along the way. Somewhere above, we are being watched and manipulated by a cosmic experimenter who wants to teach us how to get to the light—how to get to the future.

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It is another strange procession. I am observing it from someplace else, although I am in it. Several hundred people are watching us as we move down the aisle. Everyone is smiling. Everyone is dressed in bright dresses or summer suits. She is in white and I am in black. (What does that mean?) We look forward, and the promise of the infinite, of death and transfiguration, of transcendence into heaven, presents itself to us on the altar. The cross, in the center of it all, golden and glistening, is the portal into this promised future. I am thinking that I don't believe in any of this. I am asking myself what I am doing here.

I know: I am a being ruled by social expectations; I am captured in approach-avoidance; I am a being ruled by the id; I am a being controlled by comfort and guilt rather than adventure and courage. This is what is expected. Here we are, the male and the female, and when the penis goes up, reason goes out the window. This is socially sanctioned sex. This is our parents sending us forward on our journey through life. This is multiple causation—a convergence of forces. But this is no journey; this is no freely chosen act; this is not self-actualization. This is cause-effect and determinism, a set path.

But Laura is beautiful and loving. She and I have been together for almost five years. It is familiar. It is secure. She is happy with this, which makes me happy. It is simply a tradition that makes the parents happy as well. No need to make a big fuss about it. It will all be over by the end of the day.

Yet, I think that if there is a God up there, He must not not like what I am doing. I don't believe in Him, but I am watching Him anyway. I think I am doing all of this for a false God, a God of pretense. This is not Spinoza. This is not wisdom. This is the carrot and the stick. I'm supposed to believe in it all, supposed to appreciate and love Laura, to be committed to a future together. She is committed. I'm supposed to grow up. But I am a child, a child of the universe, a child of the Enlightenment, who listens to the Velvet Underground, obsesses over Sartre and Nietzsche, and believes in aliens.

Chapter Two
The Ecology of Mind

"*For things are things because of mind,*
as mind is mind because of things."
Hsin Hsin Ming

"Altogether the adherents of certainty are in the habit of believing that certainty is difficult to attain and that it needs long and patient research to uncover principles, or even single statements, that are not endangered by the fallibility of human discourse. As I have tried to show…the very opposite is the case. Certainty is one of the cheapest commodities, and it can be obtained once the problem has been set in the proper fashion."
Paul Feyerabend

The Theory of Facts

The cold in Minneapolis in the winter is the most intense I have ever experienced in my life. In walking home from school to my apartment, icicles form on my beard and mustache; I remind myself of Doctor Zhivago when, having struggled through a blizzard across the snow-swept desolation of Russia, he stops before a mirror in Laura's apartment and sees a face dark and frozen and covered in ice. Minnesota is not Siberia, but it redefines cold for me. I have to remove my glasses when I am outside in the winter because the metal frame gets so cold that it hurts the bones in my nose. One day the temperature drops to minus thirty degrees Fahrenheit, not counting the wind chill. One week straight the temperature never gets above minus ten degrees even at noon. It doesn't seem to snow much between late December and early March because, so I believe, the sky is literally frozen solid, preventing any moisture from coming down. The sky in the winter is a sheet of blue ice.

In Minneapolis I freeze. In Minneapolis, upon first moving there, I have another attack of homesickness—a sure sign that I am growing. In Minneapolis, my mind and my spirit are further shaken up and enlightened.

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The man with the orange hair is creating a diagram on the blackboard, and having run out of room at the bottom of the board, he continues the diagram onto the yellow wall below the board. It is difficult to make out his writing since he is using white chalk on the yellow wall. Lakatos barks out a comment regarding the sanity of the man with the orange hair. How does he expect the people in the audience to read what is written on the wall? The man with the orange hair, undoubtedly provoked by Lakatos, continues the diagram now onto the floor below. The people in the audience stand up

and move in closer to read what is written on the floor. Of course we do, for the man with the orange hair is as mentally brilliant and arresting as the color of his hair. Some would say he is one of the greatest minds alive in the world.

Bill and I are in the audience. The year is 1971. We are at the University of Minnesota, and we find the whole display of personal antics and soaring intellects extremely stimulating and entertaining. Bill is one of my best friends in graduate school, a psychology major like me but, again like me, with a real interest in philosophy as well. We attend many of the special events offered through the philosophy of science program, and Bill always wants to discuss the talks afterwards.

He is as intellectually driven as I am. Bill wears a long, curly beard and granny glasses. Short and muscular, already beginning to bald, he reminds me of a young Santa Claus. Bill possesses a really clear, sharp mind (one of the best I have ever encountered) and he is always a challenge to debate. He won't let me get away with any vague or unsupported assertions. I am constantly pushed into having to explain and clarify what I say. In his intellectual rigor as in his appearance, Bill is like Socrates.

Bill and I are fortunate indeed to be present at this talk, for the man with the orange hair, delivering a lecture on Aristotle, is Paul Feyerabend, one of the most fascinating and influential philosophers in the world. (His IQ is reputedly 190, the same as Einstein's). His companion and partner on their lecture tour is Imre Lakatos, another world-class philosopher and in many ways an equally amazing mind. Feyerabend is rather somber and serious, but a real showman. Lakatos is more animated and boisterous, with a high pitched voice, and the two of them engage in an ongoing competition to out-think and outmaneuver the other one in front of the audience. For most people, Lakatos would be very intimidating—he can't seem to sit still or shut up—and reputedly (who told me this?) before becoming a philosopher he was a member of the Hungarian Secret Police. Feyerabend, though, is unperturbed by Lakatos; steady and focused, he is really something to behold, stealing the show with his bright orange hair and eyebrows that twirl upward at the ends—a rather devilish look. I think he feeds on agitating Lakatos. Feyerabend walks with a cane due to a World War II injury in his spine (he was a captain in the Nazi army) and sports a bright green beret. There is a strange aura to him, a sense of deep mystery and independence within his soul. Even the sound of his name "Fire-Abend" adds to the power and mystique of his presence.

The University of Minnesota during the time I am a graduate student has one of the best philosophy of science departments in the country. One of my teachers in the department and the host for the Feyerabend-Lakatos debate, Herbert Feigl, is one of the last living members of the Vienna Circle, the intellectual group that created logical positivism. Feigl knew Einstein, Piaget, Bertrand Russell, and Wittgenstein, and seemingly every other great intellect of the twentieth century. The department, under Feigl's leadership, attracts national and world-famous figures, such as Lakatos and Feyerabend, who come and speak to their faculty and students. Though my major in graduate school is psychology, my minor area of concentration is the philosophy of science; thus I am on my way to getting an excellent graduate education in both psychology and philosophy, and I attend a variety of lectures (often with Bill) by guest presenters within the philosophy department. I read and study Feyerabend and Lakatos, and Feyerabend, in particular, influences my view of the world significantly. More to the point, Feyerabend challenges me. He and Lakatos visit Minnesota on several

occasions, and I find them exciting to watch and listen to. They are great teachers—great speakers. I pay close attention, for there is much to learn from them. There is no need for “student-teacher interaction”; these people have something to say.

One of the main points of Feyerabend’s philosophy is that there are no a-theoretical facts within science; indeed, there are no a-theoretical facts anywhere to be found. Providing numerous fascinating and convincing examples from the history of science, Feyerabend illustrates how facts do not stand alone but are always understood and perceived relative to a mental or theoretical framework. In spite of the presumed objectivity embodied in science, science is also relative to a point of view. Facts reported in scientific observation and experimentation are theoretically colored and interpretive. The theory a scientist believes influences both how the scientist perceives the world and how the scientist describes the world. The meanings of the terms used by the scientist in describing the world are determined by the theory of the scientist; the theory gives the descriptive or factual language its meaning. Consequently, within science there is no unbiased description of the facts; there are no pure facts.

When the dominant theory within a field of science changes, such as the shift from Newtonian physics to relativity and quantum theory, the facts, as well as the meaning of the words used to describe the facts, change. Space, time, matter, and energy did not mean the same thing for Einstein as they did for Newton. In Newtonian theory, the mass of an object is invariant and does not change as the velocity of the object changes; in Einstein, the mass of an object increases as its velocity increases. Mass, a fundamental “fact” of the physical world, is not the same thing for Einstein as for Newton. Moreover, in Newton, space and time are independent absolutes (containers) unaffected by the physical objects within; for Einstein, space and time are affected by physical matter: space is curved by the gravitational pull of objects, and relative time varies as a function of the relative speed of objects.

For Feyerabend, everything perceived, described, and understood is through the theory of the beholder. This thesis is actually just a modern day variation, with some interesting new twists, of an argument presented by the famous German philosopher of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant. Kant contended that all human experience is interpreted through a set of basic concepts of human understanding. Sensory perception is structured and given meaning in terms of a set of fundamental mental intuitions and categories of the human mind. There is no pure non-interpretive perception. There is no pure non-interpretive cognition of any kind. As I see it, Feyerabend, in his philosophy of science, is applying Kant’s basic argument to scientific observation and description. Kant, though, believed that the fundamental conceptual categories through which experience is interpreted are innate and unchanging, whereas Feyerabend argues (I believe correctly) that the theoretical concepts in science, which give facts and observations meaning, can and do change. Either way—Kant or Feyerabend—there is no absolute objectivity in human experience, and this includes science. There is an interpretative dimension and overlay in all human consciousness of the world. The world is an interpretation.

Throughout the history of philosophy and science, and also within spiritual and meditative practices, various people have proposed that it is possible to realize non-interpretive or non-conceptualized experience—to get at raw unfiltered consciousness. Such individuals have believed that there could be pure direct awareness of what

presents itself to (or within) the mind. Though it may require great focus, attention, and clarity of mind, it is at least possible to simply experience without interpretation. In fact, in everyday life a common distinction is made between straight-forward description and derivative interpretation as, for example, implied in the directive “Just state the facts,” as if one could just state the facts, as if there were “facts” that revealed themselves if you just opened your mind to them. Yet the theory of knowledge, going back to Kant and strongly defended by Feyerabend, is that there cannot be pure description independent of conceptualization and theory. There is no raw experience—it cannot be found. There is no “given.” There are no cold, hard facts. Feyerabend goes so far as to argue that theory is actually necessary in uncovering and recognizing facts; it facilitates the “seeing” of the facts. A theoretical belief system guides the perceiver in looking for certain kinds of things or features within the world. A theory selects the facts. A theory tells us how to see and what to see. Without it we can’t see at all.

The thesis of Kant and Feyerabend, of course, creates a big epistemological problem (“epistemology” being the philosophical word for the study of knowledge). If what they say is true, then it appears that we never really perceive the world as it is or know anything as it is, but only as it is structured and interpreted through the concepts and thinking operations of our mind. The world perceived—the world we say we know—is always a world structured and given meaning through the mind. The possibility of objective and direct knowledge seems cut off. All human experience is contaminated and biased.

I get a similar message in my cognitive psychology classes. While I am at the University of Minnesota, cognitive psychology is the new theoretical framework that is being championed for understanding the psychology of knowledge, challenging and replacing behaviorism. Cognitive psychology experimentally and scientifically studies the workings of the mind, something the behaviorists thought was impossible. Cognitive psychology creates hypotheses about the workings of the human mind and tests these hypotheses through scientific experimentation. Cognitive psychology studies memory, concept development, thinking, perception, intelligence, and language—all understood as capacities of the mind. But cognitive psychology describes all human experience and knowledge as a creation and construction of operations of the human mind. Perception is a mental creation and interpretative construction, filtered and shaped by the expectations, motives, and personality of the perceiver. The experiments demonstrate how people selectively filter out most of what is presented to them and how different people “see” different things depending on personal history, emotional states, and culture. Memory is not a record of facts, but a highly selective and interpretive mental construction. Different people remember the same events differently; memory seems more like an active re-creation than some kind of a playing back of a recording. The very structure of language seems to strongly influence how we think and what we are able to think about. The epistemological implications of cognitive psychology resonate with Kant and Feyerabend.

Now, the Kant-Feyerabend position on knowledge is not exactly the same as the philosophical idealism espoused by Bishop Berkeley. The two views can get mixed up. Berkeley argued that the objects of perception and human understanding are mental: the chair, the table, the tree, etc. are objects of consciousness, are within consciousness. Berkeley, in fact, called them “ideas.” The world we see around us is

really just in our minds. For example, the red we see and the spherical shape we see when we perceive an apple are really things and qualities in our consciousness. Whatever personal or theoretical interpretations we place on these objects of consciousness (apples are good to eat; apples are a fruit; apples are used in making pies, etc.) are beside the point. The raw objects of awareness are mental to begin with. There is no other world beyond these objects of experience (the only apple is the apple seen); there is no independently existing physical apple. There is nothing more than just what presents itself in consciousness. This is Berkeley.

Kant and Feyerabend though do not deny the existence of a material world. Cognitive psychology does not deny the physical world either. Rather they all argue that because all of our experiences are interpretive—given meaning and organization through mental concepts, theories, and belief systems—we cannot directly know this external world. We are not acquainted with objective facts because all the "facts" which we perceive and understand have been placed in a conceptual framework. We get a second-hand version of the world—we get an interpretive version of everything. So the key point in Kant and Feyerabend (and the cognitive psychologists as well) is that it is the act of mental interpretation, of selecting, organizing and giving meaning to our experiences with concepts and theories, that makes everything experienced subjective.

Yet, in spite of this difference between Berkeley and Kant-Feyerabend, one conclusion which follows from either position is that we cannot directly experience or know about an independently existing, external, objective world (whether there is one or not). Our minds are trapped within themselves, in a world of consciousness and subjective interpretation, and disconnected from whatever may or may not lie beyond. As Kant would say, we cannot get at the "thing-in-itself" that we believe exists independently of our experiences.

Carrying this view to an extreme—that we are trapped within our individual interpretations and conscious minds—one could argue that we can only know our individual minds and the content in them, for what else do we really experience? We can really know nothing more. I cannot know if someone else has conscious experiences or even if he or she exists. Everyone—everything else—may be a figment of imagination, an ungrounded speculation and nothing more. This philosophical view is called solipsism: I only know that I exist and nothing more.

But if you follow through on the Kantian-Feyerabend thesis, solipsism can't even hold itself up. Even the personal core of consciousness that one presumably "knows" is really interpretation—colored and formed by theories, beliefs, and biases. That is, I think I exist, and I think I feel this or that sensation or feeling, but even this is interpretation. "I" am nothing but a theory; is there really a me? Recall David Hume on this point. Solipsism is an interpretation.

Thinking along lines like these liberates the mind. Nothing is taken as a given; there is no place to stand. You feel enlightened and you feel very, very dizzy.

Feyerabend is also very critical of the search for certainty, a quest for absolute, guaranteed knowledge that goes back to Plato, and a belief or an aspiration that also shows up in most religious and spiritual traditions as well. As Feyerabend states it, certainty is actually a cheap commodity, one connected not with a state of enlightenment but rather with dogmatism and closed-mindedness. According to Feyerabend, it is better to be uncertain and open to the possibility of modifying or

evolving one's beliefs. When one is certain, the search is over; there can be no growth, no revision of beliefs or ideas. Only with an open mind can a person evolve and transform. Trying to find something certain to hold onto is a form of retreat from reality, a defense against the challenges and perplexities of life. It is the absolute epitome of human hubris and the anti-thesis of real knowledge. What we thought was good—to know for sure—is really very bad.

To understand Feyerabend's philosophical skepticism and his rejection of the value of certainty, it is important to look at the ideas of his teacher, Karl Popper, another great philosopher of the twentieth century whom I study in graduate school. Popper believed that what distinguishes science from religion is that scientific hypotheses and theories are formulated in such a way that they can be tested (through experimentation) and potentially falsified. That is, scientific theories open themselves up to the possibility of refutation; scientific theories stick their necks out. For Popper, this is good. Religion, on the other hand, protects itself from risk. Religious people won't change their minds no matter what evidence is brought forth. This is not good. Hence, for Popper, the fact that religious people argue that they are certain in their beliefs and that nothing can change their minds is a weakness, not a strength. The fact that scientists acknowledge that they can be wrong in their theories is a strength. Without this openness to being in error and the actual process of discovering one's errors, science would not progress. For Popper, intractable certainty is not something good, but rather a form of willful stupidity.

Another one of Popper's students whom I read, William Bartley, presented a general principle to capture this philosophy of openness to error. He describes this general principle as the core of being rational. The principle is: "Every principle is open to question, including this principle." I find this formulation ingenious, since it acknowledges that one is uncertain even about one's uncertainty. This principle is the ultimate (if anything is ultimate) expression of critical self-consciousness.

Wilfred Sellars, another contemporary philosopher whom I study intensively at Minnesota, modified this principle of ubiquitous criticality in a way I think is both realistic and equally ingenious. In science, according to Sellars, any principle or idea can be questioned and subjected to critique, but not everything in science all at once. There would be no place to stand relative to which you could critique; you would fall into the abyss.

Granting Sellars's point, I still think Bartley is onto something—something that has to do with courage and openness to reality and oneself, as much as rationality. In Bartley's book, *The Retreat to Commitment*, he argues that whenever one takes a stand and commits to a view, one has backed off and retreated from serious thinking and the quest for knowledge; this idea is clearly inspired by Popper, who believed it was always important to stick your neck out, take risks, and be open to change. The philosophy of Feyerabend emerges out of this critical rationalism taught by Popper and espoused by Bartley.

Around this time, in the early 1970s, Feyerabend comes out with an article titled "Against Method," which he later turns into a book, the main thesis of which he describes as an "anarchistic theory of knowledge." In the article and book he contends that whatever the principle of investigation, research, or thinking that scientists presumably use in their practices to arrive at knowledge about the world, one can

always find exceptions in the history of science to the principle or rule; indeed sometimes breaking the rule turns out to be a good thing. In essence, he contends that in science “anything goes” (or at least might go, given the circumstances), which actually, in a deeper essence, means that “nothing goes.” One cannot say that any principle or rule of investigation will guarantee you the discovery of “truth.” There is no “for-sure, it will work if you just keep doing it” approach that will inevitably lead to success. He even throws this point back on his teacher Popper. Falsification isn’t always practiced—it doesn’t always work. There have been times in the history of science when even though the facts seemed to contradict the theory, the theory was not given up, and it turned out that this was a good thing.

There are no guarantees, no methods that will unequivocally lead you in the right direction. Again, there is no place to stand—in fact, there is no way to walk that guarantees you won’t fall off the edge. And any idea, no matter how crazy, just might be the right way to go. Again, the mind is opened up; the mind is enlightened; it is all an adventure and you can’t get away from this. Adventure, in fact, should be embraced; commitment is a security blanket.

A third important idea in Feyerabend is his pluralism. For Feyerabend, disagreement and multiple points of view are positive things; both science and human society need a plurality of voices. If everyone agrees, we become static and closed in our thinking. Disagreement generates the questioning of beliefs, keeping our minds flexible and growing. Disagreement is necessary for a democratic and open society. Disagreement is necessary for science. Feyerabend teaches me, through this philosophical pluralism, that science is a competitive reality (between different theories) and that this competition is good; it generates growth. Again, Feyerabend’s conclusions run counter to popular beliefs. It is often said that it is a good thing when everyone agrees; that it indicates unity and strength; that it is good “to be on the same page.” Yet what Feyerabend says here is that a house divided against itself is not a bad thing at all. It is healthy and growth-promoting. When we all agree, we die.

And I ask, what does this mean regarding states of mind? A house divided against itself—even if the house is one’s mind—is not a bad thing; it is a plus to be in a state of inner conflict, at the very least, a state of inner disagreement. It keeps you growing and on your toes.

All told, Feyerabend has a number of very important, very convincing points regarding the philosophy of knowledge; at least he raises my consciousness on things. In fact, to use one prime example, his defense of scientific pluralism in the early 1970s is my first real encounter with the idea—an idea that will grow in popularity in the coming years—that diversity of points of view has real value. Also, I find his critique of the quest for certainty right on target and absolutely liberating. People who are certain bother me. How can they be so smug, so convinced? How can they say that they “see the truth,” that they just “know it”? To me, they seem closed off to the world, incapable of having an open and honest conversation with anyone. They are trapped in their interpretations, mistaking them for reality. Resonating with Bartley, I find such people less than rational. I cannot feel certain about anything and, after Feyerabend, I see this character trait as something positive.

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Aside from Bill, another new friend I make while in Minneapolis is Tom. Recently transplanted from Milwaukee and Marquette University, Tom lives in the same apartment complex as Laura and I, and he is a graduate student, like me, in psychology. But whereas I am trying to figure out a direction of study that synthesizes philosophy and psychology, Tom is in clinical psychology. Tom and I find many areas of resonance though: we both love history and fine liquors, and we both obsess over the meaning of life. We spend many evenings together, often with Bill or Laura, drinking beers and talking about what it all means. Tom is a bit depressive though, and in spite of my ongoing philosophical education in skepticism, I tend to take the more optimistic position in our conversations. Yet, Tom is a very kind and gentle soul, a big guy who loves to play basketball almost every afternoon as an outlet for the tension that builds up in him as a consequence of being subjected to the intense load of study required of a psychology graduate student.

As part of his program of study, Tom takes a variety of courses in psychological testing, and needing someone to practice on, he turns me into a guinea pig for his educational development. I take the *MMPI* (*Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory*), responding to over 400 questions on my likes, dislikes, attitudes, and beliefs, and Tom scores it. I score high on several scales—two or three standard deviations above the average or mean. (I'm in the top five to ten percent on these scales.) I guess my high scores confirm to Tom that I am a bit "crazy." Of special note, I am three standard deviations above the mean on the obsessive-compulsive scale. Tom assures me, though, that this is actually an adaptive trait for a psychology graduate student. I am exceedingly organized and disciplined and ponder over ideas incessantly in my mind, an aberration in my character that is really a strength for someone who is an academician. Tom admits to me that he is high on the same scale as well, though not quite as high as I am. I also score high on the feminine scale for males (a strong anima in me) and high on the unconventionality scale; social norms and rules do not influence me as greatly as the average population. I believe psychopaths score high on this scale as well. Tom connects this trait with my fascination with philosophy, unorthodox ideas, science fiction, and the fantastic. That is, I am disposed toward order but drawn toward the abyss.

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It is sometime around 3:00 a.m. and Laura and I are asleep in our bedroom in our apartment. We wake up with a start. There is a loud banging on the sliding glass door in our living room. I jump up and go into the living room as the banging continues. I flick on the outside lights and slowly, cautiously pull back the blinds to see a guy I don't know standing on our patio looking crazy, mad, and drunk. He tells me to let him in. I refuse and he gets even more agitated. I yell to Laura to call apartment security. I'm scared shitless. Who is this person and why is he demanding to come into our apartment? I try talking to him. He says that he lives here and wants to go to bed. I tell him that he doesn't live here, that he has the wrong apartment. This pisses him off even more. I'm afraid he is going to punch a fist through the glass. He starts scratching his face, getting crazier by the minute. Somehow it comes out that he lives on the third floor

of the complex, but he can't seem to understand that if he is standing on a ground floor patio this can't be the entrance to his apartment.

Finally, having been roused from his sleep, the security guy for the apartment complex shows up. He is a cop who moonlights as a guard for the apartments. He is carrying a gun. The guard convinces the crazy guy on our porch to walk around to the front entrance of the complex and come in that way. I go out to the front entrance with the guard, and we go up the elevator with the guy to his apartment. On the elevator going up, the guard is acting cool, but his hand is resting on the gun in his holster. The guy disappears into his apartment, and I never see him again.

I can't sleep for the rest of the night. I am bothered over the fact that I am so frightened over the incident. I am bothered over the fact that someone—anyone—given sufficient levels of insanity, pathology, drunkenness, stupidity, or disregard for others, can simply crash into the presumed security and privacy of one's home. I am bothered by the realization, at a gut level, that, yes—indeed—there truly are demons out there in the darkness prowling around. I am bothered over the fact that the universe is neither a secure nor stable place; there is no absolutely solid place to stand, no impregnable fortress to hide within.

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In spite of my admiration for him, I find aspects of Feyerabend's philosophy questionable if not disconcerting. For one thing, a plurality of conflicting beliefs can have negative consequences as well. Is there not value in coming to agreement? And what is the value in arguing and competing over everything? Too many different voices or opinions can be unsettling and disruptive, or disorienting and confusing, leading to mental and behavioral paralysis and gutless, wishy-washy relativism. It can lead to chaos.

And isn't there value in commitment? Isn't it important to take a stand? If everything is open to question, the ground collapses beneath your feet. If you can't commit to anything, how can anyone count on you? How can you possibly make any headway in life? How can you realize love?

Moreover, within Feyerabend's system, where all facts are theoretical and subjective, it seems impossible to know anything. How can we compare our beliefs with reality if we can't find reality? Further, how can we compare and evaluate different points of view if everything is theoretically biased?

Yet aren't some ideas better than others? It would seem so, yet relative to what, if everything is subjective? (How can I even evaluate Feyerabend?) Dogmatism may be suffocating, but complete skepticism or subjectivism is totally disabling.

Within Feyerabend's framework, even Popper's notion of the falsifiability of scientific theories suffers a blow, since there are no indubitable experimental facts (since all facts are theoretical and subjective) relative to which theories can be falsified. If I can't be certain about the facts, how can I be certain that the facts contradict the validity of the theory? We can't even know for sure when a belief is wrong.

At the heart of the matter, Feyerabend's philosophy raises deep questions on the nature and possibility of truth. Can we discover the truth? What indeed is truth? More to the point, is there such a thing as truth? If all perceptions, beliefs, and statements are

interpretive and subjective, how can we possibly believe that the “truth” is something we can discover? Isn’t truth something objective, independent of a point of view? Yet how can we possibly get at the objective (if such a thing even exists), if everything is subjective?

No question about it—Feyerabend is a challenge. In my mind there is something about what he is saying that rings very “true,” but the implications seem too extreme and disastrous to the pursuit of knowledge. I will spend much of my four years in graduate school trying to figure a way out of this relativist, subjectivist epistemological quagmire.

All of this is not simply academic head spinning; these philosophical issues have relevance to real life. In our present world we seem to have one faction of humanity (albeit divided into many camps) thoroughly convinced that their version of the truth is the real truth. These various camps of “true believers” continuously fight each other over their particular versions of the truth. Each is certain of their view and equally certain that every other view is wrong (the problem with dogmatism). Then there is another group, uncertain about life and willing to acknowledge everyone’s version of the “truth” as equally valid and worthwhile, which, in essence, is to abandon the notions of truth and right and wrong altogether. The first cluster—the true believers—are stubborn and militant; the second group is spineless and non-committal. The first group sees the second group as mindless, egocentric, and immoral; the second group sees the first group as dangerous, if not evil. We seem caught between the Devil and the deep blue sea. Where is the way out of it all?

Lakatos, for one, finds the relativism, subjectivism, and skepticism of Feyerabend highly disturbing. This is what they argue about. Lakatos believes that there is a way to determine, at the very least, whether or not we are making progress in our quest for knowledge, even if it might not be possible to arrive at some final complete truth. (We can justifiably say “better” though we can never say “best” or “for sure.”) Further, Lakatos thinks that one can compare and evaluate different points of view and determine which view is superior and which is inferior.

Lakatos’s philosophy of science is based on a fundamental distinction between what he refers to as “progressive” and “degenerative” problem shifts. A progressive problem shift involves a theory that repeatedly anticipates new discoveries and facts: the theory makes predictions that (seemingly) are confirmed. A degenerative problem shift involves a theory that is continuously trying to explain, after the fact, new discoveries that it didn’t anticipate or predict. A progressive problem shift is on the offense; a degenerative problem shift is on the defense. A progressive problem shift anticipates change; a degenerative problem shift keeps defending against it. Lakatos believes that one can compare competing theories by looking at whether they are progressive or degenerative. A belief system or theory that is degenerative should be abandoned in favor of a progressive belief system that is anticipating new discoveries and facts.

As a psychology graduate student I look at the philosophy of Lakatos within the framework of human motivation and personality. His distinction between progressive and degenerative problem shifts connects with a variety of ideas I have learned in psychology. For one thing, it sounds similar in ways to how mental health and neurosis are defined and contrasted with each other. Mental health is forward looking and

generates progressive change in life; neurosis is defensive and motivated by fear and anxiety, constantly protecting against threatening realities. In essence, mental health is a state of hopeful anticipation; neurosis is a state of anxiety-driven defensiveness. Doesn't this sound similar to progressive and degenerative problem shifts?

Neal Miller captures a related idea in his distinction between approach and avoidance motivation. Approach motivation moves toward something positive; avoidance motivation moves away from what is perceived as negative. Approach generates growth; avoidance generates stagnation. In Lakatos, there is also this distinction between approach and growth, and avoidance and stagnation.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow, in fact, argues that there are two fundamental forms of human motivation: growth motivation and security/stability motivation. If security/stability is motivated by fear, growth is motivated by hope. Connecting Maslow's motivational theory with mental health and illness, mental health can be seen as more growth-motivated and mental illness as motivated more toward stasis. It seems that in Lakatos, a progressive problem shift reflects a hopeful and growth-motivated mindset, whereas degenerative problem shifts reveal fearful and static mindsets. Further, a progressive problem shift generates new things; a degenerative problem shift explains new things away.

Hope and fear, growth and stagnation, approach and avoidance, health and illness: all these dichotomies in psychology connect with how people view adventure and uncertainty in life. Is a person open or defensive? Is a person forward thinking or dogmatic? It seems to me that, in his distinction between progressive and degenerative problem shifts, Lakatos is attempting to capture the difference between growth and dogmatism. Clearly growth is preferred over dogmatism.

In thinking all of this through, it hits me that perhaps progress in the growth of knowledge is similar in dynamics to mental health and psychological growth. The positive pursuit and realization of knowledge is governed by hope, a spirit of adventure, and creative anticipation. There is a clear and strong sense of optimism regarding the future.

Further, in spite of their differences, I realize that it is possible to identify a major point of agreement between Lakatos and Feyerabend on the central value of growth. Feyerabend, to recall, advocates for the importance of growth over security and certainty. His pluralism, his anarchistic theory of knowledge, his critical stance toward the status quo in the philosophy of science: all reflect the value he sees in epistemic transformation and growth. What Lakatos wants to add is that the key differences in dynamics between growth and security, between being anticipatory of change or defensive against it, can serve as a basic criterion for evaluating the value and validity of a belief system. Hence, it seems to me that for Lakatos knowledge exists in a state of growth. When a belief system stops growing, it is no longer knowledge; again, it is willful ignorance. I think perhaps it is also madness.

But there is another person I need to bring into this discussion on the nature of knowledge and the issue of growth. Thomas Kuhn, the historian of science, is a contemporary of Feyerabend and Lakatos to whom I also have the pleasure of listening in-person around the same time. Kuhn is immensely influential during the 1970s (more so even than Feyerabend or Lakatos), and he is an amazingly sharp, animated and forthright individual who overpowers his critics with his energy, intellect, knowledge, and

personality. The day I listen to him, I watch how effectively, after his presentation, he handles his opponents in the audience, many of them full professors in philosophy.

I never get to see Kuhn go at it one-on-one with Lakatos though, the way I have watched the latter duel it out with Feyerabend. What a spectacle and battle that would be. Lakatos, when he talks about Kuhn, is even harder on him than on Feyerabend. Lakatos believes that Kuhn, with his great impact on the intellectual culture of the time, is significantly undermining the ideal of objectivity in science in favor of a philosophy of subjective free-for-all. Lakatos thinks that Kuhn is arguing that scientific beliefs and scientific change are determined by mob rule. Lakatos can't stand this. He thinks Kuhn is encouraging people to abandon the quest for truth.

In the early 1960s, Kuhn wrote an extremely influential and controversial book, perhaps one of the most noteworthy philosophical works of the twentieth century, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Contrary to the traditional view that science grows through the accumulation of facts and principles, in his book Kuhn argues that science goes through revolutionary periods of transformation where an old "paradigm" in an academic discipline (Kuhn liked the word "paradigm" better than "theory") is abandoned in favor of a new paradigm of thinking and research. Everybody everywhere in graduate schools across the country has to read Kuhn's account of scientific change, and the pervasive popularity of the word "paradigm" in contemporary thought derives from Kuhn's great influence.

Scientific change, according to Kuhn, is not so much cumulative and piecemeal as abrupt, involving total Gestalt switches in mind and behavior. When a new paradigm arises, both the language and the presumed facts of the discipline dramatically change. In fact, according to Kuhn, the new paradigm is incommensurable with the old paradigm. Followers of the old and the new paradigms cannot meaningfully communicate with each other. Further, given the deep change in thinking and perception in a "paradigm shift," it is difficult to describe how the new paradigm is an improvement over the old paradigm, since there aren't any points of common comparison. The new paradigm is judged in terms of new facts, which are different from the old facts that served as a foundation for the old paradigm.

A scientific theory, narrowly defined, is a set of abstract principles (often statements of general laws) that explain and bring integrative coherence to some domain of nature. But Kuhn thinks it is better, more realistic and comprehensive, to describe science in terms of "paradigms." Following Kuhn, it is best to think of a paradigm as a way of life, including the theories, beliefs, values, types of experimental equipment, social networks, and practices of a group of scientists. Paradigms subsume theories; a paradigm is the total Gestalt of thinking, perceiving, behavior, and instrumentalities of a scientist (or usually group of scientists). People who subscribe to different paradigms literally live in different universes.

Like Feyerabend, Kuhn is strongly criticized by philosophers and scientists who believe that there is real progress and cumulative growth in science. In particular, in opposition to Kuhn, Lakatos's view of degenerative and progressive problem shifts is a way to demonstrate how one could evaluate whether progress is occurring in a theoretical perspective or not, and how one could compare different theoretical perspectives. But if one accepts Kuhn's ideas on paradigms and paradigm shifts, then it

is difficult to see how one can say—from some detached point of view (of which there really is none)—that one paradigm is better than another.

Furthermore—bringing Feyerabend back into this philosophical confrontation—the great skeptic that he is, Feyerabend has a counter for Lakatos and all other philosophers who believe that they have a criterion for determining either truth or progress. A theory may look like it is getting nowhere; it may appear contradicted by the facts, or may appear degenerative and protective, but at what point in time do you decide that it makes sense to abandon the theory in favor of a different one? As is often the case in science, as well as in life, there are times when it turns out to be a wise move to hold onto a point of view a little longer until things turn around, and what appears to be going nowhere all of a sudden takes off in a positive direction. The question is: When do you fold your hand? When do you ask for a new deal? (And for that matter, at what point do you decide that you're neurotic or crazy and you'd better do something different with your life?) For Feyerabend, there is no absolute rule for how to decide, to know for certain that you are doing the right thing. (Recall Feyerabend's critique of scientific method.) Sometimes tenacity is called for, and what could be seen as blind stubbornness turns into commendable faith.

So perhaps it is more like some kind of psycho-social phenomenon, some psycho-social momentum that builds up, reaches an intolerable crisis and level of agitation, and wham-o, there is this shift and jump in thinking and behavior, as Kuhn would argue, and God knows if there is any rational method or rule behind the process. Again, Lakatos finds this view of scientific change intolerable; it undermines the empiricist and rationalist ideals regarding the acquisition of knowledge.

All told, to hit the nail on the head, for writers such as Feyerabend and Kuhn, a great myth has been propagated through popular culture, academia, and our educational systems: Science is not the cold, objective, dispassionate search for truth built upon the accumulation of facts, rational deduction, and a set of hard and fast rules. Science textbooks have misled people into thinking that there is some clear, definable scientific method for uncovering natural laws and accumulating unambiguous statements and observations of factual truth. Objectivity, facts, and scientific progress are myths.

As I have said, studying the philosophy of knowledge and science in the late 1960s and early 1970s introduces me to the problems of truth and progress. Can we know the truth? Is one view as good as the next and, if not, how do we determine which view is better? Can we make progress in the growth of knowledge, and if so, how do we determine if we are? And more generally, how do we define the nature of progress in any sphere of human activity such that we can assess whether we are going in a positive direction or a negative one? These questions have relevance for epistemology, mental health, and the overall well-being of human civilization.

The *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s and 1970s, though, is with Feyerabend and Kuhn. It is the era of the liberalism of the Hippies and the rise of postmodernist philosophy, and Kuhn, in particular, is one of the central icons of postmodernism. For postmodern philosophy, all facts and all values are relative (personally, historically, and culturally); objectivity is a myth; objectivity is a theory; objectivity is propaganda used for purposes of social control. As a graduate student I am learning that everything is open to criticism. Nothing is certain. Nothing is unequivocally true, even the supposed indubitable facts of

science. So much the better, perhaps. It all feels very liberating: attack all dogmas and tear down the walls. Long live the revolution!

But to go the extreme and conclude, as many postmodern philosophers do, that truth and objective knowledge are impossible and, in fact, nonsense, and progress is an illusion is too much for me. Clearly interpretation and subjective perspective come into our beliefs and perceptions of the world. But it seems to me that subjectivism (in the extreme form) is confused and self-contradictory. If every statement is relative and there is no objective truth, then this statement itself is relative and not objectively true. And what starts off as liberating may kill you in the end.

Dionysius and the Music of the Spheres

To further churn up the workings of my mind in my first couple years of graduate school—while I am studying Feyerabend, Lakatos, Kuhn, and all the others—new things pop into existence and miracles occur; Laura and I are drawn together and stretched apart; I discover a new kind of truth and contract an uncontrollable addiction; my brain gets re-wired; and a very dark and frightening yet compelling vision of the future comes knocking at the door.

To explain, all my philosophical pondering on knowledge and progress plays back on my relationship with Laura. Though I find the extreme pluralism, relativism, and skepticism of Feyerabend and others too much, I also see the value in an open society, in an open forum of exploring ideas and following the pathway of critique and counter-critique—of considering the alternatives—where nothing is taken for granted and nothing is assumed. If there is a direction toward the truth—a direction to progress and sanity—then one needs to get things out in the open and see where they lead. (This all sounds a little like Freud, a little like Plato too.) I have such open, exploratory conversations with Tom and with Bill—sometimes we drive ourselves crazy in such dialogues—but I can't seem to do this with Laura. I want to think things out, to go on the adventure of possibilities, to feel a sense of mental freedom, but Laura isn't into philosophy and she sure is into commitment. I seem like a relativist to her, unable to hold still, which provokes anxiety in her. Conversely, she seems like a dogmatist to me, unable or unwilling to explore and to grow, which provokes feelings of entrapment in me.

This lack of resonance on how to search for what is true and good is a continuation of what emerged in the beginning of our relationship—when I first got into philosophy and psychology—only now it is further fueled and amplified by the ultimate iconoclast and freedom fighter, Paul Feyerabend, and all the other postmodern rebels of the early 1970s.

It is an ongoing challenge to our stability and happiness. How can we possibly synthesize such opposite mindsets and approaches to life?

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It is the anima and animus of things, the coupling of male and female, the undulation and interpenetration, the procreative act. A miracle occurs—of flesh and the

substance of the body—that draws Laura and me toward each other, even while our respective and diametrically opposed epistemologies pull us apart.

In essence, it is the ontological act of creation: things pop into existence, rearranging the entire configuration of reality. First something isn't there, then it is—or conversely, what is, may disappear. Things are born and things die. Life is not smooth and linear. There are ruptures and percolations in the flow of events—like Kuhn's paradigm shifts.

Bryan pops into existence in the summer of 1970. I become a father. For the first time in my life I feel unconditional and total love for someone. As a baby, Bryan obviously can't offer me anything except his wonderful and adorable presence, and that is enough. I look at him and feel amazement, awe, and wonder over him. He is this strange new person in my life, and I feel nothing but warmth, affection, and protectiveness toward him.

Of course, there is the scientific explanation of how a baby forms: the sex, the fertilized egg, the dividing of cells and the differentiation of body parts, and the growth of the embryo into a fetus. But at another level of existence—the level of conscious human selves—a baby is a new being, a new Gestalt, that emerges into the world. This brute fact blows me away. I must say that after this experience with Bryan, the raw fact of the creation and the emergence of the unique in the universe really sticks in my mind. New things happen. New things pop into existence.

Bryan unites Laura and me. We have created something we both love. We both watch Bryan grow, and we both find him adorable and totally lovable. We bundle him up and take him out into the Minnesota cold. We take him everywhere. Though I am immersed in my books and my studies, we have this new person in our family that brings happiness to both of us. A calm and deep sense of good feeling permeates through us over Bryan.

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But then there is Beethoven, also popping into my existence around the same time, sending a tumultuous wave out across our tenuous sea of stability. Asserting himself in all his power, precision, and passion, he not only further unsettles the life trajectory of Laura and me—adding more tension into the scheme of things—but also challenges the philosophical relativism I have been studying in graduate school. He says enough is enough, here is what it all means.

Beethoven is an existential rupture and experiential revelation.

Sitting in my study as a graduate student, reading essays by Feyerabend and other philosophers and psychologists regarding how the human mind presumably constructs experienced reality, I have recently begun listening to Beethoven. As I immerse myself in his music, it hits me that there is nothing relative about him. Beethoven penetrates to the heart of reality and reaches upward to the heavenly heights. He is truth, beauty, and the good, a synthesis of the highest ideals of Plato and the Greeks and everyone who comes after that. The journey toward these ideals is not an illusion. Beethoven is the proof—a proof that transcends logic and philosophy, as well as the messiness of life. Here is something you can believe in.

But Beethoven, the classical composer? Where did he come from? How did he enter into my consciousness? Sure as hell, I did not grow up listening to Beethoven in Waterbury, Connecticut.

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It is sometime in the near future, but "the future ain't what it used to be." I am having trouble watching it. Laura is really having a problem and cannot take it any longer. She gets up and leaves. I am torn between getting up and following her, or continuing to sit and have my senses assaulted by this vision of the shape of things to come. Any real vision of the future, one that stretches and pulls on the present, should cause cognitive dissonance, and sure as hell I am experiencing dissonance on many levels right now. On the screen before me a woman has just been murdered by a man wielding a giant, white ceramic penis.

For over half an hour I have been waiting to see where all of this is going, while one act of "ultra-violence" after another gets committed up on the screen. The villains in the movie are a young punk gang all dressed in white, with external jock straps/penis protectors proclaiming their testosterone egos. They sport black derby caps and drink some juiced-up milk concoction that flows out of the nipples of manikin nudes in the local pub. Their language is bizarre, some futuristic evolution of street and gutter lingo. The Devil shines in their eyes. All the while, as these totally nasty, despicable characters beat and brutalize and rob and violate others, the second and fourth movements of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*—with its rousing, powerful, heavenly melodies—plays in accompaniment to their monstrous acts.

We are watching *A Clockwork Orange*. I can't pull my eyes away. I do get up for a brief moment to go talk to Laura, who is now in the theater lobby. She is upset and won't come back inside. Part of me understands but part of me wants to go back and continue to watch the movie. (There goes my ambivalence over her again.) After a minute or two of talking, I head back inside. I head back into the future, but clearly this is not the future of *2001*. (This is Dionysian; *2001* was Apollonian.) Beethoven is playing again. On the screen a set of naked dancing Jesuses flashes in rhythm to the second movement of the *Ninth*; on the screen, in fast forward motion to Rossini's *William Tell Overture*, the lead gang member seduces and fucks two teenage girls (who first appear in the movie sucking on rainbow colored penis-shaped popsicles). My mind and sense of what is right is repeatedly jolted by the irreverence, vulgarity, and strange creativeness being played out on the screen. Anything goes.

And then—here comes Pavlov—how is one to deal with violence and evil in the world of tomorrow? After being captured and sentenced to prison, the ringleader of the gang naively volunteers for a new treatment which will gain him an early release. In his treatment, he is subjected to aversive classical conditioning in which a drug-induced nausea is coupled with images of sex and violence. Thus conditioned to have an extreme visceral reaction whenever he witnesses (let alone engages in) violence or sex, he is deemed cured; he can no longer act out his evil behaviors for as soon as he starts to even think about it, he immediately gets sick to his stomach.

But the question of course is immediately raised: Does he choose what is good because he sees the good in it, the value, or is it simply that evil makes him sick? Is his

moral behavior freely chosen or simply conditioned? Would he still choose evil over good without this conditioned aversion? (This is not positive motivation; this is avoidance behavior.) And of course the answer is that he is no better than he was before. His mind, or rather his body, simply punishes him whenever he moves toward the dark side. His id has been put in chains, but the id still wants to rape and abuse and murder his fellow human beings; he just gets physically sick whenever the feelings rise to consciousness. This is not Spinoza.

Yet we could ask, is this new "better person" really any different than the rest of us. Why do we choose kindness and compassion over violence and rape? Are we not conditioned as well? If Freud is right, then the dark feelings of the id—the feelings that find outward expression in the main character of *A Clockwork Orange*—exist in all of us and are controlled by our super-egos, our learned (read "conditioned") conscience that inflicts guilt and shame (read mental nausea) on us when we want to go astray. Psychopaths don't have this problem—this internal control mechanism. They don't experience guilt, and without guilt they feel no constraints on their behaviors; their super-ego is impotent. The character in the movie starts off as a psychopath, one who breaks into people's houses and violates their dignity, but one who also loves Beethoven. Through his treatment, he seemingly becomes as moral as the rest of us, though his super-ego has been technologically created.

The tragic irony of the conditioning process for the central character in *A Clockwork Orange* is that during the process of aversive conditioning, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* is being played in the background. Hence, our villain/protagonist now feels extreme nausea whenever he hears the *Ninth Symphony*, an apt punishment for all of his evil behavior before. The one good thing in his life, his appreciation of Beethoven, is taken from him. This is perhaps the deepest of all punishments. In being conditioned to become a "good" person, the one admirable thing in him is destroyed.

But this is just the beginning. Having been released back into society, our protagonist falls victim to all those people whom he wronged in his former life. He is beaten by those he abused, abandoned by his parents whom he took for granted, and finally trapped and tortured in a room by the husband of a woman he raped and murdered, with Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* blasting in his ears. (He had inadvertently told the man that Beethoven's *Ninth* now makes him exceedingly nauseous.) Without the capacity to fight back (his id has been disabled), he is weak and totally vulnerable to assaults and personal insults of any kind. And what is the message in that? That without the dark side, we have no power—no will—no capacity to defend ourselves?

Unable to take it any longer, he attempts to kill himself by jumping out an upper-story window in the room he is trapped in, yet he wakes up in a hospital bed, badly injured from the fall but still alive. And lo and behold, while unconscious the treatment process has been reversed. There has been too much pressure on the government and accusations that the treatment is inhumane, that it robbed him of his free will and his life force. The movie ends with our anti-hero being spoon fed by a government official as the grand finale of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* blasts from giant speakers that have been moved into the hospital room. The music no longer sickens him; he is again enraptured by it. As he listens, the old devilish look once more shows itself in his face, and in his mind he envisions two naked women wrestling in the snow as the angels sing the final chorus of Beethoven's sublime and celestial symphony. In the final second

though, his eyes turn upward and glaze over—something isn't right—and the screen goes black.

Leaving the theater with Laura, I am in shock. My mind is racing; the blood in my body is churning in a huge adrenalin rush. My psyche has been conditioned in what in psychology is called one-trial learning. *A Clockwork Orange* has blown everything else away. *2001* was a trip, but *A Clockwork Orange* is vastly more creative, more challenging, and more visceral. Perhaps it is even more philosophical and deep. Both movies, of course, are by Stanley Kubrick—thesis and antithesis, God and the Devil, Apollonian and Dionysian visions of the future.

In spite of these differences in the movies, it is once again a cinematic image of the future that captures my mind and my thinking, an image, in this case, of the possible evolution of humanity, but of thwarted evolution, a dystopian vision where the Devil can not be exorcised without killing the spirit of life. Visions good or bad, the future strongly pulls on my psyche. These science fiction images are trying to tell me something portentous. They are calling out to me.

I want to discuss the movie, but Laura has gone mute. I feel uncomfortable that I even want to talk about the movie. There is silence. There is tension. We are in different universes.

I ask myself why I am so enthralled with the movie. I don't particularly like the answers that pop into my mind. Do I somehow identify with the central character? But I cannot help but feel that *A Clockwork Orange* is the best movie I have ever seen.

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And then, as if the experience of *A Clockwork Orange* isn't bizarre enough, the strangest thing happens, something totally unexpected, without any intimations whatsoever ahead of time. A door opens up, a door into another new reality, popping into existence out of the nothingness.

After watching *A Clockwork Orange*, I can't get Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* out of my head. I have been conditioned. I have never really listened to classical music much in my life, but undoubtedly galvanized by the powerful imagery and energy of the movie, Beethoven has penetrated deep into my soul.

I go out and buy an album set of his *Ninth* and *Fifth Symphonies*, the *Emperor Concerto*, and some of his most famous piano sonatas, the *Moonlight*, *Pathétique*, and *Appassionata*, and start to play the music over and over again while I read and write in my study at home. The complexity, the power, the soaring melodies, the intricate harmonies, the intense beauty, the supreme precision, the incredible magnificence of Beethoven permeates down into my brain and my nervous system. My mind/body is being re-educated. I am feeling, seeing, and hearing something totally new, totally transcendent in quality to anything I have ever "heard" before.

Rather quickly, popular music begins to sound exceedingly simplistic and lame. I am learning to hear patterns of sound of increasing temporal duration, subtlety, and complexity—at another level of intelligence, quality, and beauty than what I have listened to before.

I can hear the first movement of the *Fifth Symphony* and how it fits together with the rest of the Symphony. I can hear the Symphony as a whole. The sounds and

emotional force of the *Emperor Concerto* move through my body and my spirit as if I were a tuning fork. The chorale finale of the Ninth feels like heaven: I have become one with the angels; I feel myself soaring through the clouds above.

And after a week I think, if I really get into Beethoven, what about Bach?

And the cascade starts. I try to make it stop but I can't. It feels like an addiction but a positive one. I buy a collection of Bach's most well-known pieces of music: his *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*; his short church melodies and songs; some of his concertos—different than Beethoven, but equally rich and invigorating to the soul and the intellect, the intellect of the ear. A week later, it is Brahms and the *First Symphony* and Tchaikovsky and the *Sixth Symphony*. Brahms' *First Symphony* is powerful, magnificent, and triumphant like Beethoven; Brahms is deep. Tchaikovsky is tragic, romantic, soaring; he moves the heart. Then comes Sibelius and his incredible, magisterial *Second Symphony*, and Rachmaninoff and a collection of his amazingly romantic, serenely beautiful, deeply melancholic piano and orchestra pieces. I cry to his *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. (The music seems to be telling me that what is now, will someday be past.)

I tell myself to slow down, to stop buying classical music. Laura tells me much the same. I am a poor graduate student who can't afford to keep buying record albums one after another. I am behaving like a child. At least that's the message I get from Laura. I feel guilty over this, but I cannot get enough. It is drive induction: The more you get the more you want. I am being pushed and pulled along by forces within me—perhaps beyond me.

And so they come: more symphonies, more concertos, more composers; Prokofiev, Handel, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, and Vaughn Williams; and then Stravinsky and his ballet suites: *The Firebird*, *Pétrouchka*, and *The Rite of Spring*. The distinctive dissonant sounds of Prokofiev's *Fifth Symphony* remind me of a descent into hell and a rushing train speeding headlong into a crash. And then, of course, Stravinsky is a trip: sensual, rhythmic, rumbling, beating, volcanic—at times frenzied, at times triumphant and romantic. Stravinsky dances and sings, breaking the rules of traditional classical music. Stravinsky, the greatest musical innovator in modern times, is twentieth century, like Sibelius and Prokofiev, and by this point in my musical buying spree and education, I am beginning to feel—I realize—a special resonance with modern classical music. I'm not sure what it is; it sounds new, sleek, creative, dissonant, and inventive. It transcends whatever vague stereotypes I have had of classical music.

Then comes Aaron Copeland, another modern composer, and the beautiful sounds of *Appalachian Spring* and *Rodeo*, and then deep and powerful Bruckner, and metaphysical Mahler and his *Resurrection Symphony*—as close to Beethoven's *Ninth* as you can get, the choral finale reaching an emotional peak equal to Beethoven's finale—and after that there is Liszt and Dvorak and Ravel and Mozart and Wagner and Bartok and Khachaturian.

Every week I find something new to play and to absorb. And the list goes on. At times I feel like a madness has overtaken me. I am being driven in a furious rush, as if I were flying on the lightening notes of the second movement of Prokofiev's *Fifth*.

Everyday I go into my study and play classical music continuously for hours upon hours while I hit the books. The music is always in the background and I learn it, learn

each piece through constant repetition and total immersion. My autonomic nervous system—the auditory and kinesthetic centers in my brain—is being tuned as the vast assemblies of neurons in my head are trained to resonate with the patterns of vibrations within which I am swimming. I am not consciously attempting to study it, but I am totally into it, feeling it, using it as a context for the philosophical and psychological abstractions I focus on in my textbooks. My brain soaks it up as if it has been waiting for it. It becomes my constant companion, the musical accompaniment to the words and ideas in the books. In my study, my focus periodically shifts from the words and ideas in the books to the melodies and patterns of sound—back and forth—like a concerto of philosophy and orchestra.

I never learn anything as deeply and as quickly as I learn classical music in the early 1970s. Within two years, I have over a hundred albums and have listened to every single one of them at least ten, if not twenty, times. I can hear the difference between Beethoven and Bach and Mozart; between Prokofiev, Sibelius, and Stravinsky—easy as pie. I can recognize any of the pieces of music I own taken from anywhere within any particular work.

It becomes a standing joke (and embarrassment) that it is *A Clockwork Orange* that ignites my love of classical music. Do I somehow associate the power of Beethoven with the violence and dystopian darkness of the movie? Why would such a negative vision provoke such a strong passion for beauty within me? Or is there something deeper at work here?

Music is Romantic. Music is Dionysian. Music pulsates and swims and flies through the air. The movie shook up my senses. The movie had a raw power, an unorthodox quality. The movie was an explosion in my consciousness. *A Clockwork Orange* was like nothing else I had ever seen before. Beethoven came alive in the color and imagery and dynamism of the movie.

Beethoven, perhaps, is some kind of assertion against the mundane, the banal, and mediocre. Classical music becomes a further expression of my search for something more, a rebellion against the cultural norms on which I was raised. The voice of Beethoven has come out of the past, but for me at least, he transcends the present and points to the future.

A new dimension of reality and supreme expression of quality, excellence, and spirit has opened up in front of me. And though my philosophy books speak of truth and debate it, and my psychology books delve into the inner workings of the human mind, there is something about life and existence that the music touches on that the books do not. There is a truth and a value, an essence to things, captured and spoken without words, without the use of sentences, propositions, or statements of belief. The Apollonian—rationalism, reason, and order—can not encompass the total essence of life, consciousness, and reality.

And I realize, as all of this takes hold of me, that my brain seems to need this more complex, intense form of the Romantic, the affective, and the aesthetic to complement and balance the intellectual universe that I am exploring in graduate school. Classical music provides it. One reads and understands Feyerabend and Kuhn while listening to Bach and Bartok; there is no other way to get into resonance with such thinkers.

A Clockwork Orange: a dystopian future with the world gone mad; a shock to my mind and my senses; the question of the meaning of morality and the significance of free will; the suppressive conditioning of violence and sex; Beethoven and classical music, with Laura a million miles away; a new universe of order, intricacy, power, beauty, and the sublime; the totally unexpected; positive addiction and learning faster than the speed of light. Is this the path to enlightenment? What is next?

The Reciprocity of Perception

Again, there is a knocking at the door. It is 11:00 at night. A cold November wind is blowing against my apartment door. Dark shadows vibrate and move across the windows in the kitchen and living room. I look out through the window in the door, and a small shadowy figure, shoulders slung forward, his body (it's a man) bouncing up and down, stands outside on the steps. Who the hell is this?

It takes me a couple of seconds to realize it is Gibson. He looks rather forlorn and agitated, and of course I invite him in. Often we meet late at night—we are both night owls—and we frequently talk till 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, but tonight we had cancelled our meeting, or so I believe. Anyway, I cannot turn J. J. Gibson away at the door. Of course I will talk with him, whenever he wants to. The first thing he says to me is: "Don't ever get into an argument with your wife about psychology." I don't ask him the specifics of what he is talking about, but I can pretty well figure it out, and within ten minutes we are at the dining room table in a conversation about some abstract topic, totally unrelated to the challenges, the ups and downs, of marriage and the relationship of the sexes. (But I should take that back, since whatever Gibson has to say is of relevance to anything and everything, and assuredly so regarding love and the sexes.)

But who is Gibson? Gibson is something else. I mean Gibson is really something else.

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It is 1971 at the University of Minnesota. Gibson, who is a professor at Cornell University, is visiting the Minnesota psychology department, and while I am sitting in my office, he walks in accompanied by one of the professors in the psychology department, Herb Pick. Herb Pick is one of Gibson's former students. Herb introduces us to each other, and butterflies quickly materialize in my stomach as my Adam's apple surges up in my throat. Gibson is probably the most famous perceptual psychologist in the world, and in studying his ideas both as an undergraduate and graduate student, I have become convinced that he is a great creative mind, both scientifically and philosophically. And all of sudden he is standing there in front of me, in the flesh, face to face.

Yet, reality is surprising. (Have I said this before?) I am meeting someone I consider a genius, and what does he first say to me? He asks me if he can bum a cigarette. And as soon as I give him one, he begins to chat with me as if we were old buddies or long-time intellectual colleagues. We talk for at least half an hour at that first meeting, on the history of psychology, Müller's "Specific Energies of Nerves" hypothesis, whether perceptions are localized in the mind (or brain), and why he doesn't

buy packs of cigarettes any longer—it is a way to cut down on his smoking. I must be ready for Gibson, for I jump right into engaging his mind. And perhaps Gibson is ready for me; he immediately connects with the fact that I am a psychology student who is also interested in philosophy and intellectual history.

This is the beginning.

Bob Shaw, another one of Gibson's former students, is my thesis advisor at Minnesota, and after talking with Gibson and thinking about the whole strange and wondrous encounter for a day or two, I ask Bob if there is some way I can be a visiting graduate student at Cornell in order to study with Gibson and do my thesis on the evolution of his ecological psychology of perception (much more to come in a moment on that). Shaw likes the idea, and when I talk with Gibson about it on the phone, he is enthusiastic as well. With the approval and financial support of the psychology department at Minnesota, I head off to Cornell with Laura and Bryan in 1972 and spend the next year interacting—and frequently arguing—with Gibson as I write my thesis.

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To be clear from the start, what Gibson offers me in his ecological psychology is an alternative to philosophical dualism, an epistemological answer to Berkeley, Kant, and Feyerabend, and a totally different conception of human psychology and human nature. Gibson introduces me to an alternative way of thinking about reality and knowledge. And, as alluded to above, he also teaches me about the nature of love. All of this notwithstanding, let me say at the outset that what he proposes—the far-reaching implications of it all—takes quite a while to penetrate into my skull. Deep learning takes time. The symphony of Gibson requires (for me at least) many years to hear.

In order to describe Gibson's new way of thinking, let me go back to Plato and review his key ideas—to set the contrast for what is to come. Though Gibson doesn't specifically critique Plato in his writings, as I come to understand Gibson and place him in the context of history, it appears to me that Gibson's key theoretical principle of reciprocity represents a rejection of dualism, the origins of which go back to Plato. Where Plato separated, Gibson tries to bring things back together again. This contrast between Plato and Gibson captures the essence, the depth, and the significance of Gibson's originality, for Plato's dualism strongly influenced much of subsequent Western thinking, both secular and religious. Gibson believes that he is challenging this entire intellectual heritage of Western thought, specifically regarding the nature of knowledge and reality. And to a great degree, as I come to understand him, I become convinced that he is.

In Plato we find a thoroughgoing dualism of both reality and forms of knowledge. He divided the eternal and temporal realms of existence, and elevated the eternal above the temporal. This division between two realms of existence is dualism. Plato, in fact, dualistically divided reality along several important dimensions. Aside from eternity and time, he also separated the world of spirit (or mind) and the world of matter. The eternal realm is the realm of mind or spirit, whereas the world of matter is in flux and change. Hence, the mind of humans is eternal whereas the body, which exists in the temporal world, is perishing. Further, the eternal realm—the realm of truth—is the world of abstraction and form, and known through reason; whereas the temporal material

world is of particulars (individual things) and “known” through perception or the senses. Sense perception, though, is not true knowledge but mere opinion and subject to confusion, ambiguity, and error.

The key theoretical principle in Gibson is reciprocity, a clear rejection and alternative to dualism. Reciprocity means distinct but interdependent. Gibson re-conceptualizes mind and matter, individuality and the world, stability and change, abstractions and particulars, the subjective and the objective, and a number of other major features of reality and knowledge as reciprocities rather than dualisms. All of this rethinking about deep philosophical and psychological issues emerges out of studying the most commonplace and basic of human experiences—our perception of the world. Yet, ever since reading Bishop Berkeley, I have realized that perception is anything but simple and easy to understand; there is something highly significant that needs to be grasped regarding what it is to “perceive the world.”

First let me begin with Gibson’s critique of the dualistic idea of a conscious mind and a physical world. Gibson does not use the words “mind” and “physical world” (he doesn’t even like the word “consciousness”) because these expressions carry with them, so he believes, the connotation of two distinct realms of existence or reality. Instead, Gibson begins his theory of perception with the terms “perceiver” and “environment.” He proposes that the perceiver and the environment, though distinct, are interdependent realities. Gibson argues that there is no way to describe a perceiver without bringing in the environment, and there is no way to describe the environment independently of the perceiver. Each reality, though distinct, depends on the other. This is reciprocity.

Now what does this mean? First, consider what it would mean to understand the environment in relationship to the perceiver. Of course, most of us suppose (contrary to Berkeley) that the physical environment is something that exists whether there are any perceivers present within it or not. We believe that the ground exists whether or not anyone is walking on it; the tree falling in the forest makes a sound whether or not there is anyone there to hear it. But Gibson has a way of coming at the environment that is very ingenious; it isn’t Berkeley, but it isn’t the common sense view either. Gibson introduces the concept of “affordances” which refers to properties of the environment that have a use or function for an animal (including humans). There are things that are edible; things that provide shelter; things that can be grasped or thrown; things that provide physical support for the body; things that provide the opportunity for reproduction, and so on. Affordances are features of the environment that provide opportunities for action or things that are needed to support the continuation of life. Affordances are properties of the environment that provide what is necessary for animals to exercise or express their distinctive way of life.

Upon a moment’s reflection, it is clear that affordances are relational properties of the environment: that is, they are defined and described in relationship to animals and what animals do in order to live. If we say that the ground supports locomotion for animals, then the quality of “supports locomotion” is understood relative to the physical qualities and abilities of an animal. The ground holds the animal up; the ground provides pathways of locomotion for the animal. Hence, it would be correct to say that the ground possesses certain inherent features to it—its chemical and physical composition—yet its affordances only make sense in the context of an animal and animal behavior.

Gibson goes so far as to argue that, at the most general level, the term “environment” means to surround, to provide the context for, and to support life. The environment is defined relative to life; it is the set of necessary conditions for life.

Are these basic properties intrinsic to the environment as such? Well, to a degree yes, but also to a degree no. The environment must possess certain physical properties (chemical, mechanical, and otherwise) in order to provide the necessary affordances for life. For example, for terrestrial animals, the ground cannot be made of gas or else it could not hold up solid living creatures on its surface, and the ground must be larger in extent than the physical size of an animal or else it couldn’t surround the animal and provide an arena of action for animal behavior. But to surround and physically support are relational properties of the environment relative to animals. Hence, at least in this fundamental sense, the environment requires animals. In general, Gibson defines the environment in terms of its affordances. The environment is one big affordance, or collection of affordances.

To further reinforce this point about the relational quality of affordances and the environment, it should be apparent that what constitutes an affordance depends on the particular type of animal. The affordances of the environment for an ant are different to a great degree than the affordances of the environment for an elephant. There are different affordances—again to a degree—for predators and prey. Again, an affordance is a relational property of the environment, but depending on the animal and its distinctive anatomy and way of life, the environment will possess different kinds of significant relationships specific to each kind of animal.

From the point of view of perception, why are affordances so important? For Gibson our perception of the world is built upon the perception of affordances. We perceive the physical properties of the world in terms of their significance, their function, and value to us. We perceive affordances.

It is the central function of perception to provide awareness of affordances, for this function serves the expression and continuation of life. Affordances are those meaningful qualities of the environment essential for an animal’s survival and, as such, it is critical—in fact fundamental—that animals are able to perceive them. Affordances are those very things we need to know in order to do what we need to do. Animals, including humans, perceive the relational properties of the world relevant to their way of life.

But now to go one step further—the step necessary to complete this argument regarding the relational nature of the environment—we need to ask what it means for a physical structure to possess some set of physical properties, whatever these properties may be. In my philosophy classes in graduate school, I encounter a very thought-provoking idea regarding the nature of the physical world, an idea that I connect with Gibson. The twentieth-century philosopher Bertrand Russell proposed that all of the properties identified in physics, chemistry, or any of the other physical sciences are relational properties. We understand and define the properties of a physical reality by virtue of how that physical reality affects and is affected by other physical realities. The properties of matter are all understood in the context of interactions or relationships. If we say that an object has mass, what does that mean? It means that relative to interactions with other objects, it shows a certain quantifiable quality. The quality and quantity of mass is revealed through interactions and relationships. Hence, although the

mass of an object is a distinct and quantifiable quality (variable), this quality is only known and measured as such in interaction with other objects and forces. That is, how do we know about an object's properties? Through observing how those properties impact or affect other objects and their properties and vice versa.

The general point that emerges in thinking about Russell's argument is that what we call the physical world is fundamentally an intricate network of reciprocities, of interdependent properties and realities. The environment of animals has a substratum and ambient support system of physical-chemical materials and structures, as well as atmospheric and meteorological conditions—true. But these more primordial physical factors are themselves an intricate set of relational properties studied through physics, chemistry, geology, ecology, and meteorology. It's relationships within relationships within relationships.

Russell, of course, notes that in order to have a relationship there must be entities or objects involved in the relationship; that is, you can't have relationships without things being related. Yet, as it turns out, if we look closely at the things within a relationship, these things are, in turn, made up out of or supported by more fundamental relationships and relational properties.

Hence, affordances are no less physical or real than, for example, the chemical properties of the earth; in each case the properties are realized and defined in interaction with something else. This is a big point because it is often argued that there is a "real" physical world and then there is a world perceived—which is subjective and simply in the eyes of the beholder. But this line cannot be drawn since both the "objects of perception" and the "objects of the physical world" have the same status: they are all relational in their constitution, just at different levels of organization. As I think through Gibson and Russell, this general theory of reality begins to emerge in my mind.

It is interesting that when you read Gibson's later writings in particular, he spends a lot of time systematically describing, in detail, the environment. At first, it seems that you are not even reading a psychology text, but rather a book or article on nature. Gibson describes environmental surfaces and structures; types of environmental events; the layout of objects and surfaces; typical kinds of dangers and benefits; and typical kinds of opportunities for action. But in Gibson's mind, all of this discussion of the environment is necessary because it lays out the meaningful context in which life and psychology is realized. Gibson turns the environment into a psychological reality. It is the context of the mind—but note—it is a physical, or more precisely, an ecological context. Psychology exists in ecology.

Now let us turn to the other side of the reciprocal relationship. Can you define a perceiver independent of an environment? Well there are lots of things that animals do which define their way of life, but all of these things require affordances of the environment in order for animals to do these things. Animals walk; animals fly; animals mate; animals eat and respire; animals hide or attack. In each case, animals require something in the environment to realize or exercise their way of life. The actions occur and are only definable within an ecological context; that is, behavior can only be defined ecologically. (To recall, the function of perception—what it is—is awareness of the affordances of the environment.) Behavior is not simply motions of the limbs; behavior is interaction with and motion relative to the environment. There are things that animals do to themselves, such as self-grooming and scratching, but still, in this case the body itself

provides the affordance for the behavior—the environment for the behavior. Such behaviors are self-referential.

But to take the argument one step further, do mental processes such as thoughts, imaginations, or feelings that do not involve any overt behavior require an environment to be realized? In essence, does the conscious mind require an environment? At the very least, one could argue that unless a person is provided with an environment in his or her own development, thoughts, images, and desires will never emerge in the mind. In fact, will the mind in any sense emerge without an environment? Obviously, the answer is no. Unless there is an environment which supports and maintains the life of a human, the person isn't going to be thinking or feeling anything; the person will not be able to live without the environment.

But more to the point, it is the environment that affords the opportunities and raw material for thinking, imagining, and desiring. The mind starts in the world; the mind starts in the perception of the world. When we imagine, feel, or think, the foundation and grounding of such mental processes are features of the environment. We think and feel about the world, and our thoughts and feelings arise out of the world and our interactions with it. Of course, we may also think and feel about ourselves, but this is self-referential consciousness, where we, as part of the ecosystem of our own life, become the object of our awareness and attention.

At the most general level, the reciprocity argument applied to humans is that although we distinguish and separate ourselves from the world, we are, in fact, interdependent with the world within which we exist. I may see myself as having a distinct and self-contained body. I may feel myself as a distinct conscious being with an individual self and personal mind and consciousness. But this sense of individuality and separateness is not the whole truth of things. We inextricably and necessarily exist in relationship with our world. In this sense the subject matter of psychology is ecological. As humans we exist in the context of an environment; we cannot be described—our psychology cannot be understood—independent of this context.

This point brings me back to the definition of reciprocity: distinct but interdependent. I have emphasized in the above discussion the interdependency dimension of things—of the individual and the environment—but I did that to highlight the difference between the idea of reciprocity and the theory of absolute dualism. In fact, the distinctive part of us and the relational part of us necessarily come together; you can't have one without the other. (There are things and there are relationships between those things, but following Russell, the properties of the things in the world are realized in the context of relationships, and relationships require things related.) In the West, we tend to emphasize the core individual self, the distinctiveness and self-determination side of our reality. In the East, the emphasis is placed on the relatedness of individuals to each other, on community and group norms. Clearly when I encounter Gibson I have been raised on and strongly influenced by Western individualism. I am into autonomy, freedom, self-determination, and finding (or creating) myself. But I have also encountered Spinoza, who believed we were all part of God, that there were no true individuals. Viewing the self through the eyes of reciprocity implies bringing the two perspectives—individualism and relatedness—together into a necessary whole.

If the reality of what we are is ecological, the structure of our consciousness and knowledge is also ecological. Gibson proposes that there are two fundamental poles to

sensory awareness: a perceptual pole and a proprioceptual pole. The perceptual pole is our sensory awareness of the environment (for example, of the ground below us and objects and surfaces surrounding us), and the proprioceptual pole is our sensory awareness of ourselves (for example, seeing and feeling our bodies in relation to the ground and other objects). For Gibson, both poles of awareness are present or co-existent within consciousness, and each pole is experienced in relationship to the other pole. That is, I see myself relative to the ground and I see the ground relative to myself; I see both simultaneously. This ecological awareness is necessary for humans, as well as all animals, in order to appropriately move through the environment and manipulate it. If I couldn't see where I was relative to what's around me and under me, how could I possibly move my body the right way?

So, in the broad sense, sensory awareness involves being conscious of two realities (myself and the world) in relationship to each other. This is, in fact, another reciprocity, a reciprocity pertaining to conscious knowledge and the inherent structure of sensory experience. We are beings who exist in relationship to the world and we experience ourselves as beings in relationship to the world. At times we may focus more on the world and at times we may focus more on ourselves, but the other pole is always present, setting the context. Hence, ecological psychology for Gibson means to understand the perceiver and environment in relationship to each other, but also to describe our sensory awareness—our consciousness—in ecological terms.

In Gibson's mind, the classic philosophical distinction—and resulting epistemological quagmire—regarding the subjective and the objective can be reformulated and resolved by re-conceptualizing knowledge as having two necessary poles, perceptual and proprioceptual, that co-exist and define each other. (The subjective-objective quagmire, already discussed, is whether knowledge and awareness refer to anything objective or are always simply subjective.) In Gibson's mind, knowledge always possesses both subjective and objective components, and in fact, contrary to popular opinion, the only way to realize the objective is in the context of the subjective and vice versa. Each anchors the other. I see what is independent of my point of view relative to seeing what my point of view is, and again vice versa, I see what my point of view is in comparison to what is independent of my point of view. There is neither absolute objectivity nor absolute subjectivity; each is relative to the other.

This is a tough one to grasp. Relativists will argue that everything in consciousness is subjective, that is, from a point of view, and that the objective is a myth. On the other hand, the standard advice in science is that if one wants to look at things objectively, then one should try to eliminate any bias, prejudice, emotionality, personal opinion, etc. That is, subjective influences undercut objectivity, and the scientific establishment contends that one can and should minimize, if not eliminate, these subjective contaminants.

Contrary to the relativists, Gibson believes that there is an objective dimension to knowledge—it isn't all just from a point of view—and contrary to the scientific objectivist, Gibson believes the subjective dimension cannot be eliminated; in fact, the objective is defined in relationship to the subjective. I will come back to this topic a bit later when I discuss Gibson's concept of the active perceiver. But just as a prelude, for Gibson, the

more perspectives one takes on a feature of the environment—multiple subjective points of view—the more the objective nature of the feature is revealed.

Gibson often reminds me of a child: that is, he seems to have a mind like a young kid—alive, opinionated, bubbling over with thoughts and insights, inventive, playing with one idea after another. When he walks, he bounces like a ten-year-old, full of energy. His face is highly charged and expressive; you can often see what he is feeling and thinking through his animated eyes and the openness of his reactions to the world. He reveals himself to the perceiver. He is not a constipated or guarded adult; he shows his mind and his self (like a child) for all to see. Being with him—understanding him—is like moving into a playground of ideas with someone who gives everything to the encounter. It is heavy stuff and we have fun with it all.

I dive into his mind and his thinking with my usual force and thoroughness. I master his ideas. I read absolutely everything he has ever published; write notes on it all; organize all the material in terms of major topics and themes; connect it all with my understanding of the history of psychology and philosophy; and throw it all back at him. And then, he often comes out with strange and unexpected comments, replies that seem to me both simple and ingenious. On paper and in person he is a trip.

Refuting The Matrix

But now, as an interlude on the year I spend at Cornell, let us engage in some time travel into the past and into the future, as a way to further understand Gibson's idea of reciprocity. Let us go into the darkness, into a sensory isolation tank, into the limits of absolute doubt and the intellectual origins of the movie *The Matrix*. Let us go into the cogitations of a Frenchman who gave the queen of Sweden philosophy lessons at 5:00 in the morning and probably died from it. This excursion into history and science fiction—into past and future—is relevant to the idea of reciprocity because in order to figure out how to get out of the box of dualism—the box of being trapped in our conscious minds—we have to understand the nature of the box in which we are trapped and how we got stuck there. It is also important to see what happens if you leave the environment and dive into the nothingness. Are you still there?

Consider the great philosopher of the Enlightenment, René Descartes. As mentioned earlier, Descartes is famous for his argument, "I think therefore I am." He is also the modern starting point for mind-body dualism. According to him, each human being possesses both a physical body and a non-physical mind (or consciousness). (For Descartes the mind is consciousness.) Each of these realities (Descartes called them substances) is distinct and qualitatively very different. Physical matter has extension (size), mass, shape, and is divisible into smaller and smaller units, whereas the mind possesses none of these qualities. You can't divide the mind up into parts and it has no mass, size, or shape. Mind and matter are like two incommensurable universes.

When we think or have perceptual experiences, these events take place, according to Descartes, in the conscious mind (this part is like Berkeley and in fact precedes Berkeley on this point). For Descartes, there may be causes for these

conscious events in the physical body, specifically in the brain, but the actual experiences are mental and conscious in nature; they occur “in the mind.”

But how does one explain the apparent connection of mind and body, or more generally mind and matter (conscious mind and physical world), since each is presumably a distinct reality unto itself. For Descartes, though mind and matter are distinct, each can cause events to happen in the other realm. An intention in my conscious mind “moves” my physical body producing behavior, and a physical stimulus to my body and my senses causes a conscious sensation. This much seems clear to Descartes: there are cause-effect relationships between matter and mind.

Yet because these two realities are so different, it is completely puzzling how this causal influence occurs. How does a thought make an arm move? How does a physical event in the brain—an electro-chemical reaction—cause a thought or an emotion to occur? More generally, how does a conscious mind (filled with ideas, memories, emotions, and images) arise out of a physical brain that is made out of neurons, chemicals, and electrical reactions? And conversely, how does a conscious mind—so constituted—impact electro-chemical processes? This puzzle is called the “mind-body problem” in contemporary philosophy and science, but note that the essence of the puzzle is twofold: How does mind/consciousness affect physical matter (the brain), and how does physical matter (the brain) affect mind? It is the dualism of mind and matter, the apparent incommensurability of these two “substances,” that creates the puzzle of mind and body.

Further, following from Descartes, if the conscious mind is a distinct reality, totally different from the physical matter of the body and brain, then the mind is also separated from the physical world surrounding the physical body. How can one make contact with and know the physical world through the mind? There is no real interface between the conscious mind and the physical environment, nor can there be, since each is a different kind of reality. Hence, the ontological dualism of mind and matter leads to the epistemological problem regarding how we can ever really know—be aware of with our minds—an external physical world.

But the epistemic disconnection of mind and world gets even problematic, given Descartes’s causal theory of perception. In Descartes’s explanation of perception, a theory adopted by most scientists and psychologists after him, the physical body of the perceiver is physically stimulated by light, sound, and pressures emanating from the physical world, which in turn physically stimulates sense organs, then sensory nerves, and then the physical brain of the perceiver. The physical events in the brain “cause” experiences of color, sounds, shapes, and tactile feelings in the mind. Hence, the world that we see, feel, and hear is, in actuality, a complex event occurring in our consciousness, triggered off by events in the brain, and it is the last event in a causal sequence of events that began in the world. Our perceptual experiences are casually separated from the world by a long sequence of intermediary events.

Berkeley’s idealist argument is a spin-off from Descartes. If perceptual experiences are “in the mind,” as Descartes argues, then that’s all we know or can know according to Berkeley. How can we postulate the existence of something we cannot in any way directly experience—which is of course what Descartes does? We may believe, such as Descartes and most other psychologists and scientists, that the physical world causes our experiences via the physical brain, but can we say anything

meaningful about something that, according to the very theory espoused, we cannot possibly apprehend? We are in a contradiction. Berkeley sees the contradiction in Descartes' theory and simply eliminates any talk about the physical brain or the physical environment as the cause of all of this. But Berkeley's logically consistent conclusion that we cannot say anything meaningful about the physical world (given Descartes' dualistic model) is rejected by most psychologists and philosophers of perception after him as too radical. It is better to be a dualist—caught in an ontological paradox and an epistemological contradiction—than to deny the existence of the physical world.

As a student, whenever I explain either Descartes's argument or Berkeley's argument to most people—that the world of perception is all in their mind—they find it extremely odd (I speak from countless experiences on this point) for it seems perfectly obvious that we perceive a world that exists outside of our consciousness.

But for Descartes and most subsequent psychologists of perception, strictly speaking, our perceptual experience is a private event occurring in our minds, caused by events in the brain, and it is not really or directly of the physical world. In essence, Descartes thinks that we are "trapped' within our individual minds, within the conscious effects produced by activities in our brains, and this epistemological and ontological predicament has remained a problem in the study of perception ever since.

Based on this line of thinking, Descartes proposed an interesting thought experiment. He asked how we could know that we were not actually lying somewhere on a laboratory table with wires hooked up to our brain and that some demon scientist, who completely understood the workings of the brain, was not stimulating our brain in just the right way to make it appear that we actually were carrying out our lives and moving through the world, as it appears to us that we are. How could we know that what seems totally real wasn't really a contrived simulation technologically produced in our brains? And the answer, following from Descartes's theory, is that we couldn't tell—that it is possible that this is actually what is happening. An all-powerful, super-intelligent demon scientist may be running a simulation of the world in our head, and there would be no way to tell. Descartes knew nothing about computers, but this scenario that he imagined is exactly the scenario presented in the movie *The Matrix*, and indeed the characters in that movie, minus some freedom fighters, do not know that they are all actually hooked up to machines that are stimulating their brains and producing all their perceptual experiences of a presumed but non-existent external world. From Descartes's perspective—driven home in the movie *The Matrix*—all that we perceive may be nothing but a virtual reality generated by a machine or omnipotent cosmic scientist.

When I go to study with Gibson, I am very familiar with Descartes's dualism, his thought experiment on the omnipotent demon, and the mind-body problem, and as I noted above, I am also steeped in Western individualism. In order to shed some further light—the light of Gibson—on Descartes's mind-body dualism and also some light on the philosophy of individualism, I now want to jump ahead and describe some experiences and conclusions (inspired off of Gibson's thinking) that I will come to later in time.

There is the popular belief that at least sometimes it is important to retreat—to go off away from everybody and everything—in order to find oneself. Though there may be some value in sequestering away, as a way to self-discovery, there is also something

totally wrongheaded with this idea. The approach, in fact, sounds like Descartes, who, as the popular story goes (I cannot vouch for its absolute authenticity) was isolated one winter by himself in the wilderness and developed the habit of sitting in the darkness in the wood compartment adjoining the stove in the cabin he occupied in the woods, meditating on philosophy. (The wood compartment was the warmest spot in the cabin.) According to the story, it was in this dark solitary reality that he came up with the statement “I think, therefore I am.” He found the one thing he could be absolutely certain about—his own conscious existence, his own thinking self—in the void, in the darkness. Within this context and mindset, all he could directly know for certain was his own self. Everything else was, according to him, beyond the confines of his own mind and at best could only be inferred. Perhaps the omnipotent demon was putting all the experiences in his head. As Descartes stated it, he doubted everything, but in doubting everything, he realized that he—the thinking self doing the doubting—must exist. (How could the “I” doubt itself, for the “I” must be there for the doubting, so Descartes believed.) The doubter must exist.

One could take this story as the philosophical underpinnings of modern Western individualism: the absolute certainty of oneself—defined as a conscious mind and nothing else—realized in the emptiness, blackness, and stillness of a cabin in the woods, so to speak, in solitary confinement. There is consciousness and there is the self that is conscious and nothing more. If I were sitting by myself in a sensory void, I might come up with such a philosophy, but from an ecological perspective, there seems to be something totally unnatural and inappropriate in this as a way to go about thinking things out—about reality, knowledge, the self, and the human mind.

In point of fact, I repeat Descartes’s isolation experiment—even bettering it—and I come up with very different conclusions.

Let us move forward in time about six years, relative to my time at Cornell. I am floating in highly buoyant water heated to skin temperature in a light-proof and sound-proof wooden box—a sensory isolation tank. Without variation in sensory stimulation, my sense of my body quickly disappears. (As Gibson would put it, there is no stimulus information for my body or for anything else.) Within a couple minutes of immersion, I cannot feel my body if I don’t move it. I am there (there where?) with simply my conscious mind suspended in the emptiness (like Descartes), but after a while the sense of darkness disappears on me as well. I have no sense of seeing/perceiving anything. In fact, the sense of being in anything disappears; there is no sensed environment—no sensed surround. At times I even find myself talking to myself (so it seems) or perhaps it is a sense of another. It is hard to tell. By the time I have been in the tank for an hour, my sense of self has fragmented or become ambiguous, to say the least. I am not even sure if I am conscious or awake. My mind—my self—the world—everything—evaporates.

I take this experiment as a refutation of Descartes. At least, I can’t hold my mind together in absolute nothingness. If anything I feel rather psychotic from the experience, unsure of my own existence. If there is no world or sense of body, the sense of me disappears as well. I do not find myself in the darkness and the emptiness; I lose myself.

Normally, we do not live in nothingness; we live in a complex environment filled with complex and varied events. Without this complex environment, as occurs in the

sensory isolation tank, both the individual self and consciousness seem to disappear, or at the very least, disintegrate into ambiguity. If mind and consciousness are realities distinct from the environment, why do they disintegrate when pulled out of this ambient context? My total being—brain, body, self, mind, consciousness: you name it—when disconnected from any meaningful interaction with the world begins to collapse into a fog of indeterminacy and chaos.

Further, in a normal environment there exists a particular group of beings that provides the most complex and subtle array of interactions of all. These beings are especially critical to our sense of self and the level and quality of our consciousness. These very special beings are us, our fellow human beings. Nothing in our environment is anywhere near as complicated as another human being, and the modes of interaction among humans far exceed in richness and meaning any other type of interaction we have with anything else in the world. Clearly there is a limitless number of ways to interact with other people, and there are many types of relationships one can have, from the superficial and fleeting to the deep and long-term. To use Gibson's terminology, different people can provide different affordances or clusters of affordances for the realization of different aspects of one's way of life and one's sense of self. One can only be a teacher in the context of students; a parent in the context of children; a friend in the context of people who know and like you; and a lover and mate in the context of romance and marriage. The people in our environment are a critical element in the creation, development, and perpetuation of our minds and our selves; human minds require social environments—human minds require other human minds. My self may be distinct and different from other selves, but it is not independent; no one is an island. There is something crazy about the philosophy of solipsism and trying to find yourself isolated away from others; it sure seems that who I am—even that I am—depends upon others. And this point bears upon the central significance of love in the evolution of the self.

Years later in the 1990s, I read a critique of Descartes written by the neurophysiologist Antonio Damasio. Damasio argues that self-identity originates in feelings rather than thoughts—a Romanticist rather than rationalist vision of the human mind. Damasio proposes that the primordial expression of self-existence is "I feel, therefore I am." In reading Damasio I think—perhaps even more on the mark, and following through on some ideas I derive from Gibson—that the foundational expression of self-existence is "I love, therefore I am." Love is a reaching out toward other people, an emotional and motivational connection between oneself and others. I think that within a Gibsonian perspective, love is a perception of a fundamental affordance in the world: the central value and importance of another for my own existence. The mind creates itself by going beyond itself, especially going beyond itself toward other people. After my time with Gibson, it increasingly hits me as the years go by that there is something fundamentally flawed with the philosophy of individualism and in the idea that the conscious mind and self is trapped within itself, separate from the world and from others. Consciousness and self exist as an act of reaching out and touching the world and being touched by it. Gibson starts this thinking going. It is the very nature of consciousness and mind to connect, and especially to connect with other people and other minds. Something very deep is wrong with Descartes and dualism.

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Kuhn argued that within the practice of a scientific paradigm there are always “anomalies”—things that don’t fit into the theoretical framework of the paradigm—that can’t be explained. But scientists don’t abandon a paradigm because of these acknowledged anomalies; if anything, there is the hope that at some point the anomalies will be accounted for. One reason a paradigm isn’t abandoned, though anomalies or contradictory facts seem to imply it is flawed, is that there appears to be nothing better at the moment to take its place. But if the anomalies persist—if they grow in significance or multiply in number—the tension increases; dissatisfaction with the paradigm grows; and perhaps new theories or visions begin to emerge, challenging the existing paradigm. At some point, the tension and dissatisfaction get too great, and the existing paradigm collapses under the weight of the anomalies that won’t go away.

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Gibson likes to drink sidecars, and we sometimes get together on weekends and have a few drinks. We sit on the back porch of his house with his wife Eleanor and Laura, and Gibson mixes and pours sidecars for everyone. Often Rick Warren is there as well. Rick, another psychology graduate student at Cornell, also loves to talk philosophy, and I have become good friends with him while I am at Cornell. Soft-spoken and refined in his mannerisms, and sporting a jet-black mustache and goatee, Rick is, in fact, a regular at the late night conversations held at my apartment with Gibson. Both Rick and I, each in our distinctive ways, engage Gibson and get him going. The sidecars help.

Gibson, of course, frequently gets very animated in our discussions. Often, perhaps to goad us, he makes some extreme statement which provokes Rick or me or Eleanor into a dispute with him. I find it interesting and somewhat unnerving that just as Gibson argues with me or Rick, he also gets into very heated debates with Eleanor, locking horns over the validity of some idea. (Recall the night he came knocking on the door.) In fact, his exchanges with Eleanor are even more intense than with me or Rick. Clearly Gibson and Eleanor love each other, but they argue to the point that, at times, Gibson bangs his glass down on the table spilling his drink all over. Although at first the intensity of these interactions makes me nervous, I come to realize that there is a meeting of minds going on here, a dueling of intellects. They afford each other the opportunity to realize who they are.

Laura and I, on the other hand, never argue. Laura and I never debate psychology or philosophy. This bothers me. Laura does all the cooking; she takes care of the house; she washes all the clothes; she takes care of Bryan; and she is not cold or frigid toward me. She is a good wife, a good person; in fact, I see her as ethically superior to me. But there is no open confrontation. What we do is afford each other the opportunity to do our own thing, me the student and scholar and Laura the loving mother and caring wife. She does her thing and I do mine.

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Gibson takes the view, contrary to Descartes and all the other scientific thinkers who came after him, that we directly perceive the environment; we don't just see mental representations of the world within our minds. We don't just infer the world from impressions and sensations. We see it; we perceive it. In essence, for Gibson, mind makes contact with matter; mind is not trapped within itself. Gibson refers to this view of things as a direct realist theory of perception.

As I think through Gibson's concept of reciprocity and his direct realist theory of perception, it hits me that the fundamental philosophical distinction that Gibson is attacking is mind-matter dualism. It is mind-matter dualism—the idea that the mental and the physical are distinct realities—that creates the puzzle of how we can consciously perceive an external physical world. (As it also creates the puzzle of how brain states cause conscious experiences.) How can my conscious mind—one kind of reality—make contact with a totally different kind of reality—the physical world? But it seems to me that the conscious mind does reach out and make contact with the world, and the world reaches out and makes contact with us. Mind and matter interface in perception; in the act of perception mind and matter are reciprocities.

Further, Gibson, in his theory of the perception of persons, argues that we can directly perceive, at least to some degree, the self of the other person. If, following Descartes, minds are private, somehow hidden away in another reality off from the physical world, then not only can we not make direct contact with the physical world surrounding us, we clearly cannot make direct contact (mind to mind) with the mind or self of another. We are doubly hidden away from each other. We are inextricably alone, blocked off from each other by layers of impenetrable realities. Each of us exists in a solipsistic bubble.

Now it is clear that people can hide things from one another, and that we can't in any simple sense read each others' minds, but I think such facts are relative and variable (depending on the circumstances) and not absolute. It seems to me that at times, at least, one can see the other self, see into the other person. Mind makes contact with mind. The presumed absolute separation of selves can at times dissolve or transform; we can become one with the other. This occurs in love—there is that importance of love again. Again, we are not absolute separate individuals.

Now, based on my understanding of Gibson, how does one get to know another person? We get to know another person the same way we make contact with the environment: we actively explore and engage. Perception, which is a form of knowledge, is an active process, and the reality of what something is is revealed or made manifest through the dynamic interactions it has with other things. This is a critical point in Gibson's theory of direct perception, and it helps to explain how we get at the objective properties of the world, as well as at another person.

One could think of perception as simply consciously taking in what is delivered to the senses. I open my eyes and the world presents itself to me. But this is not really what happens. Vision, for example, is not like being shown pictures of the world (or having simulations played in your brain). Rather, as a starting point consider the following example, drawn from a different sense, touch: Imagine closing your eyes and having someone place a graspable object in your hand. You are asked what the object is. Usually, it is extremely difficult to determine this if you simply let the object sit in your hand, but if you are allowed to move your fingers over the object, to actively grasp and

feel it, and raise your arm up and down to ascertain its weight, you will be able to determine very quickly what the object is. You just need to explore the object and interact with it, and its identity is progressively revealed in increasing clarity. More generally, whether it is vision, touch, hearing, or even tasting, we perceive through active exploration and interaction with our environment; we do not sit still. In perceiving the world, we attend and we look, listen, and touch. If we want to see what something is, we look it over, inspect it from different angles; we visually explore it.

Gibson's theory of direct perception emphasizes the active and exploratory nature of perception. Perceivers are not passive. He believes that much more about the environment is revealed when one begins to explore and interact with the world, when one begins to move around. One reason for this is that the nature of a thing involves what the thing can do, its modes of activity and reactivity to the world around it. In interacting with something, its modes of behavior, action, and reaction are provoked and revealed.

Perceiving other people is especially significant in this regard, since humans are both highly complex and highly dynamical and interactive. We perceive better the nature of something by observing what the thing does, and humans do a lot of different things. Further, the people within our environment are perceivers and active beings as well, so part of what we perceive is how they are seeing us and reacting to us. Getting to know another person involves a complex and evolving process of interacting with each other, in different situations and in response to different things that we do and say relative to each other.

Also, recall that Gibson describes the environment in terms of affordances, and affordances are revealed by interacting with the environment. We observe what we can do with something by doing things with the object. People possess numerous affordances that they can offer to each other, but the only way to tell what those affordances are is to interact with the other person and see what happens, what they do and what they offer to us in our interactions.

In essence, Gibson describes the environment, including other people, in dynamical terms. The essence of things is a set of activities and modes of interactions that things can do. (The world is a network of dynamical relational properties.) Hence, perception must be interactive, and our being in the world must be interactive in order to apprehend the world around us. This brings us back to the idea of reciprocity—the nature of things is bound up in the interactions between things.

But let us go one step further, bringing in time and the ideas of persistence and change, in order to further understand Gibson's theory of direct perception. Gibson introduces the concepts of invariants and transformations in describing both perceptual stimulation and the properties of the environment. An invariant is something that remains persistent and a transformation is something that changes.

When one holds an object in one's hand and begins to explore it with one's fingers, a transforming pattern of pressure stimulation occurs across the surface of one's skin, as well as a transforming pattern of joint positions, and a transforming series of muscular tensions.

Yet, what is fascinating is that as this transforming and complex pattern of stimulation occurs, what happens is that a perception of a stable object emerges. Gibson would say that the invariant properties of the object are revealed through the

transforming pattern of stimulation. In an analogous case, as one begins to move through an environment, the eyes receive a transforming pattern of visual (light) stimulation—a “transforming optic array”—but it is through this optical transformation that a complex and stable environment of objects spatially arranged in a certain way is revealed. The invariant qualities of the environment are revealed through the transforming series of optical perspectives. To make the comparison with person perception and getting to know another person, the more interaction that takes place and the more patterns of change are experienced, the more the self of the other is revealed. Hence, it is important to be active and exploratory, to be interactive with respect to the environment, because it is through the varied and complex transformations of stimulation that the deep nature (the invariance of things) is revealed. What is objective comes into view as we move and as we interact with the world.

So, for Gibson, time becomes a critical factor in the perception of reality. You can’t see what is constant from a stationary position. You can’t see the thing in a moment in time. An invariant property only manifests itself across change—across time. Hence, there is a necessary connection between invariance and transformation. Although stability (persistence) and change (transformation) are opposite qualities, the former only emerges through the latter.

Consider this: What does it mean for something to stay the same, to be constant? Well, this concept only makes sense in the context of a change. Staying the same implies some kind of constancy across some change. One can’t stay the same in an instant. And reciprocally, change is only understood in the context of stability. A transformation is set in the context of an invariant. For example, if we say something is changing, what is the something that is being referred to that is changing? Something is being identified as a persistent reality undergoing this change. The plant is growing; the volcano is erupting; the glass is shattering; the animal is running; the person is maturing; the sun is emitting light: in each case, the change identified is anchored to some object or thing or context.

(As I learn all of this, I also think about Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, and Prokofiev; about perceiving patterns of sounds; about hearing melodies and harmonies and the juxtaposition of instruments and the development of themes through a movement of a symphony. I think about perceiving the invariance of Beethoven—or the development of his unique sound across his nine symphonies—across the transforming array of different pieces of music.)

Within Gibson’s ecological psychology, invariance and transformation describe fundamental dimensions of the environment, physical stimulation, and perceptual awareness. The environment exhibits both invariants and transformations, and each dimension is defined relative to the other. Physical stimulation possesses both invariants and transformations, and again each dimension is defined relative to the other. Finally, one’s perceptual awareness embodies both sensitivity to change and sensitivity to constancy and persistence; one can’t experience one dimension without the other. In consciousness there is both persistence and transformation. There is a fundamental reciprocity of persistence and change across all these parameters of perception. And this is a key point: stability and change are reciprocals. This is very different from Plato. There is no ontological dualism of stability (eternity) and change (time) in this.

For Gibson, time embodies a fundamental reciprocity of stability and change. Two apparently oppositional or contradictory qualities are two sides of the same coin. According to Gibson, the most fundamental distinction made in the perception of time within the environment is between relative persistence and relative change. The most basic experiences of time are seeing things change and seeing things stay the same. But persistence and change are reciprocally distinguished in perception. Perceptual persistence and change are relative, rather than absolute. Things are experienced as changing relative to things experienced as staying the same, and things are experienced as persisting relative to things changing.

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And on this note, let me return to the question of love. When I study with Gibson, I don't think too much about love. Laura is there, but for some reason I don't think much about love and Laura. Most of the time Laura is simply a constant in my life. This is odd and this is revealing. Instead I think a lot more about epistemology and our knowledge of the external world. I think about mind and matter. I think about the complex Gestalt properties of the mind, the body, physical stimulation, and the environment. My mind is into the Apollonian side of reciprocity, rather than the Dionysian or Romantic.

Still, from early on, many of the pieces regarding the nature of love begin to fall together in my mind. Applying a Gibsonian framework, love is a reciprocity, an interactive and dynamical reality that involves two people getting to know each other and providing the opportunity in certain important respects for each other's self-realization. Love is built on affordances. Love does not occur between two isolated minds entrapped in themselves and hidden from each other. To use a sexual metaphor, love is becoming naked to each other by exploring each other and loving it.

Knowing another person comes through resonating into the invariants that define the nature of a person, and this is only accomplished by going through and experiencing transformations with each other. That is, love requires time. Love requires ups and downs.

Love is an interface of complementary qualities, but there is a unity that emerges that defines the invariance of the two poles—what the individuals have in common.

Can one see into another? Perceive another person's thoughts, feelings, and desires? The better one is able to explore and attend to the other, the deeper one sees, but reciprocally, each of us can be more or less guarded in terms of what we expose. How much we expose depends in part on trust and our own psychological well-being, but there is nothing in principle that prevents exposure and connection. One can progressively reveal more, the more one becomes trusting and in tune with the other.

I am doubtful whether there is any absolute distinction between the inside and the outside, between reality and appearance, between mind and body, and if I follow Gibson's logic, then what is most essential and invariant gets revealed the more interaction and the more varied the interactions that take place. People talk about empathy and the sense of feeling what the other feels when the other is actually feeling it. We sense—we perceive feelings. This is part of love.

In the act of sexual love, where sex is really lovemaking, one can feel the pleasure of the other as if it were happening to oneself, and the sense of the self and

the other seems to dissolve into a sense of oneness. There are still two bodies and selves, but it is as if one were experiencing the reality from both perspectives simultaneously. One is both self and other.

Love is the transcendence and the dissolving of dualism.

The psychologist Albert Ellis, in discussing happiness and the self, states that one finds oneself by losing oneself. By this he means losing oneself in something or someone else. To become immersed in something outside oneself leads to self-discovery. This is basically the antithesis of Descartes and sounds rather paradoxical. Don't look for yourself in yourself; look elsewhere and you will find yourself. You find yourself in love.

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"The world is inseparable from the subject,
but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world,
and the subject is inseparable from the world,
but from a world which the subject itself projects."
Maurice Merleau-Ponty

At one level, there is a similar point made by Kant and Feyerabend in their theory of human knowledge and the theory of perception proposed by Gibson. Perception (or observation) is not a passive and receptive process; it is an active and selective process. The perceiver does not simply open his or her senses to the world; the perceiver looks and listens and guides his or her senses. There is no "sensory given" or raw unfiltered experience prior to the active act of perception. In Kant and Feyerabend, it is concepts and theories in the perceiver's mind which guide and select what facts are observed and how these facts are interpreted. On the other hand, Gibson describes the senses as "perceptual systems" which actively explore the world. Through the perceptual systems, which include sense organs, brains, and muscles all in active coordination, the perceiver interacts with the world to know it. The perceiver looks for what is of significance to him or her; the perceiver looks for affordances. In either case—Gibson or Feyerabend—the perceiver brings something to the experience, an active and selective engagement with the objects of perception.

But Gibson, unlike Feyerabend or Kant, believes that we can make contact with the world (the environment) through this active process. For Gibson, perception is a reaching outward toward the environment rather than the creation of a private object or representation in the mind. We are not all stuck in our own little conscious worlds of bias and conceptual-theoretical filters.

Gibson does acknowledge, and in fact makes a strong case for it, that perception is a skill and that one can be better or worse at perceiving different features of the world. What the perceiver has learned influences what he or she perceives, but this can be in a positive and penetrating way. The artist, through learning and immersion in art, clearly sees the world better than most of us, and the musician or composer hears sounds and combinations of sounds better than the average person. They have educated their senses through years of practice. They have learned and thought about things. Their minds know how to listen or see.

This means that we can learn to perceive the world more deeply and more fully. When the perceiver engages the world and guides his or her looking, listening, and touching through whatever learning has been acquired, he or she perceives the world the better for it. Perceiving the world better—perceiving it more accurately—would not make any sense if perception were entirely relative. Hence, the knowledge, concepts, and experiences brought to the act of perception don't necessarily block off the world, creating a subjective fabrication. Rather, the development of such cognitive factors can enhance one's capacity to know the world. The subjective enhances the objective.

I do not think that there is any way around the point that what we perceive is influenced by our learning, our beliefs, our concepts, and our general understanding of the world. What a person believes can blind him or her to salient facts, or distort the facts, but as noted above, beliefs can also help individuals in perceiving the world more accurately or thoroughly. Beliefs can also lead one to the discovery of new facts. (This is Feyerabend's point: that theories open up or help us to see new facts, and it a major point of Lakatos: that a good theory anticipates the discovery of new facts. It is defensive theories and defensive minds that block off reality.) I think that we have all noticed that people who have a well-developed understanding of a subject matter appear to be able to dig deeply and uncover the important "facts" in their area of expertise, whereas individuals who seem to have mistaken, incomplete, or distorted beliefs about something appear to perceive the world in limited if not erroneous ways. People can live in worlds of great clarity and depth or in worlds of obscurity and delusion.

What does seem clear is that our consciousness of the world is a dual creation of both the perceiver and the world, of what we call the subjective and the objective. Perception (in fact, all of human knowledge, including thoughts, theories, and concepts) is an interaction effect.

In the years at Minnesota and at Cornell, I learn to hear classical music. I learn to hear the complex patterns of sound and the distinctive styles of different composers. I learn to hear a symphony and learn to hear the difference between Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. My mind and perceptual systems are being educated. My mind—my hearing—is able to penetrate much more deeply into a dimension of reality that I had only marginally attended to in the past. As Gibson would say, I am able now to resonate with the sounds. I hear all the beauty which had been "there" but had gone unnoticed because I couldn't hear it, because I didn't bother to learn how to hear it. I perceive beauty and emotion in the concertos of Rachmaninoff and tune into the grace and power in Sibelius. I ask myself if one can hear the heart and mind of the composer in his or her musical creations. At times I think I can. Knowledge empowers; the desire to learn empowers; passion empowers the mind to reach out into the world.

Now, there is the theory that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, and that what is good is relative and subjective as well. Given what I have written above, these views are at best half-truths. For there is something beautiful about the music of Beethoven; you can hear it if you educate your senses. It is not simply in one's own mind.

Just as most psychologists and philosophers of perception since the time of Berkeley and Kant have argued that the experience of perception is "in the mind" and/or created in the brain, the popular psychological view has also been that meaning or significance is given by the mind to experience. The world itself is not meaningful;

matter is without meaning; it is the mind that gives meaning. (Actually this idea goes back to Plato.) This would include both the aesthetic and ethical qualities of things as well.

But Gibson, thinking ecologically, rejects these traditional views as well. The environment is rich in meaning, in so far as it is rich in affordances. It is also rich in values for the same reason. Affordances are the repository of meanings and values in the world. Affordances, of course, are defined as properties of the environment in relationship with perceiver. Affordances can be very complex and very abstract, yet affordances are not simply in the mind of the perceiver, and their meaning and value are not just in our heads. The environment offers things that can help us or hurt us, that are bad or good for us, that can inspire us or depress us. This is meaningful—this is what value means.

Herbert Feigl, probably my most inspiring philosophy teacher at Minnesota—a great soul and great mind who teaches me that humility comes together with wisdom—suggested that perhaps the puzzle of mind and matter, of consciousness and the physical world, has to do with a limiting or mistaken understanding of physical matter. Perhaps it isn't the mind that is mysterious; perhaps it is matter. Perhaps we have a totally mistaken notion as to the nature of the physical world. Gibson, in his theory of affordances and in his proposal that the environment is meaningful, is reformulating the concept of the physical world.

Just as I get the idea from Gibson that one can perceive the identity or self of the other, I also get the idea that one can perceive the beauty and even the goodness of things in the world. Just as beauty is more than a subjective phenomenon, what is good is also not simply subjective either. Of course, people can be blind to beauty, or be blind to what is good, or be blind to the other, but this doesn't mean that the realities aren't there to see.

Journeys through Space and Time

"Whoever discovered water it certainly wasn't a fish."
Anonymous

"The most incomprehensible thing about the universe
is that it is comprehensible."
Albert Einstein

Gibson discovered the ground by leaving it. During World War II he worked as a perceptual psychologist for the Air Force. One major challenge was to understand how experienced pilots land airplanes, how they could see where they were and how they were moving relative to the ground.

Within the history of the study of perception, a major area of interest has been space perception, that is, how we see depth, how we see the positions of objects, and how we accurately perceive the motions of things. In thinking about how airplane pilots perceive space and motion while flying through space, it dawned on Gibson that the ground not only provides a spatial framework relative to which a pilot perceives the

spatial layout of the environment, but also provides a framework relative to which the pilot perceives his or her location and movement. We are terrestrial creatures and we move across the ground (or artificially constructed surfaces of support that afford similar locomotive conditions), and consequently it makes sense that we orient ourselves relative to this ubiquitous environmental structure, even when we are in the air flying a plane. Yet, in the history of perceptual psychology, no one prior to Gibson had seriously considered the fundamental significance of the ground, and Gibson didn't really begin to think about it—to notice its importance—till he left it and went up in the air. We walk, we orient ourselves, and we see the layout and motions of things all relative to the ground. It is right under our feet, right in front of us extending outward in all directions. It is the spatial Gestalt in which we are beings-in-the-world.

Just as ecological time is relative (persistence and change anchored relative to each other), ecological space is relative as well. We perceive the motions, distances, and locations of things relative to each other, with the ground providing the ubiquitous framework for these different types of spatial perceptions. We do not perceive absolute or empty space. We perceive the layout of spatial surfaces in relationship to each other. Further, we see ourselves relative to the ground; our visual spatial proprioception is anchored to the ground. We need to see where we are—where our feet, our bodies, and our hands are—relative to the surface of support we use to get around in the world. Though one could think of the spatial location and motion of an object—where it is and whether it is moving or not—as absolutes (which was Newton's view of space), within Gibson's theory of perception, such fundamental properties of an object are ecological. Space is relational: the spatial location and motion of anything and everything in the environment is defined and perceived in the context of other things.

Another key concept in Gibson, relevant to this discussion of the spatial layout of the environment as well as to his theory of direct perception, is stimulus information. Gibson argues that the environment projects or broadcasts information about its layout and make-up in the form of stimulus information. Stimulus information is structured energy specific to a particular environmental fact. Objects, surfaces, and events produce patterns of stimulus energy (light, heat, sound, pressure, etc.) and each unique facet of the environment produces a unique pattern of stimulus energy. This unique pattern is stimulus information about the environmental feature. Our sense organs—more precisely our active perceptual systems—are sensitive to or resonate with these patterns of stimulus energy. We perceive the world because the world reveals itself to us through stimulus information, and as perceivers, we resonate to the information. The environment is structured in such a way that it is knowable. And we are structured in such a way to tune into this revelation of the world. The more we explore the world and engage it, the more information is revealed and the deeper we see—the more we see. There is an immense amount of stimulus information in the environment, more than we can ever tune into. Reality is a potentially infinite revelation.

Patterns of energy are built up out of variations in energy and relationships among these variations. That is, all information is composed of differences and relationships among differences. We perceive the environment in terms of differences which are relational properties. We see light relative to dark, up relative to down, curved relative to straight, and so forth. Colors are relational as well: red is seen relative to green and blue relative to yellow; they are complementary colors. In temperature

sensitivity, a bowl of water at seventy degrees feels warm to your hand if that hand has just been submerged in ice water and cold if the hand has just been submerged in hot water. Again, it is relationships that matter, not absolutes. In fact, it is oppositional relationships that capture the order of things.

We are engulfed in (as Gibson would term it) an ambient optic array, a converging pattern of light differences coming off of the surrounding surfaces of objects and the ground. This converging array of differences is information for the layout of the environment, and we see by means of these differences and patterns in these differences. Stimulate a sense organ with a constant value of energy and the sense organ adapts out—literally it goes dead. Sense organs need differences—that is, relationships—to operate. Submerge a human in a homogeneous and constant surround of stimulation—a sensory isolation tank for example—and sensory awareness dissipates.

If we are surrounded in something that is ubiquitous and without variation, it is invisible. We cannot see it because there is nothing to compare it to. There is no contrast, no difference. We ignore or become oblivious to what is constant. Monotony not only kills us, it deadens us, deadens the senses. Water is invisible to fish. Only when you leave the water, does the water become visible. Only when you leave the ground, does its significance reveal itself.

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Gibson pulls things together and tries to connect all the pieces. He takes what others have analyzed into parts and divided into distinct ontological realms, and shows how it all forms a whole—a Gestalt. Gibson even synthesizes opposites, connecting the heavens above (the sky) with the earth below (the ground), connecting the mind of the perceiver with the physicality of the world.

The historical thinker who is closest to Gibson in his approach to knowledge and reality is Aristotle. One of Aristotle's central questions was how the world could be known. Aristotle, of course, was the most illustrious student of Plato and equally, in many ways, Plato's greatest critic. For Aristotle the nature of a thing is its *telos* (its end or goal) in time. Plato ran away from time. The contrast of Plato and Aristotle defines the central dialectic of Western philosophy. Gibson follows in the footsteps of Aristotle, adding his own unique stamp to this dialectic.

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I don't know if you could call Gibson wise, but he was enlightened. He was amazingly creative, unavoidably lovable, cantankerous, theatrical, and unassumingly conceited and convinced about the monumental importance of his ideas. While other people will become ghosts of the past as the years go by, Gibson will remain very real to me. He is one of those persons who after dying will appear to me in dreams, ever alive and present. He is one of those bright stars in my life—my teacher and inspiration, an intellectual soul of great passion. I will carry with me, after my stay in Cornell, his general theoretical framework for understanding knowledge and reality.

Years later, the last thing Gibson ever says to me in a letter he writes a couple of months before his death is “Stay away from bright-eyed girls.” I save this letter. I think about these final words and ponder their significance. Perhaps what he says is real wisdom. Instead of saying something about philosophy, the meaning of life, or the nature of mind, he throws me a curve and sees deeply into my psyche. But that is another story, a story about a bright-eyed girl, a story still to come.

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The *Fifth Symphony* of Sibelius ends in a series of short bursts of sound, not the typical, flamboyant spiraling finale of classical symphonies. But in the ringing echoes of the staccato climax, one can hear backwards in time from that sharp and punctuated ending, with all the pieces coming together and defined by how the symphony ends. Time is a Gestalt: the whole, only revealed at completion, defines the nature of the parts.

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According to Gibson, we do not perceive absolute or empty time. We perceive events. Events are concrete rather than abstract. Events come in all degrees of complexity and duration. Events overlap and weave together in our lives. Events have meaning.

Ecological reality, for Gibson, is dynamic: the nature of things is revealed through interaction, through process and flow, through events. The “whatness” of something cannot be determined, cannot be defined in an instant. The “whatness” of things is in its interactions, in what it does over time.

Conscious time is a tapestry of events. It is not a linear line of points, of moments of the present. Conscious time is a Gestalt, extending outward in patterns of persistence and transformation. Past, present, and future cannot be sharply distinguished. Past, present, and future reach out into each other and define each other. This is the time of our lives. Gibson went looking for the moving line of the present but couldn’t find it. Who can?

There is, though, becoming and passing away, creation and destruction, birth and death. This is part of the perception of ecological time. According to Gibson, we can see these things. It is important to see them. They have great meaning in our lives.

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It is time to leave the history of science library at Cornell where I have studied the manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Kepler, and the great Medieval Arab optical scientist Alhazen. It is time to leave the forested hills of Ithaca, New York. It is also time to leave the frigid winters of Minneapolis where I have studied Feyerabend, Lakatos, Popper, and Kuhn, and where I discovered classical music. It is time to leave my years as a student.

I take my music and my books, and Laura and I pack up our furniture in a U-Haul. Bryan is almost three years old, and Laura is pregnant again. Our second child will be born sometime toward the end of the summer of 1973. We are heading into the unknown.

We first circle back to Connecticut though, where Laura sits and types my thesis—she types all of my papers—before it is submitted and defended before my thesis committee, the last step before completing my Ph.D.

In my thesis, I trace the historical development of perceptual theory from Plato and Aristotle and other Greek thinkers to Alhazen and Leonardo da Vinci and on to the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, covering people such as Kepler, Descartes, Berkeley, and Kant, and then proceed into modern perceptual psychology, including the Gestalt psychologists who strongly influenced Gibson. (Gibson thinks in terms of Gestalts about everything.) After this extensive history, I describe Gibson's own development, chronicling his work in the air force studying space perception; the emergence of his theory of perceptual systems; his concepts of stimulus information and invariants and transformations; and finally examining his more recent thinking on affordances, proprioception, direct perception, and his pivotal idea of reciprocity. I write an encyclopedia on the study of perception relative to Gibson.

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I ask myself: What have I really been looking for through all of this study and thinking? After having come unglued, after having abandoned the absolute "truths" and certainties of my youth—certainties destroyed by the flames of science and enlightenment and critical philosophy—I am now searching out a new ground, a new informed philosophical perspective that explains how knowledge is possible; how beauty, reality, and the good can be discovered; how love and wisdom and enlightenment can be realized. Such a new perspective is necessary in order to answer the challenges I encountered in my years of college study, the challenges of relativism, subjectivism, skepticism, dualism, existentialism, and atheism, with a good dose of Freud, the unconscious, and behaviorist determinism thrown in to give the whole unsettling mélange some added angst and flavor. The beginnings of the answer, I believe, lie in Gibson.

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Sitting on the front steps of Bill's apartment building in Minneapolis, having just finished my dissertation defense and now officially a "Doctor," I don't feel any different, and I feel very odd and very flat over not feeling any different. Perhaps, I think, it is the journey that matters, not the destination. Perhaps I am frustrated over the argument I have with one of my committee members during my defense. (But he only read a third of my thesis, the night before the defense.) Perhaps I realize that there are still much deeper things I need to learn.

That evening, Bill and I and some friends go out to a restaurant to celebrate. The restaurant host won't let me in because I am wearing a tank-top, inappropriate attire for the restaurant, he explains. Bill takes me back to his apartment on his motorcycle to get

a shirt for me so I can get into the restaurant. Bizarre, I think. I have a Ph.D.; I have accomplished something really big, something to be proud of. My mind has surely evolved. But because I am not dressed like all the other properly attired clientele in the place, I can't get in. The values of popular culture: what a bunch of shallow materialists. What am I getting myself into? What is going on in the outside world? Have I been watching and listening and looking?

Mostly though, what is going through my mind is that I need to find a job.

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It is time to really learn psychology and philosophy, time to learn about life and what goes on in people's minds. It is time to hear my voice and observe my actions. It is time to see who I am and who I will become in the world. It is time to hear "the harmony of the spheres," the music of the heavens and the rumblings of the earth. It is time to encounter the affordances of the jungle and realize that *A Clockwork Orange* is not about the future. It is time to walk down another dark street.

Chapter Three
Lightning in the Darkness

"He doesn't know which of us I am these days, but they know one truth.
You must own nothing but yourself. You must make your own life,
live your own life, and die your own death…
or else you will die another's."
Alfred Bester

"The Universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number, of hexagonal galleries…The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any hexagon and whose circumference is unattainable."
Jorge Luis Borges

Teaching in the Inferno

Darkness pervades the land. To the north, spires of orange and blue flames spew out of the myriad smokestacks illuminating the vast gray body of water behind them. Funnels of smoke, gray, and black and white, can be seen rising up into the sky. The landscape stretches out for miles and miles—ugly as hell—punctuated by street lights obscured by the soot in the air. Humans do not live in a place like this, only Morlocks whose skin has turned gray, mimicking the hue of oily machines, cracked and crumbling city streets, decrepit buildings and cement encrusted with the grime of decades. I feel like I am crossing into Dante's *Inferno*, all hope abandoned upon entering this ominous world of dilapidated warehouses and gargantuan steel mills, all shrouded in gaseous industrial waste. I am moving along the interstate just south of Lake Michigan, heading toward my new home. Immediately to the west is Chicago—off in the distance—only thirty miles away as the crow flies but a million miles away culturally with its modern glass skyscrapers, architectural wonders, luxury shops, and jazzy restaurants. There is none of that to be found in the place that I am entering now—this place of rusting, putrid decay. My God—what am I doing here?

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After graduating, I find it extremely difficult to secure an academic job. For starters, I rush through my final year of graduate school, writing a 450 page thesis in less than six months and consequently not allowing myself enough time to job search or publish some articles to add to my academic credentials. But Laura thinks I should start making more money. My graduate fellowship has been rather meager, we are broke, and we have a second child, Kristin, who was born in August. Also, we both want to move back east, to leave the Midwest and live closer to "home," but this narrows my initial job search to the northeast, a tactic that gets me nowhere, except that I waste three or four valuable months looking within too limited an area, and many job

possibilities pass me by. And finally, in graduate school I do not specialize in a narrow area of psychology and do not get into experimental research. I stay a generalist, interested in the broad issues of theoretical psychology, intellectual history, and the philosophy of science and mind. I am a Renaissance man living in an era of the study of minutiae. My thesis covers a two-thousand-year period of thinking on perception and is the length of a book. I want to be a scholar and a writer who investigates and ponders the deep issues of knowledge, reality, the good life, and the human mind, and who wants that?

Yet, literally at the last possible moment, feeling exceedingly desperate and dejected, I serendipitously run into a fellow graduate student while I am back in Minnesota defending my thesis, who tells me about a job offer he has just turned down that he thinks might fit me perfectly. I rush to tell Bob Shaw about the opportunity, and Bob immediately calls the chair of the psychology department with the job opening and convinces the chair over the phone to grant me an interview. In two days I am there going through the interview, and a couple of days later, the chair calls me and offers me the position—an assistant professorship in psychology at a four-year college in northwest Indiana. I take it. Though I want to head east, I am being drawn back toward the west.

Before we all move out, I come out alone to quickly find a place to live, and sick of living in apartments I find a house to rent, very close to the beach on Lake Michigan. I think it is picturesque and romantic. It is a big place but it needs a lot of cleaning up, and in our first week there (after Laura and the kids come out) we find live rounds of ammunition buried under garbage scattered about the rooms and lumps of dried animal dung throughout the house. Moving our refrigerator into the house, it gets stuck in the stairway leading into the kitchen. Its massive weight seems to willfully thwart our every effort, and we think we are going to have to rip down a wall before, finally, after a couple of hours of pushing and twisting it about, we maneuver it free. We rip up the wooden hand railings in the process. A million other little problems and nuisances emerge as we try to get organized in the place. The house does not seem open to our presence.

Then one night, about two weeks into our stay, as I lie on the couch in the living room, the TV suddenly turns on. In synchrony the whole house sparks up in a sudden flash of bright light, and I hear a large crack—like wood shattering. I am totally spooked out. What's going on? The idea that the house could be haunted—a notion we have recently entertained—crosses my mind, but within a couple of seconds I realize that the house has been hit by lightning; living so close to Lake Michigan, lightning is especially drawn toward our neighborhood. The lightning came in through our electrical wiring and not only split the wood handrail in the hallway but permanently fused the on/off switch in the TV set, causing it to go on. We decide the lightning is the last straw—a bad omen to say the least—and within a week we move out of the house into a nice clean three-bedroom apartment in a new complex at least five miles away from the lake. But I should know . . . call me superstitious . . . I think the house is hexed … it is more than that.

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Though I've accepted the job, I don't want to be here at the college in Indiana. I want a faculty position in a more academic location, preferably at an ivy-covered

campus in a small New England town where I can devote myself to being a scholar and a writer, where I can spend my time in libraries surrounded by books and in my study, reading Plato, Aristotle, and the classics of Western thought. Instead I am surrounded by and engulfed within the pollution-clogged, industrialized modern Midwest and its suburban outgrowth of apartment complexes, strip malls, fast food restaurants, and never-ending gas stations on street corners. Yet, my image of the future (though I don't realize it at the time)—the life of the bookish scholar in a rustic setting, reminiscent of Norman Rockwell paintings—is really a vision of the past. The future is someplace else.

Still, here I am in the now, in northwest Indiana, and my primary responsibility at the college is not scholarship and writing but teaching. In the coming years, I teach almost every course in the undergraduate psychology curriculum, from introductory psychology to perception, learning, cognition, motivation and emotion, the history of psychology, and contemporary theories in psychology, as well as some unusual courses like psychology and science fiction and the philosophy of science.

In spite of my discontent, as usual I rise to the challenge and decide I am going to extensively research every topic I teach and ensure that my students receive a thorough grounding in the subject matter of any course they take with me. I take Feyerabend's approach and make sure I describe the main issues and competing theories and viewpoints in each topic. I am a pluralist as opposed to a dogmatist. I also decide to adopt Turvey's style of teaching, coming to class with energy, enthusiasm, and the conviction that I can explain the principles of psychology to students and that they will understand it all and enjoy it.

It is strange that up to this point in time I never envision myself much as a teacher. Yet, I apply myself and go at it and I am rewarded—a very positive and uplifting surprise, in fact, and compensation for enduring the grayness and industrial funk of my surroundings. I quickly find that I love to teach (once I get over the anxiety of speaking in front of people). I very much enjoy my students and take great pleasure in engaging their minds. Within a year or two, I become a real teacher—in the deepest sense of the word—articulate, clear, animated, highly organized, personable, and above all else, stimulating and entertaining. I find I can get people thinking and talking and discussing and debating—I get their minds to come alive. My student evaluations are consistently very good, if not superlative.

Teaching emerges as the candle—the light—that helps to wipe out the feeling of bleakness that engulfs me. It pushes it back. I could be anywhere. It doesn't matter when I dive into the world of ideas with my students.

As I evolve as a teacher, it hits me that teaching is like conducting an orchestra in the performance of a symphony. All the pieces have to come together. One has to keep in one's mind the whole and weave in each component part in a logical and intuitive way, building to a finale that synthesizes all the elements into a great crescendo of insight and understanding. And like a symphony, a class period is a Gestalt—a holistic idea of many coordinated parts.

Further, on the emotional side, one has to make sure that the orchestra is excited and engaged. The students have to be provoked and challenged into performing, into opening their minds and voicing their views. They have to be astonished—they have to sing; they have to feel the thrill of learning and exercising their intellects; they have to experience enlightenment at times.

Teaching is entertainment for the mind. The souls of both the teacher and the students should be elevated and inspired by the experience. Good teaching is a passion, as much a Romantic expression as an Apollonian one.

The Apollonian, though, is not to be minimized. Without my concerns for analytic detail, order and coherence, abstraction and integration, logic and truth, and intellectual thoroughness, the Romantic would not be able to flower. It would be a superficial performance, shallow and filled with fluff. The Apollonian gives the Romantic substance, clarity, and depth; the Romantic gives the Apollonian life.

Teaching and learning is an interpersonal, interactive experience weaving together the intellect and the passions, and the teacher and the students.

As a consequence of my teaching and rewarding interactions with students, instead of realizing my dream of a solitary scholarly existence, lost in my mind and the universe of abstract ideas, I become much more social and sociable, drawing other people into my personal and intellectual space—into the worlds of history, psychology, philosophy, and science—and it is exhilarating. I am always talking with students in class, debating and discussing things with them. I talk to them outside the classroom as well. I bring them into my universe, and they open up and share their ideas, their hopes, and their lives with me. Being around them, I feel a sense of energy well up in me, a new dimension to my personality, a feeling of having value and significance. I get to know all these new people: Linda, Bridget, Joy, Bill, Terry, Pat, Greg, and hundreds and hundreds of others. It is an emotional and spiritual high.

What I find, in fact, is another way to experience flow, in interaction with others, and I can provoke flow in many of the students, the experiential flow of thinking about ideas, about the nature of the human mind and human personality, about the history of thought, and the wonders of reality. I always approach students with the highest expectations that they can understand whatever ideas, however difficult, I throw at them—that they can participate and experience enlightenment. I teach them Gibson. I teach them Feyerabend, Plato, and Aristotle. I do not sell them short. I do not talk down to them. I ask a lot from them and they frequently deliver. They love it and we get into it. We flow together.

Part of the life of the enlightened mind is exploring with others the meaning and nature of things. It is in Indiana, of all places, in this dark, depressing, culturally impoverished, and sooty world, that I first learn to lead others on the path to wisdom and enlightenment. It is in Indiana that I learn to teach and share my mind with others. It is the Yin and Yang of things.

As for my own intellectual development, it is through teaching that I much more deeply learn the subject matter of my disciplines, specifically psychology, philosophy, science, and intellectual history. When you have to explain something to other people, it really tests and challenges your understanding. You get to listen to your own mind, how well oiled it is and how well the different parts work together—out loud. Often you surprise yourself with what comes out of your mouth, where your mind goes as you start to think out in the public space around you. How do I know what I think until I hear what I have to say? Teaching is the best way to learn and the best way to practice and strengthen your thinking, and in Indiana I really learn and internalize what I have been studying for the previous eight years.

I feel responsible for communicating to students the clearest, most comprehensive and balanced, and most up-to-date and well organized overview of the material. In my mind, this is the core of education. This is the path to enlightenment for them. I want them to understand, to know, to be aware, and to have a broad and balanced perspective on things. I am continually pushed in the direction of knowing the subject matter better and better to make sure they get it better and better. Also, I am driven by the conviction that there is a way to explain any idea, no matter how difficult it is, to any reasonably intelligent mind, assuming the person will listen, ask questions, and discuss the idea with you. And I am my own worst critic, continually assessing myself after each class regarding how well I come across, how well the students react, and what I can do to improve the educational experience. I want the students to "see the light."

One day in one of my classes, a student stands up in the back row and exclaims "That's it! I understand." He picks up his books, leaves the room, and I never see him again. What did I say to him, I ask? I have no idea. But something triggers the flash, the insight, the moment of enlightenment in him—and that is that. He is off.

I may not be turning into the solitary scholar and writer I envisioned, but I am becoming more knowledgeable, more enlightened, more wise, yet it is in the context of interacting with people. All these higher qualities of mind and character, I come to realize, require a social arena in which to really blossom and be refined. As Gibson would say, we are ecological beings, and knowledge is realized in an ecological and interpersonal setting.

But something else is going on. If I am opening up in one arena of my life, I am closing up and retreating in another.

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It is 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. The house is still except for the classical music playing on the radio, but the music is very low. I don't want to wake anyone up. Almost every night I do this, stay up almost till dawn and read stories and novels in my study. I feel guilty doing this, for I think I should be trying to write articles for publication. Yet except for preparing for the classes I teach, I'm not creating much of anything new. I can't seem to find the desire to do so. This has been going on almost since I first arrived in Indiana. For the last three years, I have been devouring science fiction, sometimes reading a novel a day, often during the time when everyone in the household is asleep. My only company is the classical music in the background and the eerie ambience of that time of the deep night when ghosts from other dimensions and monsters from the unconscious wander about.

I ask myself why I am doing this. As a new college professor I should be doing research and writing in my discipline. My thesis has sat there for the last three years when, with some work, it could be published as a book. Am I trying to sabotage my career? Good teaching isn't enough; you need to write and publish. I know that if I want to find a better academic position back east, then I need to do this. And isn't that my dream anyway, to read scholarly works and write scholarly books? Am I being irresponsible for some unconscious reason that isn't clear to me? Is something pulling me in a different direction?

A good deal of the time I ignore the personal reality around me. Early in the evenings I can hear Laura and the kids. They do things: watch TV, talk, play games. But I am not there. I am in the future. I am off in outer space. I am in another dimension. I am wandering the desolate terrain of Mars, on an odyssey, accompanied by a friendly Martian named "Tweel." I am on Jupiter, a technologically and biologically enhanced human called Joe, terrifyingly powerful, amazingly strong, who has finally found his true self after a lifetime of being a cripple on the earth. Instead of sitting stranded in Indiana, I have left it. Instead of living in 1976, I have jumped into a time machine and traveled into strange and different futures. I am Frost, from Roger Zelazny's "For a Breath I Tarry," a super-computer in the far far future who rules the northern hemisphere of the earth, who cannot feel but who is searching for sensation and for love. I am one with aliens, strange tiny aquatic aliens, like those in "Surface Tension" by James Blish, who are trying to escape from the mud puddle in which they live and see what lies beyond. I am like the children in "Mimsy Were the Borogroves" who have learned how to construct a machine that is a portal into another time and another dimension. I watch the evolution of humanity millions of years into the future in Olaf Stapledon's *The First and Last Men.* I cry over the grand future saga of humankind, over the great progress and adventure and evolution, and finally the curtain ringing down on the "music that was man." I travel with a crew of humans and aliens to *Ringworld*, a massive circular structure ten thousand miles wide and a hundred million miles in circumference, surrounding a distant sun. We all wonder who built such an immense thing and then abandoned it. I am back on earth, in the present, but the Nazis have won World War II, and there is *The Man in the High Castle* who in the novel writes a novel in which he argues that the Allies won World War II. It is one mind-boggling trip after another. I am searching for the future; I am searching for something else.

The first science fiction novel I read in Indiana that triggers the escape and passage into this multiverse of possibilities is Clifford Simak's *City*. It is a story about a future in which humanity has disappeared. All that is left are robots and intelligent animals that somehow have learned to think and to speak. The saga is told around a campfire late at night by intelligent dogs who speculate on man and whether man ever really existed in the past. (What was, often evaporates into dreams, into obscurity, into ambiguity.) The story chronicles the abandonment of cities, the coming of robots, the invasion of giant ants from another dimension, and the escape of humanity to Jupiter and beyond. It is very touching. I don't want it to end. I immediately have to go out and buy another science fiction story to read—and another and another.

This, of course, has happened to me before, with classical music: total immersion, a sense of losing control, a sense of finding a whole new unexplored universe. This has happened before: a Dionysian or Romantic escape from the Apollonian. Except this time, it is interfering with what I am "supposed to be doing." I can't seem to stomach the abstractions and theories that I studied the last few years as I wrote my thesis. I can put together class outlines to present to students, but I have no enthusiasm for researching and writing papers. I need the concrete. I need stories, drama, color, and sound and fury. I need personification, something different. I can't seem to study the past. Again, I seem to be searching for the future.

What else am I supposed to be doing that I am avoiding?

I read a story about a mad android and his owner, one of whom goes crazy whenever the temperature gets too warm. It is not clear, though, which one of them is crazy in the story. Identities have become confused. Either the man or the android commits murders when the temperature gets too high. The story, written by Alfred Bester, is called “Fondly Fahrenheit.” It is a story about the meaning of personal identity, about what happens when identities get confused, when there is no longer any sense of “me” versus the other. Bester also wrote the book *The Demolished Man*—something else I read—the first novel to win the Hugo award for best science fiction novel of the year. It is a story about a future in which people have developed telepathic abilities, where we can read each others’ minds. In this transparent and highly paranoid future, a telepathic criminal must try to hide his thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and whereabouts from the police who are telepathic as well and who are trying to track him down, to corner his mind and invade it. It is a story of good and evil, of cat and mouse, of cops and robbers, taking place in a meta-space of naked minds. (Imagine how it would feel if everyone could read everyone else’s thoughts.)

Science fiction, I come to realize, gets into your deep consciousness, gets into your head. It explores the possibilities of self-identity, mental realities, and madness and sanity. Further, it goes after your sense of reality and unsettles it. You move into the intellects of aliens, into the consciousness of highly evolved or transcendent humans, of robots and androids, and even of God. You journey to *Solaris* where the whole planet is conscious—alive—a single mind that communicates through sending dreams into your unconscious. In David Gerrold’s *The Man Who Folded Himself* you time travel, switch your genders along the way, and become your spouse, your mother, your father, your daughter, and your son. Your consciousness forms an eternal ring, with no beginning and no end. Your head spins. As the collective intelligence of the entire future universe, in the great culminating act of cosmic evolution, you search out the mind of the Creator, and you find what you are looking for. You gaze into the mind of God in Olaf Stapledon’s *Star Maker* and are humbled, bedazzled, and blown away. You travel out so far in time and so far out in space that you encounter Spinoza’s God—the mind of everything—and God turns out to be a child, whose play is the creation of multiple, unending universes.

Sitting there late at night, alone, cut off from the immediate physical world yet filled with fantastical images and ideas—in the ultimate modern day juiced-up and teched-up version of the Platonic realm—I frequently feel strange, as if I were looking at myself from the outside and see someone different than I expect to see, than I used to see. How can I not feel different, be different, since I am saturating my imagination with so many alternative realities? We are beings-in-the-world and I am a being in a world, in a world of time travel, outer space, other dimensions, interpenetrating minds, and alien beings and alien worlds. My sense of reality and my sense of self are both being stretched in a million different directions.

My mind feels very clear though. Once again, I am passing through a period of enlightenment, of vistas opening up, of consciousness being expanded in new directions. And the world around me, of Laura and the kids, of Indiana, of my hoped-for future in New England, at times, seems totally unreal.

Yes, I am looking for something else, something beyond the epistemologies and philosophies I studied in grad school. And what is going on is not entirely Romantic in

nature—it is not entirely an escape from the abstract into personalization and drama; it is a metaphysical—an ontological—trip as well. And it is also a searching for something else beyond the world I presently inhabit, here in Indiana, in this downstairs study cocooned away.

Not that I haven't thought of it before, but perhaps I don't want the white picket fence in the small college town. Perhaps there are other things I don't want. Perhaps what I want is to float above the rings of Saturn and sing in resonance to the "harmony of the spheres." Perhaps I want to jump into a time machine and find the future.

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Every semester, including summers, I teach introductory psychology in a big lecture hall which holds around one hundred and fifty people. I teach from up on a stage, but I move around across the stage and reach out to the students. I don't use a microphone—I learn to throw my voice to the back of the room. Behind me I have a blackboard approximately thirty feet in length. Every class, I fill up the board with lists, diagrams, pictures, and terms. I connect the whole array with arrows, dotted lines, circles, and circles within circles, in essence creating a "mind map" of the topics discussed in a particular class. The students end up seeing the big picture of ideas, to be imprinted on their brains. I make sure I include as much imagery as I can; I am always asking if there is a way to create a diagram or visualization of an idea. I want the students to see the Gestalt and not simply hear a sequence of concepts. As I pace back and forth, turning my attention from my notes to the blackboard and then the students, I draw the class into the creation and discussion of the vision emerging before their eyes.

In introductory psychology, from early on, I present to students the holistic message that all of the basic psychological dimensions are interconnected and interactive. We have minds possessing consciousness, but we exist within an environment—one of concrete forms and meanings and affordances—and we are interactive with that world. We actively and selectively perceive, and we proactively behave. We manipulate and impact the environment as a consequence of our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, motives, and general personality. Perception impacts thought and emotion, but thought and emotion impact perception. Thought, emotion, and motivation all churn around in our heads, intertwine, and affect each other. Also, humans are creative beings: though in many ways creatures of habit, we also demonstrate creativity in almost everything we think and do. Though we are influenced by our genetic inheritance and shaped by learning and the environment as we grow and mature, we possess an autonomous capacity. Our minds creatively orchestrate behavior; we creatively orchestrate the content of consciousness and the direction of our lives. Because I think holistically and interactively, I can usually demonstrate some degree of validity in all the basic theories in psychology. There is truth in Freud, Jung, Skinner and the behaviorists, Rogers, Gibson, the existentialists, the cognitive psychologists, and the brain theorists and experimentalists. But I also point out where given theories are lacking. For example, the behaviorist approach is too limiting. The cognitive psychologists are right: you can't explain behavior simply in terms of environmental effects and learned habits; the mind shapes and influences everything.

One of my favorite courses is the history of psychology. These classes are much smaller than those for intro psychology, but the students are more advanced and the classes even more interactive. I trace the history of psychology from the ancient Greeks, including Plato and Aristotle, through Descartes and all the other Enlightenment philosophers, to the beginnings of experimental research, psychophysics, and studies of the brain in the nineteenth century, and into the study and analysis of consciousness early in the twentieth century. Psychology begins in philosophy and, as it matures, is influenced by advances in science, including Darwin's theory of evolution and even ideas from physics and chemistry. As I learn more and more history (in teaching it), I increasingly see how ideas today frequently begin somewhere in the past—how they are anticipated in ancient or early modern thinkers. History is a cumulative flow and development of insights and discoveries. I had shown this in my study of Gibson. Though there is creativity and novelty, it builds on the past. Aristotle anticipates the Gestalt psychologists, the functional psychologists, and Gibson in numerous ways. There are scientific revolutions, indeed, as Kuhn argues, but revolutionaries take pieces of the past and then put them together in new ways.

I teach a course in cognition and language and spend a good deal of time focusing on creativity. I first devour and then assign Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation*—one of the most impressive, learned, and encyclopedic books I have ever read. I find Koestler's description of how Johannes Kepler developed the three laws of planetary motion extremely fascinating. Kepler conceptualized the solar system in terms of the Holy Trinity: the sun was the Father; the earth (and other planets) represented the Son; and the force (of love) holding together the Son and the Father—that is, the Holy Spirit—was gravity. It was Kepler who first postulated gravity as a physical force that influenced the motions of astronomical bodies. For Kepler, gravity was astronomical love. Kepler ingeniously applied a theological metaphor to astronomy and in so doing figured out the how and the why of planetary revolution around the sun. Kepler was a trip—an incredible mind, a real visionary. (He also first correctly explained the optics of the eye, and he anticipated, early in the seventeenth century, traveling in spaceships to the planets.) As Koestler argues, Kepler, in his theory of planetary motions, took a familiar idea from one domain and applied it to another domain. He saw a connection between two apparently unrelated areas. A new Gestalt—a new whole—emerged.

I also discuss in the cognition class the new studies on split brains where the main connection between the right and left hemispheres of the cerebral cortex—the corpus callosum—is severed as a surgical procedure for reducing the severity of epileptic seizures in some neurological patients. Not only does this procedure seem to produce individuals that possess two relatively distinct minds or spheres of consciousness, it also seems that each of these two minds has relatively distinct capacities. The left hemispheric mind appears more logical, linguistic, analytical, and linear; the right hemispheric mind appears more intuitive, visual, holistic, and creative. The left brain thinks in words; the right brain thinks in images—so the emerging popular generalization goes. The two sides complement each other in a normally functioning brain where the corpus callosum is intact, but people can be either right or left brain dominant with an intact brain: some people are more orderly, linear and logical and some more intuitive, visual, and creative. I decide that I am too left brain dominant (my

Apollonian side), so through the years I teach in Indiana, I work on my weak side. I push myself to visualize everything—to think in pictures, to cultivate my creativity more.

The department chair also allows me to create new courses. I create a course on major themes in twentieth-century psychology. I create a course on the philosophy of science which I offer through the philosophy department. But the most unusual course I create is psychology and science fiction. Surprisingly there are other psychology professors around the country experimenting with this course, and there are a couple of anthologies of readings in the area. Given my renewed passion in science fiction the last few years, my mind has been churning and percolating with themes and concepts from the genre, and it occurs to me that one can find plenty of stories relevant to each of the main areas of psychology. Instead of reading a non-fiction psychology textbook, students can read fictional stories—crazy, imaginative, mind-expanding, way-out stories that bring new angles and perspectives to the main topics of psychology. Instead of abstractions and theories and experiments, the students encounter concrete characters placed in highly unusual situations. If the characters are also bizarre, so much the better.

I write to science fiction writers around the country and tell them about my idea of combining science fiction with psychology. Some write back, including Clifford Simak and Roger Zelazny. I go to a psychology conference in Minneapolis in 1976 where, coincidentally, Clifford Simak lives, and he agrees to meet with me while I am there. Simak, the author of *City*—probably my most loved of all science fiction novels—has lunch with me. What a trip. He is a gentle and kind man, quiet, pleasant, and very receptive to my ideas. It strikes me that here is someone whose imaginative capacities are immense but who, in person, is totally unassuming and very down to earth. Creativity is not all bells and whistles.

One of the stories I use in my psychology and science fiction course is “Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death.” The story, only written and published a few years before, is by James Tiptree, Jr. I consider it an excellent vehicle for understanding the concepts of instinct, love, emotion, and motivation. It is a love story about two aliens, spider-like creatures who live in a jungle-like world. The male, Moggadeet, is significantly bigger than the female, Leelyloo, and he both seduces and is seduced (a reciprocity) by her. After their wild, rambunctious, and fiery copulation, while Moggadeet sleeps, Leelyloo spins a web around him, entrapping him and eventually feeding him to their children. The story is powerful—graphic, visceral, almost pornographic—and filled with psychological and behavioral themes. I eventually give a presentation on the story at a psychology convention. As I carefully think through the story, it strikes me that Tiptree knows an awful lot about the science of psychology.

And one may ask, as I and many others do, who is James Tiptree, Jr.?

During the late 60s, a wondrous new writer emerged on the science fiction scene. Beginning with such provocatively titled short stories as “The Girl Who Was Plugged In,” “Please Don’t Play with the Time Machine,” and “Her Smoke Rose up Forever,” this new writer quickly achieved great popularity and acclaim. Yet, no one had ever met the person. All correspondence went to a P.O. Box in the Washington, D.C. metro area. Some speculated that this new writer worked for the CIA or the FBI, and for security reasons didn’t want his identity divulged. This new writer was James Tiptree, Jr.

One thing seemed clear from the style and content and gutsy power of the writing: according to one famous science fiction writer, Tiptree was unquestionably a man. Then in 1973, Tiptree's story, "The Women Men Don't See," was nominated for the best science fiction novella of the year and Tiptree wrote the nominating committee declining the nomination. But, why?

Sometime soon thereafter, Tiptree came out into the open and announced that James Tiptree, Jr. was actually a semi-retired psychologist, a gray-haired sixty-one year old woman, Alice Sheldon, Ph.D. Her story, "The Women Men Don't See," was nominated for the best science fiction novella (at least in part) because it seemed to demonstrate such a clear understanding and empathy for female psychology though it was written by a man. But then Tiptree was no man, so she declined the nomination.

Tiptree would write later that she had taken her pseudonym from *Tiptree Preserves* in Essex England, the source of *Tiptree* jams and marmalades. A bit of trivia I keep in my mind.

When I hear about Tiptree's true identity, I find the whole story so amazing—this older woman who has fooled everybody, this woman who comes off appearing like some James Bond type character—that I track down Alice Sheldon's home address. She lives outside of Washington, D.C. in McLean, Virginia. I attend a psychology conference there, also in 1976, and decide to take a taxi to her house. When I actually find her house and knock on the door (unannounced), a very tall, young gentleman answers the door and tells me she is away in Mexico or someplace. I am disappointed but I don't give up. I write to her, telling her what a fan I am of her writing and how exhilarated I felt when I learned that she was a woman. She writes back—a very nice letter typed in blue ink; sharp, funny, intelligent in tone; a really great mind at work that shows through even in a friendly, conversational letter. Tears come into my eyes when I read it. She signs the letter in the dual identity "Tip/Elli" that she says lives within her. I save the letter.

Around the same time, she writes a story titled "The Psychologist Who Wouldn't Do Awful Things to Rats" which, if she had maintained her secrecy, would have been a dead giveaway that she was a graduate-level educated psychologist (at the very least).

A few years later, Alice Sheldon writes a suicide note that she secretly saves for eight years before committing the act.

James Tiptree, Jr. —Alice Sheldon—what a soul.

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At times I do try to write works of academic scholarship. I write a sixty-page article on Bishop Berkeley's theory of perception, but I can't find a publisher. I don't look very hard though. I write a paper on Descartes but it sits on my desk. The papers are too picky and detailed and ponderous, and what is the point of them? I put together a presentation on Leonard Troland, the co-inventor of *Technicolor,* a psychologist who strongly influenced Gibson. I give the talk at the American Psychological Association convention, but I am bored and stiff.

But I also go out and buy fifty pounds of modeling clay and start to sculpture a huge and colorful terrain filled with model dinosaurs. I spend hours and hours making trees, hills, lakes, hadrosaurs, sauropods, ceratopsians, and carnivores. I do this as an

interlude to reading science fiction. I am very good at making clay dinosaurs—the best there is. I won awards for it as a young kid. Instead of working on my book on Gibson, I am into the grace and beauty of the Brontosaurus. It is amazing how well I can sculpture a Stegosaurus in mortal combat with an Allosaurus. For some reason I find more enjoyment and sense of accomplishment in this than in writing psychology papers.

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As I have said, Laura and I never argue. Peace reigns in our household—on the surface. Instead, I argue with my students in class. My students go with me into discussions of philosophy, psychology, and even science fiction. They journey into the past of the ancient Greeks and the future of cosmic civilizations. They are with me. They reinforce me, as I reinforce them. I feel a sense of mental camaraderie, something I feel is missing with Laura, and Laura knows it.

Still, I see Laura as ethically superior to me. Whereas she seems more giving, I seem more self-centered. Laura reinforces this; perhaps the message originally came from her. She is more committed to the marriage, to the ideals of a solid relationship and partnership, to the values of a family, to the raising of children. I frequently find myself ambivalent about the whole thing. Laura knows this. I have talked to her about this but I struggle, trying to be honest on one hand and, at the same time, somehow trying to work through it. At times I think I'm getting better. Many times I tell her that I love her. I see her as kind and giving. I feel a deep appreciation toward her. I think and tell her that she is too good for me. I feel an obligation toward her.

But Laura never comes into the study with me. Laura never comes to watch me teach. Laura never talks about ideas, never talks about history or philosophy with me. Laura never reads any books.

Somewhere along the way, emerging slowly over many years but growing stronger and stronger, she sends me the message that the life of the intellect is flawed. It is an escape from "reality." It is deficient when it comes to everyday, practical wisdom. Though I am "book smart," I am failing at life. I am not "realistic." From Laura's perspective, I don't spend enough time with our children. I don't sufficiently attend to their needs. I stay in bed too late in the morning. I don't get into family functions and events. I am odd, peculiar. I am too strange and aloof.

This message gets into my brain. She rejects what I love.

We do, though, share a number of things, but even here there is a problem. We go shopping together. We watch TV together. We go to restaurants and to the movies together. We attend social functions together. We play cards with our friends together. We eat together. We make love together. We sleep together. We talk about and plan out concrete practical events (buying cars, fixing things in the house, taking trips, etc.). In these areas we are partners, companions, and friends. But these are all things at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (security and bodily pleasures). And of course I ask myself, is that enough?

Although by some standards we are a success—we have a house and two healthy children; I have job security and a solid profession and career; and Laura is an excellent mother and housewife—and though in essence our roles complement each other, these standards of domestic success derive from the stereotypical middle class

family image of the 50s and early 60s, an image which is flawed. Our division of labor and interests generates a separation of the mental spaces in which each of us lives.

In the final analysis, though we live in the same house, eat at the same dinner table, and share the same bed, in many ways we inhabit two different universes. One thing Laura and I do agree on, though, is that we both want to go back east, me to find my ideal college position, Laura to be close to her family and old friends. At least that's what we keep saying to each other.

And then, in the third year in Indiana, the opportunity presents itself, the thing we presumably have been waiting for. There is an ideal faculty opening at a university in New England in the history of psychology, which is one of my main areas of expertise and interest. It is a position for a scholar and a teacher. I apply for the opening with great hopes of landing it. I do a great deal of work in answering all the in-depth questions included in the application. I think that my answers are very good. I go to the school to speak in person with the head of the search committee. I have read his book on the history of psychology; we have a great conversation.

But I don't get the position. I am second on the list. Candidate number one takes the job and that is that. That really is that. This is not the door into the future.

Lost in the Universe

Instead, I am lost in the infinite permutations and ramifications of a story I read the previous year, "The Library of Babel." I am writing a tale provoked by it, a time-travel adventure about leaving "The Library of Babel." There is a woman in my story, and the woman has bright red hair. She is tempting me to abandon everything and chase after her.

Written by the great Argentine fantasist, Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel" is the most imaginative, thought-provoking short fictional work I have ever read. More metaphysical and allegorical than, strictly speaking, science fiction, Borges' tale takes place in a vast library that extends indeterminately in every direction without any discoverable end. The fictional inhabitants of the library, with no collective memory of its creation, believe that the library is eternal. They also believe that the library is the entire universe, infinite or boundless in both space and time. Rooms upon rooms, extending upwards and downwards, forward and back, and to the right and the left, each room in the library contains shelves filled with rows and rows of books. Given certain constraints placed on the size of the books in the library ("…each book contains four hundred ten pages; each page, forty lines; each line, approximately eighty black letters"), Borges imagines that all possible sequences of letters and spaces are contained in the seemingly endless volumes in the library.

Consequently, given every possible sequence of letters and spaces, most of the books in the library appear to be random gibberish, with all imaginable successions not only of letters but words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. For example, in the library is a book that simply repeats "abababababab..." and another that repeats the alphabet for 410 pages. One book repeats "The cat sat on the mat" over and over again, and another book repeats "The mat sat on the cat" for 410 pages, etc., etc. etc. One book simply repeats "cat," another "mat," another "Shakespeare," another

“Borges.” One book alternates between “Shakespeare” and “cat,” and another book alternates between “dirigible” and “submarine” and so forth. One book repeats this paragraph (that I am writing right now) over and over again; one repeats it backwards; one leaves out just the articles and another just the nouns. Every permutation, every combination, is in some volume in the library.

But because of this totally unconstrained vastness of possibilities, somewhere in the library must be all the exact works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Plato, and Aristotle as well as all small, medium, and significant variations of their works. Every edition of *The New York Times*, of *The National Geographic*, and of *Cosmopolitan*, and every *Doctor Seuss* book are also all in the library. Again, since every possible book is in the library, the definitive answer to the meaning and purpose of the library, and of the entire universe itself, as well as all false answers, are contained in books somewhere in the library. (This book and all variations on it must also exist in the library.) The library contains all the words that Jesus said that are not recorded in the Bible, and all the words he will say at the Second Coming, whether he comes or not. Undoubtedly, in a very large set of volumes, the library contains the entire description, down to the minutest detail, of the future history of our universe (and every other one besides). Hell—the library of Babel contains “The Library of Babel” and all possible versions of it. The library swallows The Library of Congress and all future additions to it, as if it were nothing more than a morsel, a speck, a droplet of water for the mind. If that doesn’t make your head spin, nothing will.

The library contains every book that will ever be written and every book that will not.

The inhabitants of the library have spent their lives in search of the book that explains it all, but since there are so many books, most of which make no sense, the chances of finding the book border on the infinitesimal. The library is a boundless sea of chaos with islands of order spread about, at vast distances from each other, with no discernible (or every discernible) pattern to their distribution. The library is the universe of galaxies spread across the white noise of the background radiation of creation.

And of course, one could ask, if someone did find the book—the book that explained “life, the universe, and everything”—how would they know it, since there is an indeterminately large number of books in the library giving false explanations of the library?

And all of this futility is recorded somewhere in the library as well, along with a recounting of the day when someone actually discovers the “true” book and knows it, and knows why they know it. But how could this be? Yet it must be. What is impossible, as well as what is possible, is written somewhere in the library.

Every thought that Spinoza’s God could have is somewhere in the library. Every thought the Devil could have is there as well.

When I think through “The Library of Babel,” an infinite process without end, as the Beatles would say, “It blows my mind.” I become lost in a universe of absolute disorientation. It is frightening once you grasp the idea of the library. I imagine I am looking into the face of God. This is enlightenment, the opening of consciousness, but so powerful—so vast—my mind goes reeling every which way in its endless possibilities and implications. But, as I said above, at some point I also start thinking about escaping from it.

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After I read “The Library of Babel,” on one of those nights, alone, sitting in the middle of the cosmos, lost in Indiana, I can’t stop thinking about it afterwards. I talk about it with my students. I assign it as a reading in my course on psychology and science fiction. A million associations are triggered off by the story and its image. I see the library as a metaphor on life: searching for meaning and the right answers to things amidst a vast sea of meaningless gibberish, as well as false, misleading, or destructive answers. (To complicate matters further, the inhabitants of the library speculate that perhaps the books are written in some divine or esoteric code, or that perhaps the meaning of each symbol is contextually determined by the symbols surrounding it.)

I calculate the number of books in the library, assuming every book is unique and all possible books are present. The number roughly is twenty-six (the number of distinct symbols in the books and the one space marker) multiplied by itself (to the power of) 1,312,000 times (the number of spaces to be filled by the twenty five symbols and space markers within each book)—which comes out to a number of approximately 1,800,000 digits in length. (But these calculations already exist in the library.) For comparison, a trillion is a one followed by only twelve zeros (digits); a google is a one followed by a mere hundred zeros (digits). This number, “Babel,” is vast, deep, expansive, immense—a journey to all the galaxies and stars, across the entirety of space and time in the universe, and into the minute intricacies of every atom in the cosmos.

I keep ruminating on the point that everything I have written or ever will write is already somewhere in the library. It is as if all possible futures are already foretold in the library.

I compare the library with Spinoza’s God: everything is set, defined, determined, and articulated. (But of course Spinoza wouldn’t have allowed for all the chaos in the library.) Still, everyone must be trapped in the library—just as we are in Spinoza’s God—and we just don’t know it. All our lives are written there, seen through “the eyes of eternity.”

I ask myself if there is any conceivable way out of the library. The inhabitants can’t find a way out, but it hits me that somewhere in the library there exists a book that provides directions for getting out of the library. It has to be there. Every scenario, possible and impossible, has to be there.

Perhaps “The Library of Babel” is like a Buddhist koan: contemplating it eventually burns out the intellect and reasoning, producing enlightenment, or it drives you mad—which is maybe the same thing.

Sitting in my study I begin to think that I live in a kind of “Library of Babel,” surrounded by books, each book providing an answer to life or some facet of the universe. Somewhere in all the books is every possible answer. But also, many of my books are probably gibberish, confused, or misleading.

What’s more, although there is a great vastness to the topics and realms described and encompassed in the books in the library, it seems that there is something missing—something missing in the idea of a library. I can sense it but can’t say it, can’t

wrap my mind around it. I feel that I am trapped in my own library and that there is something outside of it.

So I begin to write a story. It is a time-travel story about a man who lives in a library. The man is a scholar, an Apollonian mind, a being of reason and order. His goal in life is to understand everything, to integrate the vast wealth of knowledge—of science and philosophy—and put it down on paper. Like Spinoza, he will see into the mind of God. He will write the book. But this is somehow not enough, he realizes; the intellect cannot capture all of existence. Existence cannot be frozen into words. I am thinking that Spinoza is wrong—but how?

Hence, I imagine a woman whom I call "Harmony" coming into the library, invading the ordered space of his world. Harmony is a being of emotionality—fiery red hair, quintessentially erotic, a being of fluidity and fickleness—an expression and personification of the chaos of time. Her name is ironical and yet right on the mark, for she will bring balance into the excessive imbalance of order, intellect, and reason. Plato is wrong: reason did not create harmony; ultimate harmony requires chaos. What a strange idea!

The woman tempts the man, leading him out of the library, and he chases her through time in a time machine. Time is the portal out of eternity. Harmony will not stand still for him though. She is time in a metaphorical sense. On every occasion when he finds her, she breaks free and runs away again. She cannot be frozen or captured. He will learn about love, though, through this endless chase (such a depressing image of love indeed) and learn that eternal stability cannot encompass time.

The vision is highly dichotomous, dualistic, and stereotypical: I envision the man as standing for reason and order and the woman standing for emotionality and chaos.

To think Jungian, perhaps the story represents my search for the "anima" (the female side) in me. I have not found it—yet.

For the Greeks, wisdom ("Sophia") is a woman. Perhaps I am looking for wisdom, having become at least a little enlightened?

Perhaps I am ready to dive into the rabbit hole. Only "fools rush in." Yet to be wise, one must first be a fool.

Whatever the case, I have an unnerving feeling that the story is a premonition.

It is the early summer of 1976. I am thinking—a crazy thought indeed—that I want to become a science fiction writer. I am thinking that science fiction gets at things better than abstract philosophy or psychology. Life is a story, not a theory. Life should be fantastical, imaginative, and filled with lightning and chaos, not a home in the suburbs or a walk among the eternal heavenly forms of Plato.

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"Don't wish too hard for your heart's desire, you just might get it."
Confucius

"Now I have the chance to be a decent human being,
for I am standing eye to eye with death."
Ludwig Wittgenstein

This is what I'm thinking at 11:00 p.m. on the day after Christmas, 1976. What I'm thinking is I need to find myself, perhaps to create myself. Find, create—whatever the case may be—I feel that my identity got away from me, somewhere, somehow. I don't feel a sense of an autonomous self within my conscious mind. I feel I have been lost in others. I feel that everything I have done has been in response to others, in relationship to them and their expectations. This is what is going through my mind. What an odd thought. Perhaps there was never a real sense of who I was, and I am only now realizing it. What on God's earth has happened to me?

I have to figure all of this out, on the road, traveling by myself through the night, talking to myself out loud, to hear my thoughts and make sense of things.

Laura and I have separated. It has been around five months. We had been together for the last twelve years. My whole adult life I had been with her. Although immersed in my books and then in teaching, I realize now that it was hard for me to feel a distinct sense of self, especially around her. It was Tom and Laura for so long. I was lost in Laura, and now I have been set adrift.

This all comes as a great existential shock to me, now that I am alone. The ground, which I never noticed and which held me down under the pull of its gravity, has been removed. Instead of flying like a bird (my fantasy), I am lost in space, spinning head over heels with no sense of up and down.

Perhaps the marriage was simply the final stage of my adolescence, since we married young and moved from our parents' homes right into an apartment of our own. Frequently, in fact, I felt and behaved like a child through those years—again especially in front of her. That's it—I am a child.

Our life was in many ways highly conservative: married in a Catholic church, big wedding, having two kids rather quickly, and then buying a house the year before. Yet, below the surface of normality, there was tension: tension over values and tension over what we wanted in the future, tension over commitment. To what degree was I really there through any of it? To what degree was she really there with me? Yet, I frequently felt suffocated by a presence that, paradoxically, was not really there at all—a contradiction. And now I am gasping for air.

Things blew apart in the summer. Our separation was horrendous and traumatic. Many bad feelings were expressed along with much incrimination. The castle in the sky—the house of cards—collapsed in a violent whoosh.

One night in the spring, I got stinking drunk and threw a fit, accusing Laura of mothering me. I kept yelling at her that I didn't want to be mothered anymore. Things settled down, but a couple of months later she told me she wanted to talk about our marriage—an odd thing since that was something she had never expressed any desire to talk about at all. But within a couple of days, the talking turned to arguing, and she told me she wanted to separate. She told me she wanted me to move out of our house.

Despite my ambivalence, when she said all this I became extremely distressed. Although for many years I had felt a sense of both estrangement and entrapment, when the reality finally hit, I found myself not wanting to go through with it. I wanted to stay together. All of a sudden, I felt a great love and longing for her. Laura wouldn't change her mind though, and I packed up my stuff and left within a couple of weeks.

The first few months, I was very lonely, very sad, and very depressed. I also felt very confused. Why had I experienced such a complete reversal in my feelings? Why

did I want Laura back? Perhaps it is that the power of the familiar is very difficult to let go of, even if you've felt there was something wrong with it. I also thought that maybe I didn't appreciate her and took her for granted until she was pulled away from me. Was that it? Or was it really a simple flip-flop? Was there something deep and primordial that I was oblivious to?

Did I really love her all along? Did I really want to be married? Yes and no. No and yes.

My mind was a jumble. My mind kept swinging back and forth between extremes. Nothing seemed to make sense. Perhaps that was good. Perhaps that was to be expected. Perhaps that's how the journey begins.

By the late fall, I found it increasingly difficult to be around her or interact with her. After so many years of being together, it felt totally and utterly unnerving and odd that we were not together, and that this person whom I had thought I knew so well was turning into a stranger in front of my eyes. Perhaps she was always a stranger; I was just standing too close to see it.

Reality can go in different ways but the bifurcation point comes. Yesterday I saw Laura—my wife—with her new boyfriend at the house I had lived in just a few months ago. It struck me as bizarre. It infuriated and upset the hell out of me. The need to get away from it, to go somewhere to escape from this strange and ugly reality took hold of me.

Now, the mother gone, I've taken off into the darkness alone on the day after Christmas, searching for who I am in the solitude of a cold winter night. (Am I crazy? But spending Christmas alone is a terrible experience.) Indiana is four hours behind me and I am now heading northwest through the forested hills of Wisconsin on a desolate stretch of highway in a blizzard—destination Minneapolis—to see my old friend Tom and talk about things; to cry and vent and pace around.

But I have to focus on the road. My survival need kicks in. Waves of snow are lashing the windshield, and I'm blinded by the white fury engulfing me. The world is a chaos of roaring elements. The snow is unbelievably thick. I can't see the road. I brake. When the wash of snow passes, the *Mercury* I am driving is straddling the highway. I look in my rear-view mirror just in time to see the headlights of a semi-truck bearing down on me. I have five, perhaps ten, seconds to get out of the way before the truck plows into me and I really descend into oblivion—absolute oblivion.

A minute later I am still alive, having pulled out of the way just before the truck goes zooming by, flashing its lights and bearing down on its horn to hammer home the fact that I have almost been plowed over by a big semi going seventy miles an hour. I shake and tremble for a few minutes—my body knows how close it came to annihilation—but eventually I return to thinking about my life and where I am going with it.

I want to find myself. I want to be with someone. I am off alone. I am searching for the other. I am a contradiction.

I am thinking about time. I envision time as an elusive thing. Yet, I also think—contrary to Plato—that it is within time that reality is revealed, that reality is created. (I think of Gibson, that the essence of things is in the doing; in the process; in the transformation.) Reason and the intellect can try to grab hold of the form of things, to clarify, identify, and put into some comprehensible order the pattern of existence, yet

the forms of things keep changing. The “Word” is frozen, but life is fluid and filled with contradictions. (The beginning cannot be “The Word.”)

We are all in search of ourselves and the meaning of life, perhaps believing that the answer can be found in some principle or ultimate insight, or maybe some person or imagined deity, but can such a final resolution or answer ever be achieved? Things move within time and change colors along the way: trucks zip by; you look death in the eyes; wives leave you or you leave them; you leave your home and cannot go back again; you change and can no longer find yourself.

The world is unsettled, and things will not stay put. My life has come unglued. I am running. I am searching. I am zig-zagging down the road.

As I am driving along through the night, I am also thinking about God—the presumed absolute eternal stability, security, and authority over it all. Having been raised a Catholic, I dutifully went to church, confession, and Holy Communion as a youth, and regularly prayed to God, at least on Sundays and every night before going to bed. But as a young adult, I rebelled against the Church, with its moral directives, ceremonies, and stories regarding the creation of the universe and humankind. The idea of a God is an internalized parental figure telling you what you can or cannot do, or can or cannot think or believe.

In college, I came to see myself as a child of the Enlightenment, breaking free of superstition and the tyranny of elders. I felt that individually determining your own life was critically important. At some point, one doesn’t need parental figures anymore, so I thought. And there was Sartre and Nietzsche and the death of God. There was the freedom and individualism espoused in existentialism that both drew me and frightened me at the same time. (For Sartre, the self is nothingness—there is nothing to find.)

I have, over the last few months since Laura and I separated, been creating a second story, a story about God trapped in a cell of His own making. The story is a dramatized critique of Spinoza’s God. (But I also include the Devil in the story—a persona nowhere to be found in Spinoza.) If Spinoza’s God is everything and it is all determined—every last little nuance of life—then both God, as well as all of us, are trapped in this universe where everything is set. But I have been thinking that neither God nor the universe can be defined, even by God. God cannot figure out who God is. (The universe is not a library, no matter how big it is.) I envision that the “Big Bang”—the act of creation, the last piece in the story I am writing—is when God decides to break free, to self-destruct, to go beyond His/Her own perfection, His/Her own completeness. Creation is the death of God. Creation is breaking out of jail. I am breaking out of jail.

Yet immediately after the truck whizzes by, contradicting my own presumed philosophical position, I thank God that I am still alive. On the road tonight I feel removed from everyone I know, but I don’t feel entirely alone. Whether or not it is only in my mind, I feel a presence. I feel a strong sense of God.

There are no atheists in trench holes, and I sure as hell feel like I am in a trench hole. I have collapsed into a believer again out of confusion, desperation, loneliness, and fear.

I can’t seem to reason myself into a state of felt autonomy. But you can’t be reasoned out of something you haven’t been reasoned into.

I think to myself that I wish that this sense of God within me would go away. (People go searching their whole lives for God and here I am trying to lose Him.) I want to be alone in the empty darkness of my head with no one there but me. I want to determine my own future based on what I want and what I think is right. Isn't this what I have always wanted?

I am like crazy Descartes, looking for myself in the void. I am driving along the road trying to realize Descartes's vision of self-discovery within the darkness, but this is impossible. I have written on this. I should know better. Why don't I see the contradiction between my own striving for individuality and my understanding of Gibson? One cannot be free in absolute empty space. One doesn't discover oneself in a vacuum. But then I do have company this night—a presence I keep talking to—yet I keep trying to eject the presence from my consciousness.

And then, the question of God aside, there is also an intensely felt need within me for another presence in my life—for a woman—for love. I think about women a lot now that Laura has left. Yet I ask, if I want to be an individual, to be totally self-determined, why am I chasing after a woman in my dreams? In my stories? Why am I chasing after women in the daytime, while awake?

I am just starting the journey into time, into the future. Though I believed that I had left my parents and childhood home far behind—a good ten years ago—I have probably only just left the nest. I see that. This is only the beginning of the time-travel story being played out.

Somewhere along the way to Minnesota, I start thinking that the fundamental truths about life all sound like contradictions. (Is there a name for this principle?) You find yourself by losing yourself. The only thing that stays the same is that nothing stays the same. Perfection is corruption. Madness is good. Harmony requires chaos. "In nonsense is strength." Freedom is realized in a deterministic world—the more determinism the better. Take away all the presumed chains and supposed constraints on your life and you become immobilized.

For the last twelve years I have secluded myself away, immersed in my books, at times wishing for freedom, and now that I am really free and on my own, I feel lonely. I have no idea what to do. Is something wrong with me? Is all of this crazy thinking, and if so, so what?

Again, is it that the presence of Laura over the last twelve years has only become really apparent to me by her absence, or is it that the loneliness of my existence all those years with her only became palpable when there was no longer someone there to occlude the fact, to numb the feeling? Did I numb the feeling with sex?

One may not discover oneself in a vacuum, but one doesn't discover oneself in a cell either. The philosophers of the Enlightenment knew that.

Perhaps God is speaking to me. Perhaps he is saying "I understand that you don't believe in me. You don't even believe in yourself. But here are a few ideas to consider, a few points to ponder that will open the door into the future."

The Quality of Love

Go backwards in time around two months before the ride through the blizzard in Wisconsin—another time-travel story. Don't wish too hard for your heart's desire; you just might get it. The moth flying into the flame.

She has long elegant fingers with dark polished nails. She wears jeweled rings on both of her hands. She reaches across towards my hands, which are resting on the table. Electricity sparks when she touches my fingers. Her eyes are like diamonds, bright and alluring, scintillating like her rings. She is smiling at me. She is wearing a soft cashmere sweater. It is pink. I can feel it though I am not (yet) touching it. I can feel her as well through my eyes—direct perception. I can smell her too. I am mesmerized.

She is like a bird. She is singing to me, for me. She is a siren and I am Odysseus trying to find my way home.

This is the beginning.

She is the second woman I will love. She is the second woman I have total sex with in my life—take that back—actually she is the first. (She always says "making love" though, and never simply "having sex.") I feel that I have been drawn into a whirlwind of passion, of excitement, of enticement.

That first night we go to my apartment. I pursue and push, but I am also pulled and drawn. I am freed from the past. The sight of her naked beautiful ass undulating up and down in the glow of the bedroom light is permanently imprinted in my mind. After our first encounter—right out of the blue, a spontaneous meeting, a coming together with a total stranger—I want to see her everyday.

I chase after her for two months. I am drawn to her sensuality, her sexuality, the energy of her being. She is very much alive. She moves her hands about dramatically when she talks. She sparkles and she performs. She argues with me. She teases me. She flirts with me. She is a free spirit. I am pulled into this, and I go after it.

She strokes my ego, talks to me in a way that no one has ever talked to me before. She tells me dirty jokes. She tells me how attractive and desirable I am. I am nervous around her. Am I afraid I am going to lose her?

Many romantic evenings follow. We light candles. We drink wine. We travel up to Chicago to exotic restaurants. This is all new. But then, at the end of such evenings, she goes home and she disappears again into the night.

Six weeks into our affair, I propose marriage to her, though I am not yet officially divorced from Laura. (What am I, crazy?) She tells me it is all too fast. She says that I am on the rebound. She says that things are great between us so why get married and spoil it all?

She says I should go out with other women. This hurts me.

In late December, she gets ill and pulls away. I get impatient with it all, and that's the night I hit the road for Wisconsin. When I return, I go over to her house and we argue. And it ends as quickly and dramatically as it began.

Her hair is streaked blonde. She sways her hips when she walks. She is a fox. She can't keep her house in order. She is always in a rush. She holds her head high and she is deeply and obsessively angry with her ex-husband. Something about her becomes implanted in my psyche, an archetype that stays with me. An intimation of what is to come.

That is Suzanne.

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Sometime later in the winter, Laura calls me on the phone. She wants to talk. After trying throughout the summer and fall of the year before to change her mind about breaking up, I have finally given up. And there was Suzanne—now gone. And then, when I least expect it, the phone rings and there it is, Laura's voice. We get together at a restaurant and she tells me that we belong together. She tells me that she has changed her mind about things. She tells me that all the things I said to her back when I was trying to keep things together have finally sunk in. But mostly, she just sits there and looks at me with those eyes.

I realize, though, that I am angry with her, angry over how she handled the whole thing, over how she broke up with me. I ask her if she is now alone. She says that she is, but down deep I don't believe her—don't trust her. And I feel that her effort to resolve things is half hearted at best. And after having suffered through the worst of it, I am beginning to feel okay on my own. I am feeling better about myself. Isn't this what I wanted anyway?

After a number of these meetings, I tell her that I want a divorce.

In court, the judge asks me if our differences are irreconcilable, and I say yes. I look at Laura when I answer this question, and she stares back at me with a sense of judgment in her eyes. (A look that was probably there for a long, long time but one I hadn't consciously noticed.) She answers "Yes" to the same question, yet it seems to me that she says it because I do. But our differences were perhaps always irreconcilable. It just took over ten years to acknowledge it openly.

The whole thing haunts me though. Perhaps we shouldn't have been married. Perhaps we lived in different realities with different values. Perhaps part of me felt suffocated and constrained; perhaps part of me couldn't really grow. But after all is said and done, I carry with me a love for Laura. She was the first one. And I also carry with me a sense that there is something wrong with the life of the intellect, something missing, something dysfunctional, something disconnected and dissonant, something inimical to realizing the good life—to realizing love. I have been unconsciously afflicted with dualism. Her face will follow me into the future.

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It is the early summer of 1977. I am sitting with Bill on the porch of his cabin in the forested hills of central Pennsylvania. Bill has a teaching job at a local college and I have come to visit him for a week. Bach is playing, booming outward into the thick woods surrounding us. We are drinking strong coffee out of big heavy mugs and discussing the nature of quality and love.

As I mentioned before, Bill is a real sharp cookie. I love talking with him. I also very much enjoy coming to his place in Pennsylvania. We are out in nature; the rush and noise of urban life is gone. And Bill is such a calm and jovial soul. Around him, staying at his place, my existential worries and ubiquitous underlying stress seem to vanish.

The year before I had also visited Bill for a couple of days (while I was still with Laura) and he recommended a new book he was reading, Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I had no interest in motorcycles or Zen for that matter, but Bill said that the book was really something—deep philosophy—and that I should go out and get it. He wants to talk about it. I read Pirsig's book later that year, a big part of it while I stay with Tom in Minneapolis during the Christmas break.

And now I am back and we are discussing Pirsig's book in great depth—pulling it apart, debating it, immersing ourselves in it. Both of us clearly resonate with the ideas in the book. Pirsig's key idea is quality, what it means and why we should go after it.

Pirsig makes a fundamental distinction between two different modes of knowing and approaches to life. He refers to these two approaches as the "Classical" and the "Romantic." Basically, the Classical approach emphasizes reason, logic, and abstraction; the Romantic approach emphasizes passion, intuition, and concreteness. Pirsig's distinction follows rather closely the distinctions commonly made between Rationalism and Romanticism, and the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

In popular common sense psychology, the distinction is frequently made between thinking and emotion, and we often say that some people seem more rational, detached, and logical, whereas other people seem more emotional and intuitive. (In Jungian psychology this distinction is fundamental and basic to personality assessment.) Of course, everyone both feels and thinks, and we often seem to switch back and forth, depending on the situation, between being more cool and rational and more hot and emotional. Yet, as I have noted, even if both emotion and thought are natural and universal features of all human minds, these two dimensions of the human psyche have been set at odds with each other within the history of Western philosophy and psychology.

What Pirsig wants to achieve philosophically is a way of synthesizing these two modes of experience—of transcending them—and making contact with life and the world more holistically. For Pirsig, the Romantic-Classical distinction is a creation of the Classical mode of thinking, of creating sharp abstract dichotomies. Within a rationalist framework, thinking asserts its individuality and separateness, and its superiority to emotion. Pirsig believes that in dissolving this distinction (in achieving a unified consciousness), one can experience the world holistically and tune into the quality of things.

Related to this first point, Pirsig also discusses the subject/object distinction, the experienced separation between the conscious self (the self as knower) and the world (the objects of awareness). Pirsig believes that in transcending the Classical-Romantic distinction in how we approach the world, we can realize a sense of unity/oneness with the world experienced: that is, the subject-object or self-other distinction disappears, and we make direct, unmediated contact with the world. Specifically, he believes that when we think about something (when we enter into a rationalist mode of consciousness), we stand back and separate ourselves (as subject) from the object of thought and from the world; according to Pirsig, we want to get away from this ontological and epistemological rift.

For Pirsig, the dissolution of subject and object is what happens in the experience of quality. The "I" evaporates (speaking metaphorically) into the object and vice versa; there is simply quality. This is a Zen state: there is no me or other, there just

“is.” Similarly, the Chinese Taoists talk about being in the Tao, of not resisting or forcing one’s will on the world but becoming one with the Way of things. In like manner, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, a Western psychologist whom I will discover years later, describes “flow” as a state where one is so immersed in a task that the sense of self disappears, though in “flow” one does try to guide reality along.

So, if, according to Pirsig, the state of oneness, within oneself and with the world, is the key to the experience of quality, what indeed is quality? Quality can mean what a thing is, as in a listing of the qualities something possesses; quality can mean the properties of something, such as its color, size, or shape. But quality can also mean excellence, as in a high-quality piece of art; something of value has “quality.” It seems that Pirsig means both of these things, the nature of the thing and the excellence (or value) of it, and perhaps, indeed, the two are connected; what something is, is precisely what it is worth, or what defines its value. (This idea, in fact, sounds very much like Gibson’s concept of affordances: the nature of something is its function and value.) But Pirsig resists trying to provide a verbal description or definition of quality**,** as if to do so is to provide a rational or conceptual box in which to place what is beyond words. Pirsig clearly seems to think, though, that quality is ultimate reality**,** existing prior to attempts to conceptualize it. And he also seems to think that if one mentally distinguishes the object from oneself, one loses the ultimate reality of things—one loses quality. One cannot stand back from reality (as we do when we think and reason) and understand the nature of reality. One must participate in reality—without trying to describe (or control it)—and then one intuits it, experiences its quality.

And this is an interesting insight. Whereas science and rational philosophy have taken the view that “objectivity”—the truth of things—is to be found by standing back and detaching oneself from the object studied, lest subjective bias and emotionality get in the way, Pirsig says the reverse: re-integrate emotion and thought; lose yourself in the experience and reality is found.

Yet, because of my Gibsonian way of looking at things, I have mixed reactions to Pirsig’s philosophy. First though, on the positive end, Gibson does argue that when one actively engages the world, the world reveals itself. One doesn’t stand back from the world to know it. But following Gibson’s ecological theory, the self and the world are reciprocal realities and experienced in relationship to each other, and hence I doubt one can ever completely lose oneself when one is immersed in something of quality. The very nature of the perception of an affordance is to perceive the relevance or value of something to you.

Still, overall, Pirsig’s idea of quality appeals to me. Sometimes in reading parts of Pirsig, it seems that what he is saying is that the quality of something is its “uniqueness.” Within the rational mode of consciousness, we abstract and conceptualize. We say that we have a body; that we have a mind; that we are sitting in a chair; that there are various plants, items of furniture, etc. in our environment. All these nouns used to identify the objects of consciousness are abstractions, referring to classes of similar objects, but the concrete fact is that each object in the environment is a unique reality, a particular. The world is not filled with abstractions. This ontological/experiential fact appears true especially when it comes to persons. Each person is a unique and special reality, and to try to describe or capture that reality in terms of abstractions (for example, the person is smart, kind, wise, considerate, or

temperamental) misses the real essence of the person. It appears to me that Pirsig, in his idea of quality, is trying to get away from this tendency to identify the nature of something with its abstract features. This is part of his philosophical agenda of moving away from a strictly rationalist approach to reality.

Beginning with the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and continuing into the Middle Ages and modern times, a fundamental distinction has been made between abstractions and particulars. Plato saw the world of time as consisting of particulars, of distinct, concrete, and transforming realities, whereas, in the eternal realm there exist abstract ideal forms. Plato separated the abstract and the particular. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the "form" of a particular thing (its chair-ness or tree-ness) did not reside in a different realm, but within the particular itself. The abstract and particular reside in the same reality. Though he maintained the conceptual distinction, Aristotle rejected Plato's ontological dualism of abstract realities and particulars.

Now, in everyday language when we describe reality, we use abstractions. We identify the abstract form of what is being described, as in, for example, the sentence "I am sitting on a chair." "Chair" is an abstract noun and "sitting" is an abstract verb—each refers to a conceptual class of similar objects and similar actions respectively. Yet, it seems that something is lost in this description, namely, reality. The world clearly seems to consist of particulars. Each chair is a unique thing. No matter how I may try to capture this uniqueness—this concrete reality—in language and conceptualization, I miss it. Hence, to achieve a state of really knowing or experiencing reality, (even the term "reality" should be avoided here since it is an abstraction), to realize Zen and experience quality, is to experience the immediate non-conceptualized uniqueness of "beings," what the Zen Buddhists call *genjokōan*, or "presence of things as they are," their "suchness." In the East, this immediate consciousness is enlightenment.

But on this last point, although I see the unique around me—though it makes sense intuitively—I also realize that there is a problem with this idea as well. As Feyerabend argued, all observation is filled with the influences of theory and concepts. How can one simply open one's mind to the particulars? How can one directly apprehend the uniqueness without conceptualization? And isn't uniqueness itself an abstract concept? Isn't the idea of the unique—of the particular—a theory of reality? The distinction between abstractions and particulars is itself an abstraction.

So Bill and I sit and discuss abstraction—abstractions that lead me to think that abstractions can never lead me to real knowledge and enlightenment, and yet, equally, abstractions that lead me to think that one cannot transcend or navigate around abstractions. Bill and I are really good with all of this—all these abstractions—and we sail around in the Platonic realm commenting on the earthly realm below, rejecting Plato in theory yet following him in practice.

In the morning we philosophize over coffee; in the evenings we do it over beer. In the morning it is birds chirping; in the evenings we are accompanied by the sounds of frogs and crickets calling out to each other off in the dark woods. It seems to me that Bill's cabin is the ideal place to discuss anything and everything; one has only to pull up a chair in front of nature, wild and rich and colorful, and yet peaceful, and the thoughts come forth like a fountain of illumination. The raw feel of nature—of rich and varied particulars—seems to energize, by its very complementary dimension, the philosophical adventures of the mind in which we engage.

Discussing Pirsig amidst the beauty and perceptual richness of nature leads us to love. We especially talk about and theorize on love, for clearly we are searching for it in our lives. As flesh and blood creatures, filled with passion and desire, we are searching for the real thing—for quality, uniqueness, the soft feel and smell of a woman, of immersion in the other. As philosophers, charged by our ids from below, we are trying to understand it, understand what it all means and what we need to do to realize it.

It hits Bill and me that losing oneself in the experience of quality describes fairly well the experience of deep love with another. It seems to us, in fact, that to be in a state of love is the paradigm case of experiencing quality, and love need not just refer to love of another human being. It can refer to being in love with nature, in love with art or music, in love with ideas or knowledge, or in love with the cosmos or God.

Clearly I am looking for quality, for someone—that unique and beautiful someone. Maybe Laura was just the wrong person. Perhaps I just don't want to be married, but I definitely don't like the solitude. Books and abstractions are not enough. Love and companionship are equally, if not more, important. I see this now.

The long and the short of it is that after the divorce from Laura, what rises up rather quickly and strongly in my consciousness, in my inner being, is the powerful desire to find love. Talking with Bill about Pirsig, quality, and love resonates with my present state of being—with the intense, if not obsessive, longing in my soul.

In taking the idea of quality and applying it to the question of love of another person, I think that love is experiencing the uniqueness of the other person, and that when one immerses oneself in the other person, this uniqueness is revealed. Immersion is not a passive, receptive process though. Immersion or love is interactive and attentive, and it doesn't happen all at once; it requires time. The more you look, the more you see. Love is perceiving the quality of the other person revealed over time. But not to make this sound like a one-sided thing, being in love involves each person immersing oneself in the other and each person experiencing the uniqueness of the other. Being in love is a coupling of beings in flow. It is being in flow with each other.

Further, in order to be seen, one must show and reveal. One can be closed and guarded, and then it becomes a challenge to see the person. Part of being in love is the desire to reveal oneself to the other person. It is the desire to be naked. A corollary is that in one sense it is impossible—and in another sense, totally undesirable—to be physically naked to another person with whom one is not in love.

One final point about Pirsig—as important as anything else I have mentioned thus far, and perhaps the key to it all—is his approach to writing philosophy. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* weaves together a personal narrative with an abstract philosophical discussion. In essence, Pirsig attempts in the book to blend the Classical and the Romantic, the abstract and the unique, the eternal realm of ideas with the temporal flow of concrete events. The dual dimensions are complementary, each illuminating the other. Perhaps a straightforward philosophical exposition is too dry, bloodless, and impersonal, and any philosophy worth its salt must be anchored to real life and a real person. What credibility is there in abstractions unless there is a personal and empirical grounding of them? Further, the abstract and the personal, weaving back and forth, provide a balance, a rhythm, a stylistic richness to a philosophical work. I am thinking like a philosophical artist, like someone who sees the value in the narrative,

given all my reading in science fiction. I am thinking that I want to write a book like Pirsig's.

I visit Bill frequently during the late 1970s, and we talk about Pirsig, love, quality, Gibson, the philosophy of science, consciousness and mind, the nature of the physical world, and a host of other philosophical topics. Bill eventually moves from his cabin in Pennsylvania, but he continues to live somewhere out in woods, in forested hills down dirt roads. It is a far cry from the world of cities and super-highways in which I exist. It is great to stay with him and leave all the other stuff behind, if only for a short while. But each time I go to see him, I think things out some more and return to my own life ready to go at it with some new ideas, some new angles, some fresh and rejuvenated feelings on how to come at things.

Bill has several German Shepherd dogs and the alpha male is named Helmholtz, after the great nineteenth-century scientist and theorist on perception, Herman von Helmholtz. Helmholtz frequently sits with us on the front porch while Bill and I talk. He looks at us with his big dark eyes, and it really seems as if he understands what we are talking about, as if the soul of the man Helmholtz were reincarnated in this dog at this time to see how thinking on the nature of perception, knowledge, and reality has progressed in the hundred years since he died. I feel as if I can see into the mind of this dog, and he can see into my mind as well. There is a sense of resonance. There is a sense of the mysterious.

In Nonsense is Strength

It is the late summer of 1977. I am sitting in my apartment staring at the bust of the Neanderthal man I have sculpted out of clay. The face is powerful and realistic—it looks as if there is a mind in there. The room is dark except for the flickering lights of candles. The smell of incense wafts through the air, and the eerie and ethereal music of Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* keeps rhythm with the shimmering candle light reflecting off the walls of the apartment and the starkly illuminated face of the bust of the man from the distant past. Everything in the room seems to be pulsating in tune with the strange and compelling sounds of Schoenberg's music. The Neanderthal man appears to gaze back at me in the darkness, his strong somber face looking paradoxically sad yet wise. I feel as if I am looking into myself as I gaze back at him, or perhaps he is looking into me. Across time we speak to each other. Whatever is going on, we are in resonance late at night, amidst candles, incense, and the sailing, ghostly violins of Schoenberg.

I am thinking that the place where one lives should reflect one's mind, one's soul, one's spirit. Ecology should mirror psychology. When I moved into the apartment a few months earlier, after my divorce, I arranged my furniture and belongings along traditional lines, putting my fold-out bed in the bedroom and the living room furniture in the living room—as it should be. (I had always lived in traditional, conservative households.) I tried to squeeze my books and desk into the dining room, which I was using as a study, but I had too many books and the bookcases spilled over into the adjacent living room. On the walls, I put up a few posters and a painting I had done of

Don Quixote, copying—I believe, very accurately and with artistic flair—Picasso's black-on-white version of Quixote and his partner, Sancho Panza.

But as I survey my space, the rooms feel too normal, bleak, and uninspiring. I have never had a place of my own, and in a flash the question occurs to me, why must I keep the apartment arranged along traditional lines? If it is my apartment, I can do anything I want with it. The reality of my freedom suddenly hits me, a freedom that has been there since the split with Laura but has gone unrecognized. Such is the power of long-term conditioning and habit.

So I begin to change things, mixing the rooms up and imbuing the walls, surfaces, and spaces with rich saturated colors and esoteric objects and decorations. I put a huge, bold picture of a glow-in-the-dark Brachiosaurus up on one wall in the living room and next to it a beer poster, reminiscent of the 1930s, picturing a dreamy, naked woman, her blond hair and bronze skin illuminated in a spotlight of warm, revealing colors.

I go out and buy mauve, modern living room furniture and set up the bedroom as the living room—placing the new furniture in there. I fill the room with beauty: big artificial flowers and bright and colorful tall feathers in pink and orange and purple and red. I put pictures painted in pastels up on the walls of the bedroom I have converted to the living room. There are no books in this room, and I envision it as the love room.

The real living room (the biggest room in the apartment) I transform into the study, with bookcases and art surrounding me. I also put my foldout bed in this new study, which during the day functions as a couch. I cover the walls of the study in surrealistic, fantasy, and science fiction art, mostly posters, including Gilbert Williams's heavenly and iridescent space paintings and Patrick Woodruff's dreamscapes that mix together images of aliens and alien worlds, hellish monsters, symbols of the unconscious, doll figures, and colorful animals—a modern day version of Hieronymus Bosch with a good dose of Salvador Dali thrown in.

I take my dining room table and put it in the study where it serves as my desk and working area; my regular desk is too cramped for me to work at and, at any rate, I have always liked writing at a dining room table rather than a desk since college.

On one whole wall adjacent to the study, I affix classical album covers, perhaps thirty of them. Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Bach, and Ralph Vaughan Williams announce their presence on the wall.

Even in the small kitchen, I cover one wall with bright metallic paper and paste cut-outs of figures from Patrick Woodruff on it. I fill every surface and every wall in the apartment with strange and colorful things.

One night I create a collage for the new study that measures around three feet by four feet. I stay up till four in the morning doing it. I paste pictures of philosophers, psychologists and classical composers on it, including Wittgenstein, Freud, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Spinoza, and mix them with paintings of Chagall and Maxfield Parrish, as well as the bizarre and idiosyncratic musical notations of Stockhausen. I also include quotes, such as Nietzsche's "There is always some reason in madness and always some madness in reason" and Sartre's "I am what I am not and I am not what I am." But I also put numerous Kliban cartoons around the collage, with titles such as "Whack your porcupine" and "Never give a gun to ducks." In one corner of the collage is the Top Ten Popular Tunes from *Cashbox Magazine* for the week of July 7th, 1960; the number one

hit that week is “Three Bells” by The Browns. In the center of the collage, I have a big picture, painted by Maxfield Parrish, of Humpty Dumpty and above the picture a quote from Kurt Vonnegut’s book, *Breakfast of Champions*: “In Nonsense is Strength.” I also include pictures of Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin, and right next to Wittgenstein, I paste a picture of Greta Garbo. I think that the collage is a great work of philosophical and cultural art, combining the absolutely profound and classical with the blatantly ludicrous, silly, and mundane. The collage dominates one wall in the study. If the apartment is intended to reflect the various rooms of my mind and psyche, then the collage is a snapshot of the smorgasbord of images, ideas, and feelings that perpetually circulate through my head: art, music, women, books, philosophy, the trivial and paradoxical, and heaven and hell. I am trying to create something new, and at this point in time I am throwing colors, ideas, and images on the drawing board, and arranging them through artistic intuition rather than reason.

There are times when I think that all the color and energy in my apartment is to compensate for the depression and loneliness I frequently feel inside—a reaction formation. But I also think that the apartment is an act of exuberant self-expression after having felt suppressed for so many years. Both answers are probably right. I have come to the conclusion that divorce is an oscillatory phenomenon: emotions and behaviors swing back and forth; bodies press against each other and then recoil away. I feel depressed, angry, and even guilty over my marriage ending, as well as about how it ended, and yet I also feel exhilaration over being able to create a place of my own and live a freer lifestyle. I swing back and forth, and there is a great deal of nervous energy in me, undoubtedly fueling my creativity as well as priming me for some significant move in my life. For many years I have been focused, studious, and constrained, and the creative explosion, manifesting itself in decorating the apartment, is simply an initial wave of activity connected with trying to find my wings.

Most nights I am out, though, restlessly prowling about and looking for something or someone—I can’t tell which—having a great deal of trouble sitting still. (I had sat still for the last ten years). Sometimes I find it very difficult just being by myself. Although I spend some evenings alone in my new apartment, reading or writing while listening to classical music, a rather steady stream of women come and go over the year and a half I spend in this bizarre and wonderful place.

As I come to learn, there are many young women out there ready and willing to couple and connect. One is the lovely brown-haired Janine, an extremely bright student in one of my psychology classes. Janine has long beautiful legs and a luscious round ass. Her slightly pointed chin and nose match the animation in her bright, intelligent eyes. Janine is sharp. She is a delectable combination of mind and body, and her energetic presence draws me in. Janine likes me and I like her. Once she has completed the class she has with me, she visits me in my apartment. She decides to help in the redecorating of the apartment and the construction of the collage. One night, taking a break from working on the apartment, she and I watch the old 1950s version of *The War of the Worlds* together. Maybe we are stimulated by the ray guns in the movie, or maybe it is the profusion of fake flowers and eclectic art in my place, but immediately afterwards, in a moment of sudden impulse, we move from the living room to the study and make intensely passionate love on my foldout bed. Janine is adorable and vibrant. I feel a complete resonance, an undulation, with her. Were the timing different, who

knows, perhaps something would come of it, but the romance ends in a month. And as Vonnegut says, “And so it goes …and so it goes…”

There is also the slender, petite, and shapely Sharon. She is a fair-skinned, natural blond and wears tinted granny glasses which accent her pretty and rather delicate face. Sharon’s personality is anything but delicate though. One day, she comes up to me—I hardly know her at the time—and simply says, “You’re beautiful. Do you want to fuck?”

And there is the cute, big-breasted Lori, who simply loves sex. We are together a few months and that is that. There are others, but I can’t last very long with anyone. I am living the dream life of a young bachelor (a dream that had been pushed to the back of my mind the previous ten years), but the series of women eventually becomes a blur, a parade of pretty faces and naked bodies. I am sowing the seeds of my own destruction. I am lost in a Dionysian reverie—a Newtonian counter-reaction to middle class monogamy and Apollonian order.

At some level—at every level—the whole thing feels wrong, alien and out of whack though. How did I get into this situation? A couple of years before, I was living with my wife and kids, perhaps not totally happy, but definitely feeling a sense of security and stability—a sense of the known. I was teaching college and finally making a decent salary after being rather poor through graduate school. Generally, my life up to that point in time had been a relatively smooth trajectory out of childhood, into adolescence, and then young adulthood. It felt normal, perhaps oppressive in ways but normal. I thought I had a relatively clear sense of who I was and what I wanted. But this all now seems like a dream. Divorced; on my own; all these women coming and going; the fantastical layout of my apartment: it feels like something evil has entered into my life—into me—and sent me spinning out of control into this alternative universe. (But wasn’t I drawn to this? Wasn’t this within me? Wasn’t I creating and nurturing this vision all along in my mind?) The Apollonian has been kicked out the door and the id has invaded, or been let free, into my conscious reality. More to the point, having left the mother figure and gotten over being home-sick, the wild crazy kid underneath is let loose.

One day in the apartment, I get the impulse to buy a tarantula which I name Rachmaninoff because the beautifully coordinated movements of his eight legs remind me of the skillful motions of the great pianist and composer. One night though, Rachmaninoff curls up in a ball, looks like he (or she—who could tell?) is going to die, and as I watch, a slimy gray ball begins to appear on its back. I can’t go to sleep since I have no idea what is happening, and the whole scene frightens and unnerves me. But then, after a couple of hours of this strange and ugly transformation, I realize that Rachmaninoff is molting. The next morning, the old exoskeleton lies there, beginning to shrivel up. The new Rachmaninoff, still wet and gray, is sitting unperturbed as if nothing has happened. The following day, I bring Rachmaninoff back to the pet store. It is just too much for me to watch such a thing. Afterwards, I keep thinking that maybe I am molting, that the spider was in resonance with my own ongoing transformation.

On another night in the apartment, the theory occurs to me that it is just when everything is exactly as you want it—when harmony has been achieved; when the forces of the cosmos seem to have come into complete resonance with one’s inner

self—that a meteorite will hit. Perfect order and equilibrium is not a good thing; it seems to provoke its opposite of disaster and chaos.

But then, maybe humans (at least some of us some of the time) sabotage ourselves. We get what we think we want and then on cue we decide to destroy it or throw it away. (Is it that we don't feel we deserve it?)

Then, of course, a third possibility is that even if it looks like you've achieved the best of all possible worlds, down deep, somewhere in your mind, you realize that something is terribly wrong, and unbeknownst to your conscious ego, you self-destruct to get things moving in a different direction—a better direction. For example, you start reading science fiction. Secularists might refer to this process as the unconscious having its say in things; spiritualists might say that the hand of God is at work.

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One night I decide that I am going to leave my teaching job in Indiana and head west in search of a new life. The idea of heading east had died after my divorce from Laura. The decision to go in the opposite direction occurs in a *Howard Johnson's* restaurant at 2:00 in the morning over steak and eggs talking with Frankie.

Frankie and I had grown up together, friends off and on through grammar school and high school back in Waterbury, and once free from the control of his parents and his first wife, he has begun to let loose and give in to a wanderlust that must have been simmering underneath for many years. Coming out to see me is his first stab at finding a new direction for himself. It is the late summer of 1977.

The *Howard Johnson's* is appropriately located at the crossroads of the Interstate highways 80, 90, and 94. In one direction, the highways head back east toward where I was born and grew up, to Connecticut and other states in the northeast; in the other direction the highways head west toward the open plains, the Rockies, the sun and hot deserts of the southwest, and eventually California. The two opposing directions define the past and the future for both of us.

Frankie and I have been out to the local bars drinking tequila, and we are sitting by ourselves discussing what we are going to do with our lives. Both of us are recently divorced, participants in the great surge of broken and failed marriages that is sweeping the country, being carried along by the rise of individualism, liberalism, the loss of commitment, free love decoupled from real love, and the hippie culture of drugs and rock n' roll and doing your own thing. Frankie and I want to leave the past behind and find something new out west. Frankie is all charged up—in part on the tequila—and ready to go.

Over the last year, I have read Robert Pirsig and the story of his odyssey across the country on a motorcycle, and also Carlos Castaneda's series on altered states of consciousness and the teachings of Don Juan, books that, significantly, take place out in the desert southwest. Through these books, the adventure and the freedom of the west calls out to me. I have also been devouring the writings of Kurt Vonnegut, including *The Sirens of Titan*, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and *Cat's Cradle.* Vonnegut's ideas on the comedy and absurdity of life are great medicine for my unsettled heart, funny and metaphysical at the same time. In particular, his great dark

science fiction novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, which I read concurrently with Pirsig, pulls me out of my present reality and lifts up my soul. In *Slaughterhouse Five*, a man jumps around through time. He lives through war and disaster, finds love with a highly erotic movie star, and dies, over and over again. All of this new crazy stuff stirs up my juices and primes me for Frankie's visit.

Northwest Indiana, with its steel mills and deteriorating cities and towns, has been oppressive to me, right from the start, and now I really want to get away. What is holding me, I wonder, except a steady job? Do I have to stay here just because Laura and our kids are here? Who cares what she thinks? I no longer feel much like a father; I feel more like a visitor, a babysitter, who is not really liked. At some level, I am sure I want to distance myself from her. Frankie and I promise each other that the next summer we will head west, perhaps together.

The idea has been growing in me over the previous couple of years that I want to leave academia and become a science fiction writer. I love the world of books and ideas, but I have been in school either as a student or a teacher all of my life, and I think I need to break free of this cocooned existence and dive into the rough and tumble "real world." (Where did I get this idea from?) The strange, exhilarating, and mind-expanding science fiction universes of outer space, aliens, alternative realities, time travel, and the future strongly appeal to me. I can become a science fiction writer out west, amidst the mountains, desert, open skies, and cactus. (I don't stop to ask myself if this is really diving into the "real world.")

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But, of course, since I am a ship set adrift upon the open sea, never having learned to steer my craft really on my own, and since I am distressed and exhilarated and confused over my parting with Laura, and since I am out on the streets chasing girls again—a throwback to my teenage years—and probably for a million other reasons, I make a mistake, a big one.

While I was in college, and later in graduate school and into my first years of teaching, I had pretty much steered clear of smoking pot. The Hippies had tempted me, but after a couple of tries, I decided I didn't like the effect and stayed away from it. But now, feeling lonely at night and no longer sequestered off in my study, I start to go out with lots of different people. Among these various friends, acquaintances, and lovers, some smoke pot. I try it again, and then again, and then again, and by late 1977, it is becoming a habit.

For me, it seems to work as a stimulant. It charges up my mind and spirits and provokes intense, complex trains of thought, of insights and visions. It is another way that I am expressing my freedom, my Romantic/Dionysian side. I create art (for example the collage) while stoned. I have sex while stoned. I engage in incredible conversations with people—so I believe—while stoned. I become totally immersed in movies while stoned.

Out on the street a culture of marijuana holds sway—the evolution of what had first emerged in the late sixties. It is the thing to do. It is connected with emancipation and free thinking, with exploring consciousness, with feeling good, with not being straight, stiff, conservative, middle-class (who wants to be such things?).

The double-edged sword of drugs, including marijuana, is that they frequently do have positive effects on a person's moods and states of mind—albeit short term effects. They can calm you down when you're nervous and elevate you when you are depressed. They can wake you up if you are tired and drained and put you to sleep if you have to get up early the next morning. They can put you in a happy sociable mood. They can relax inhibitions. They can heighten the senses. They can temporarily cover up psychological traumas. But they can become habits and are subject to the law of diminishing returns. You start to need them, to want them on a routine basis, and your tolerance grows over time.

I wish I could say—in resonance with the Hippies and the liberals—that pot is relatively harmless, non-addictive, and actually beneficial in some ways, freeing the mind and spirit to see deeper, to feel deeper, to chill out and calm down. I wish I could say that pot brings enlightenment—one of the central arguments of the Hippie culture. But I can't, without some serious qualifications, say these things. In the long run, if you start smoking it regularly, it deadens and confuses your mind. It creates lethargy. It clouds your judgments and gets you paranoid. It gets you doing things you would never do otherwise. It gets you hanging around with people you would normally steer clear of. It gets you doing the same stupid things over and over again. It creates negative after-effects. In this regard, it is like alcohol. It is not a good idea to make major life changes if you are regularly using pot.

But first you must make the mistake before you can learn the lesson and give the speech. In the fall of 1977, I am getting high most everyday and haven't, as of yet, flown off the ledge.

* * * * * * *

It is my last class in Indiana. It is May, 1978. There are approximately one hundred students in the auditorium and I am finishing up a section of introductory psychology. I have taught this course at least a dozen times in the last five years. At the beginning, back in 1973, I was somewhat stiff—too scientifically detailed at times and at others too abstract and theoretical—and really not well enough oiled. The lectures did not sing. As time went along though, substance and style meshed, and now in this last class, I intend to swing a bit in the opposite direction and get personal and philosophical about life. I am doing Pirsig.

I talk about Plato and his theory of perfect or absolute ideals. Being Aristotelian and Gibsonian, I have always argued against the idea of a higher realm and a dualistic split in reality, but I tell the students that there is something of importance in Plato: the belief in and the aspiration toward ideals. Are these ideals on a higher plane of existence? To me it doesn't matter. What matters is that we all need to believe in something more elevated, something to provide us with standards of excellence, with standards of truth and beauty and the good. There is the "real" and there is the "ideal," and the ideal provides the real with a sense of direction and a set of principled values. We cannot live without this vision of perfection, even if we cannot realize it. We should seek it out, clarify its nature, and use it to structure and inform our lives.

It is an odd way to end introductory psychology. But what I say comes from my heart—from my mind. It is philosophy applied to life.

I listen to what I say, take it with me, and dive into the abyss.

Into the Nothingness

"Let us draw closer to the fire so
that we may better see what we are saying."
Chinese Aphorism

We are heading out across the monotonous, amazingly flat, endless, open plains of Nebraska. In every direction lie vast fields of grass, corn, or sometimes just plain dirt, sprinkled with farmhouses and intermittent silos off in the distance. Beyond it all stretches the interminable horizon line and nothing more for hundreds and hundreds of miles. We are building up momentum, heading toward the ascent up the backbone of the continent, the Rockies looming right ahead. Frankie is ahead of us, driving the U-Haul, and Lisa and I are following in my Camaro. We have popped "black beauties" and are in over-drive.

I have known Lisa about six months. She has bright, beautiful, dark eyes, an enchanting smile, a warm and caring heart, and a girlish sexuality to which I am powerfully drawn. Though I am unaware of it at the time, our coming together is the result of a friendly wager Lisa made with her friend, Denise, over who could get my attention first and land a date.

This is how it happened—how we met, how Lisa won the bet—and why she is here now.

One night Lisa comes walking up to me with a button on her coat that says "Smile if You Love Me." I smile of course. As I said, Lisa has bright, beautiful eyes and who can resist that? Tall and thin with dark lustrous hair, it isn't so much her beauty that attracts me as the quality of purity that she emanates, of the girl next door. Lisa was raised a Baptist and taught this pure and innocent look, presumably from early on. When I meet her, I have been doing a lot of thinking, worrying, obsessing—especially over the last few weeks—that I need to stop all of this pointless sex with one woman after another that has become the pattern in my life. I really should find a good friend, someone I can talk to and enjoy being with as a true companion. (Wasn't I presumably looking for love? How did I get drawn into this hedonistic lifestyle instead?) That night we first smile at each other and start talking, I ask her out dancing and I fall in love. Within a short period of time, I have stopped seeing everyone else, and Lisa and I are spending almost everyday together. It is the days of wine and roses.

But Lisa is a student of mine (another major mistake to add to my growing list) and on top of that, Lisa is still a girl in many ways, just barely approaching twenty-one. (But then, that probably attracts the boy in me.)

She isn't very happy with her present life and finds the idea of leaving it all very appealing. She is still with her mother and father and wants to go off with me on my adventure out west. I don't think it is such a good idea though, in spite of my intense attraction to her, for she is significantly younger than I am (nine years in fact) and I keep

thinking that what she really wants to do is simply run away from her parents. I think that if she runs away from her parents now, someday in the future, when I have been transformed into the substitute parent, she will run away from me as well.

Lisa is persistent though, and she keeps telling me how much she loves me. Naturally I find it very appealing to go on this journey into the unknown with an attractive and loving young woman—a very sexy young woman. I will have a companion. And, I am on Pirsig's quest, supposedly, looking for quality and the unique, searching for Gibsonian love and the intimacy of another. I am looking for Harmony.

Yet Lisa doesn't share the same dream with me, the dream of heading out west on an intellectual and existential adventure. She surely closes her eyes and her heart to the fact that I'm not intending to settle down into some middle class eight-to-five job. I want to be a science fiction writer.

I know that we think differently, but my heart and my libido cave in, so we take off together.

I have made this mistake before—but of course—of connecting with someone who doesn't live in the same mental universe, of being overpowered by beauty and sex with a good sprinkling of guilt, and as I said, it is an act of mindless stupidity to make major life changes or decisions on pot. As a fundamental principle in this regard, a principle that takes a long while to penetrate into my thick skull, people don't learn or grow if they regularly smoke. If you are always stoned you live in the present, in Santayana's "condition of children and barbarians." This is the philosophy of the Hippies, to live in the present, in the feelings and flow of the moment. The sad fact is that I have become a Hippie, and in giving myself over to this creed, I am thrown into a replay of my adolescence and early adulthood. I have gone into a time machine that keeps me going round and round, visiting the same places over and over again. This happens in *Slaughterhouse Five*, but in the book at least, enlightenment does come at the end.

All clear thinking aside, here we are, heading to Boulder, Colorado, nestled at the base of the Rockies, the place Lisa and I have decided to move to. We had scouted out a number of western cities the month before on our first trip out west, including Phoenix, Santa Fe, and Santa Barbara, but we are drawn to Boulder. Frankie has decided that he is going to move to Denver—better job possibilities than Boulder—but we are all heading to Boulder first to attend a Rolling Stones concert. Frankie loves the Rolling Stones. We have to push it to get there on time.

On "black beauties" we make it from Indiana to Boulder in a little over one day. Such is the power and madness of drugs.

* * * * * * *

The concert is the next day. The Stones are performing at the University of Colorado stadium. The stadium fills up with tens of thousands of people, drinking, smoking pot, popping psychedelic pills, in the dead heat of the summer. Down on the stage loom the giant red lips—twenty-five feet high—the symbol of the Stones. A number of guys sitting around us pop acid, to enrich their experience, see the colors of the music, or something like that. The girl behind us, also trying to elevate her consciousness, slugs down a fifth of bourbon straight out of the bottle. Heated to the

temperature in the stadium, the bourbon has the predictable effect. She throws up, in a big bourbon-colored gush, all over the people sitting to my left, including Frankie. Then she passes out, and the medics come and take her away on a stretcher. The Stones are okay. I am much more a fan of Pink Floyd, the Beatles, Sibelius, and Beethoven, but none of them are playing here today.

The day after the concert, Lisa and I go looking for an apartment and find a place right away. It is a large modern complex with a western flair, and it is clean and bright and a million miles away from Indiana. Out of our front window, a view of the foothills of the Rockies opens up, and looking at the magnificent peaks, it hits me that we really have ascended from the plains into the mountains. In a burst of industry, we unpack all of my stuff, tacking my album covers back up on one wall and interspersing many of my fantastical posters with the numerous bookcases. I have carted all of my books and most of my belongings to Colorado. Lisa has only brought along her clothes and a few keepsakes. She is traveling light; I am traveling heavy.

On one of the first days of unpacking and setting up, the apartment manager comes over to say hello. About five minutes into his visit, he asks us for a mirror. Not knowing what he's thinking, we give him one. Thus equipped, he sits on the couch, casually takes out a bag of cocaine—as if he were taking out a pack of chewing gum—and spreads a few lines on the mirror, snorting up one or two for himself and asking us if we want some as well. Welcome to Colorado, I think. We sure as hell aren't in Indiana any more. We are in the Wild West.

Over the next couple of months, we get our bearings and take in our new environment. This involves embarking on some harrowing drives with Frankie on which we venture further up deep into the mountains. We are seeing the sights. Frankie zips around canyon curves equally heedless of the sheer drops and the nerve-wracking effect on his passengers, in particular me. Adding to the effect of Frankie's driving is the altitude. Breathing the rarified air so high up in the Rockies leaves me feeling dizzy and strange, an effect that is heightened by the grass we regularly smoke on our escapades through the hills. It is a "Rocky Mountain High." But the Rockies are more fantastic and beautiful, more magnificent and stupendous than anything I have ever seen in my life before. Snow-covered peaks; immense faces of rock dropping thousands of feet; huge forests thick with evergreens and interspersed with secluded glades rich with flowers and ultra-green grass: my mind, my senses, my perspective on things is blown away.

During this early period in Colorado, Frankie and Lisa and I party it up a lot. The discipline and focused effort, the self-imposed constraints of the preceding years totally falls away. It was already falling apart before I got here, but Colorado is finishing the job. I feel free. I feel lost.

We get into drinking shots of Mescal during this time. Mescal is an incredible high; the more we drink the more appealing the shriveled up worm in the bottle becomes. Mescal seems to wake you up rather than put you to sleep. I like this. After enough shots, the worms begin to seem appetizing and we cut them up and share them. Swallowing the worms makes me feel as if we were in Mexico, in the land of Don Juan.

We play lots of rock music—Frankie has an impressive collection. We sing along to Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird." We listen to Pink Floyd, the Stones, Marianne Faithful,

the Moody Blues, and a million obscure artists that Frankie thinks are the next great thing.

I am worrying, of course, through all of this. The Mescal, the pot, the music, sexy Lisa—none of it can drown out what is going through my mind. At some level, it just doesn't feel right. I feel that I am heading toward some great tumble off the side of a cliff. Part of me is in the mountains; part of me is watching the whole thing from some other place. It feels unreal. At times I think there is some deep blunder—existential and philosophical—in what I am doing. But didn't I want to go on an adventure?

To add to the disquiet and vertigo of it all, Lisa periodically gets attacks of guilt over taking off from Indiana, perhaps in unconscious resonance with my ill-defined anxiety. Between the fun and games, she wavers over whether what she has done is the right thing. (She hasn't really run away from her parents; they are a phone call away, and she talks to them or writes to them every few days.) I suppose that I anticipated as much, and so between the two of us, the situation we are in is far from steady. I sure as hell don't want to go back to Indiana (which is going through Lisa's mind), but I am very uncertain whether what I am doing now is the right thing either.

Yet here we are in Boulder. Home of the University of Colorado, Boulder is a real Hippie town, but commercialized and touristy as well. Nestled in a high valley and overlooked by snugly packed older houses perched on the slopes, the downtown area is quaint, very Western in ways, and bustling with activity. It is filled with vagabonds on the road to Nirvana, and hikers and campers and nature lovers ready to journey to and perhaps live in the mountains. Alongside the camping gear outlets, music stores, and ice cream parlors, the New Age and the mystical have also found a home in many of its shops and restaurants, and before long I find a science fiction/comic book store, the *Mile High Bookstore*, where Lisa and I frequently browse around, take a break (from what?), and hang out on numerous afternoons.

One day I get to talking with a long-haired guy who appears to be a regular there. It strikes me rather quickly that he is very well educated, articulate, and highly intelligent (which sure as hell conflicts with his appearance), and he really knows science fiction. He is also very friendly and personable. I introduce myself and he tells me his name is Ed Bryant. I immediately recognize his name. He is a science fiction writer, a few of whose stories I have read in the last couple of years. He is relatively young, a few years older than I am, and has not been publishing stories for that many years, but he has already won some awards for his writing. I tell him I am interested in becoming a science fiction writer, and he says that he has a writers' group that meets in Denver (where he lives) and that he will read some of my stuff. Ed becomes my first new friend in Colorado. An opportunity—a synchronicity—opens up here, but it will slip through my fingers when I slide down the hill.

Amidst all of this sightseeing, angst, Mescal, and fun and games, I try to sit down and start writing. I do this in the mornings, but nothing comes. Sooner or later as the day wears on, I get stoned and go off with Lisa to do something else. The weeks go by and nothing much happens, pen to paper. My mind seems dead which, in fact, it is. More alarmingly, as the weeks go by, I am going through my money much faster than I expected. I hoped that I would have enough money to last at least six to ten months. In less than two months, I am quickly going broke and I have written almost nothing.

Faced with the hard reality, Lisa and I decide that we need to get jobs. Lisa finds a job in a bank, and with Ed putting in a good word for me, I get a job at the *Mile High Bookstore*. Yet the romanticism of working in a science fiction/comic book store in Boulder quickly fades. I am no longer a college professor. (Who am I anymore?) I am at the bottom of the totem pole working for minimum wage, packaging comic books that are mailed out to various customers around the country.

The domestic scene is also further devolving toward its inevitable conclusion. What started off as a carefree, open-ended adventure (with a strong undercurrent of misgivings on my part) is taking its predictable course toward issues of order, control, and the future. Lisa is wavering over whether to stay in Colorado. She wants more of a commitment out of me. And in a replay from the past, this means that she wants to get married. But I don't. Again, a war of the wills breaks out between us. After much debate, though, I finally agree.

Ed has a license to marry people through the Universal Church of Christ, so he agrees to perform the ceremony. Frankie agrees to be the best man. We have around a dozen friends or acquaintances in Boulder that we invite, and we decide to have the ceremony in the Flat Irons, the grassy hills at the base of the Rockies. On the selected day, the snow-covered Rockies behind us, Ed performs the ceremony. Engulfed in the beauty and power of nature, we seem part of some fantastical scene from some strange novel set in an alternate reality. The early autumn wind whips everyone's hair about, and at times it is hard to stand erect and steady. In some kind of cosmic resonance, Ed comments that he hopes he isn't going to jinx our marriage since the last few couples he married have all separated or divorced. We celebrate back at our apartment with my five-star homemade chili and plenty of bottles of Mescal, and of course plenty of pot. It is the beginning of the end.

The honeymoon, in fact, ends quickly and abruptly. More to the point, there is no honeymoon; we've already had that. Paradoxically, things get increasingly tense between Lisa and me, even though I have gone through with the marriage. She continues to be ambivalent about Colorado. It seems like it is one thing after another with her. The more she keeps prevaricating on whether she wants to stay in Colorado or go back to Indiana, the more I am determined to stay. She has already gone back once in the early fall, before the marriage.

She wanted to come with me; I financially supported her for the first few months; she committed to a partnership on this adventure; and now she wants to bail out and head back to the Midwest?

It seems that I am trapped in some kind of determinist trajectory that keeps drawing me into some forgone conclusion. The Gestalt of the whole thing is no good. It feels like a replay of the past.

Eventually, in November, having really hit a total stalemate, Lisa packs up and once more goes back to her parents in Indiana. But she doesn't leave alone this time; she is carrying our son.

I want to love her. I want to participate in Pirsig's quality. I want her commitment. I want her to grow up.

My plan is to stay in Boulder, hoping that Lisa will eventually return. After blowing all my money and wasting the last six months on exploring the Rockies, getting stoned,

and doing almost no reading or writing, at least I have the apartment and all my belongings. Maybe I can make it through the winter, alone or with her. Fat chance.

* * * * * * *

There is a man who lives in New York City in the twentieth century. He is a skeptic, but he wants to believe in something. He needs to. The guy is a total neurotic, self-absorbed and filled with anxiety, guilt, angst, self-recriminations, and low self-esteem. At the vortex and center of his spiraling, crazy psyche, he is obsessed with Christ. Did Christ really rise from the dead? Was Christ really the Son of God? He needs to know.

This man meets a physicist, an inventor who is looking for a guinea pig for his great metaphysical experiment. He has invented a time machine and he wants to test it out. The physicist needs someone who will get in the time machine and travel to some other time and then come back. Our Christ-obsessed skeptic agrees, but he wants to determine the destination of the trip, and he wants to go back to the ancient Middle East and watch the Crucifixion to see what really happened. The physicist agrees.

Boarding the machine, the man does travel back in time, but the time machine breaks apart upon arrival in the past. Materializing in the sky, it descends in smoke and flames and crashes to the ground, knocking the man unconscious. This “heavenly event” is witnessed by several people in the vicinity, one of whom is John the Baptist. Believing that the man in the flaming chariot that came out of the heavens is the Messiah, John takes the man back to his tent and cares for him. Once he has regained his wits, the man from the twentieth century attempts to explain to John that he is not the Messiah, but rather that he has come to look for him. John does not believe this, for didn’t the man come riding in on flames from the heavens above?

Once he is well enough, the time traveler decides to go in search of Jesus. He eventually tracks down the home of Mary and Joseph, but Mary and Joseph find it very surprising that anyone would want to talk to their son. Further, Mary comes across totally different from the loving, caring, pure-of-heart individual portrayed in history. This Mary is dark, depressive, more earthy and womanly than the Biblical image. But Mary leads the man into their home and takes him to a dimly lit back room. Off in the corner is a shadowy figure, hunched over. Dribble is coming out of the dark figure’s mouth. The man asks the person in the room if he is Jesus, and the person responds by simply repeating his name over and over again. “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” The figure in the room is an imbecile, deformed and incapable of any meaningful communication.

In a state of shock, the man from the twentieth century runs out of the room and heads out back into the desert. He wanders through the desert for days and days—forty days to be precise—trying to make sense out of what he has seen. It cannot be. Something is terribly wrong. Where is the real Messiah? How could the Bible be so wrong? The man decides that the real Jesus—the real Christ—has not yet appeared, but that he is coming and coming soon. Christ is waiting somewhere, ready to appear. The bizarre encounter in the dark room with the congenital imbecile is some kind of test of faith. So, he decides after wandering through the desert that he will come back to the local towns and villages and start to play act the role of the Messiah until the real Messiah shows up. He has memorized all of the words presumably spoken by Jesus, as

recorded in the Bible. John believes he is the Messiah, so he will play the role for the time being. He even tells people that he is Jesus of Nazareth.

So the sermons are spoken, the disciples are selected, the necessary actions are taken, and the man finds himself in front of Pontius Pilate, but he remains silent, waiting for the Son of God to come. The crown of thorns is placed upon his head, and the Cross is placed upon his shoulder to carry up Mount Calvary. He waits, wondering, hoping Christ will come. The nails go through his hands and feet, and the Cross is pulled up erect into the ground. And then, it finally hits him: no one is coming. It is he who is the historical figure recorded in the Bible. He is a time traveler who has appeared miraculously, as out of nowhere, from the heavens above. He is Christ and he dies on the Cross.

Two thousand years later, he comes back to life, a child in New York City, born again after having died on the Cross. The prophecy is fulfilled. He dies but has risen, by the hand of God, by a time machine that has looped his identity through time.

But then, we can ask, where did the words that the man spoke and that are recorded in the Bible come from? He read and learned the words in the future, and said them in the past, to be recorded so he could memorize them in the future. The words have no author, or the author is God. As the words are eternal, so is the man. He dies in the past and is reborn in the future, only to return to the past and die again. His life goes round and round; there is no beginning, there is no end. “I am the Alpha and the Omega.”

Written in the late 1960s, Michael Moorcock’s *Behold the Man* is one of the most psychologically provocative, spiritually unsettling, and metaphysically elevating science fiction stories I have ever read. There are people to whom I tell this story; there are people to whom I won’t. There are people who become outraged and upset to hear this tale.

But there is an archetype to all of existence—of death and resurrection—and the past and the future seem to circle around on themselves. And is this not the nature of God?

* * * * * * *

“Good judgment comes from experience,
and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.”
Will Rogers

I have told part of this story before. I am suspended in the void, in the emptiness. I have no sense of having a body. I am consciousness, mind, spirit—an immaterial being. Then I fall apart and evaporate.

After having adapted to the absolute darkness of the sensory isolation tank on my first few floats—my initial reactions are panic, anxiety, and a “projected” feeling that the walls of the tank are caving in on me—I find the sessions in the tank very calming. I come to think that the tank accelerates the process of learning how to meditate, an ecological context that facilitates the realization of Nirvana. As I said before, within this reality the ego—the self—seems to disappear or fragment. The tank contains no stimulus information. There are no patterns, no variations. It is a total Ganzfeld, an

omni-directional ambience of sameness. With no information, there is nothing to perceive; the world, the body, the self all vaporize. There is death. Then there is emergence, resurrection out of the void when you exit the darkness.

After Lisa leaves, I decide that I need to find a better job than working in a comic bookstore, so I take myself off to the local unemployment office and emerge with directions to a neighborhood of older wood frame homes, one of which houses a sensory isolation tank business run by a thirty-something couple named Jim and Star. I had read about sensory isolation tanks while in graduate school, and the reports on the effects of floating in such tanks often describe psychotic-like reactions in the subjects. But it is a possible job connected with psychology, something better than working in a comic book store, so I go over to check it out. After talking with Jim, I decide to give it a try. My job is to sell sensory isolation tanks.

One thing leads to another and after a couple of weeks, I find myself regularly floating in the tanks and getting a real feel for the effects of it. I find the experience strange and fascinating, and believe that it can have some interesting benefits. I feel I am into something here that is psychologically enlightening, if not philosophical and metaphysical. This is something different. There is a sense of adventure in it all, and that's what I'm looking for, that sense of adventure.

But if I reflected on it more, I would have to admit that over the previous year or so my reason has taken a holiday. I have been making one stupid mistake after another, and each time I walk off a cliff or slide down some slippery slope, I do it knowing in my gut that what I am doing isn't the right way to go. The captain—the ego, or my sense of conscience (as the case may be) —has lost control of the ship.

Though the tanks offer Nirvana and enlightenment, the mind falls apart within them. You start talking to yourself. Chaos and confusion enter into your consciousness. Is this good?

This is not the worst of it though. Right off the bat, it hits me that there is an ominous quality to Jim and Star. The first night I am there, I witness these two belittle and scream at one of the employees in front of everyone else. (What, am I stupid? Why do I stay?) Another time, several employees suddenly quit without notice and disappear. Why don't I connect this to the way Star's face turns a livid red when she is yelling at one of the employees? And why don't I question the sanity of the place when Jim begins to call meetings for everyone late on Sunday nights, when I notice that the employees are almost all passive, intimidated, and compliant? I am in a place for stray dogs who will do anything for food and shelter, and I am one of them. Perhaps underneath (at the perimeter of my consciousness) I do see all of this, but I am pulled into something so quickly I don't have the wits to get out of it.

From early on a sense of moral obligation is instilled in me that, as the doubts and concerns accumulate in my mind, works against my leaving. After so many mistakes, I feel that I am supposed to keep at it and succeed at this new job. Jim and Star play on this sense of responsibility and commitment, with me and the others. On top of that, and in my skewed thinking, I fear that backing out would make me a coward. And then, Jim treats me as special, as someone intelligent with whom he can discuss important ideas, as someone who is not going to be treated the same way the others in the place are treated. What a sucker I am.

It also seems to me that they can “see” into things, including seeing into me. (This is part of the message they reinforce.) They are gurus. I am drawn or captured by this. My life is a mess. I am distressed. My plans have fallen apart. And so I am vulnerable and weak. Underneath I don’t feel very good about myself, and they see this and play on it. Jim, off and on, makes comments about me, about my life and my personality. Is he right about these observations or not? I start to wonder. I start to doubt myself. Does he understand me better than I do?

In essence, they get to me the same way they get to so many other people in the place. It only takes a little over two weeks. Following the usual pattern, from early on Jim quickly draws me into conversations about my life in which I am encouraged to reveal my goals, my experiences, and my problems and hang-ups. They all want to get to know me, they explain. We sit around, mostly Jim and I, and smoke pot and philosophize about life. I think that Jim is smart, but sometimes smart is a weapon rather than a source of nurturance. Presumably, this is a place where one can evolve psychologically, where there are caring friends and kindred minds. That is part of the promise. The sensory isolation tanks are a tool to be used toward increasing self-awareness and enlightenment; it is part of the whole process. That is the story. Of course, I tell them about Lisa, and they say that they want to help her too.

In conjunction with all of this, I float in the tanks everyday. The tanks relax you—bring you down into alpha; bring you into a state that is easy to condition. Your identity melts and evaporates into the air.

Then one day, I start to question something Jim says in a presentation he has just finished (thinking to myself that I could do it much better). I am rather hesitant about being too critical, but he starts to push, wanting to know exactly what I think. I try to evade and get out of the discussion. Somehow, though, I find myself in the middle of an encounter group that seems to spontaneously emerge out of the blue. Perhaps I have threatened him, challenging his authority. Perhaps he is pissed because I don’t spit out what I am thinking. Whatever it is, I find myself the focus of an onslaught, with other members of the group getting into it as well. It is the very thing I have seen happening to others before.

This is their way of establishing and maintaining power in the group, a baboon kind of power. Beat everyone up at one time or another and make sure everyone—when they are not the victim—participates in the beatings of others.

Circling around me like wolves, they tell me that I won’t take responsibility for my life. They tell me that I am dishonest and a coward. They tell me I can’t make a commitment. They tell me that although I pretend to be a good person, I’m not. I am a bastard. (This one really bothers me.) They tell me that I have bitten off more than I can chew. (Another point that really bothers me.) I pace around the room, getting more upset, more confused, and find myself emotionally crumbling in front of all these strange people. My intellect seems to dysfunction; to go around in circles; to go off on tangents; to dodge this way and that. And they comment on this like sadistic clinicians analyzing a particularly bad psychotic state in one of their patients. I feel trapped. I find the experience totally unnerving. But they have succeeded in whatever perverse objective they have. They have frightened the hell out of me, humiliated me, and I feel absolutely terrible about myself.

But for some stupid reason, I come back again the next day. Again I believe it is to follow through and not cave in, but my nerves are still very shaky from the night before, and they start back up again. A couple of days earlier, I had given Jim a copy of *Behold the Man* to read. In the middle of this new onslaught, he picks the book up off his desk, throws it down on the floor, and tells me it is trash; it is sick, it is neurotic, etc. etc. I think to myself that there is something about the book that really touches a nerve, but his point at the time is clearly to reject and belittle a symbol of what I stand for.

And now I think to myself that I just have to get out of here. I don't want to talk to them anymore. I just want to leave. I tell them that I've had it and that I am quitting, which provokes an escalation of the verbal attacks. What am I going to do, they ask? (Who are these strange, fucking people I have let into my life?) Run back to Indiana? Run back to Lisa? They tell me that if I leave, I will carry the defeat and humiliation with me. I can't run away from it. They tell me that I am dooming myself, dooming my future. They have gotten into my head; let's say more precisely that I have let them, and now they are throwing it all back at me. I just want to leave and get away from them.

Somehow I break away and make it out of the house. As I walk across the snow-covered front yard, they just keep yelling. Jim follows me out, trying to physically provoke me, grabbing my jacket, heaping more abuse. This is too much—too much analysis; too much thinking and delving into things; too much manipulation. My mind recoils from it and goes dead. When I finally make it to the car and drive away, I feel like I have been beaten up.

I drive like hell to get away from there, to get as far away from the hell hole as fast as I can. Though I feel totally demoralized and shaken by the experience, I think that at least Lisa has been spared. If Lisa had come out, they would have eaten her alive. She is pregnant and God knows what would have happened. I feel a knot in my stomach when I remember the story they told of a woman who had come out to their place pregnant and ended up having some kind of spontaneous, stress-induced abortion. It gives me some comfort afterward to think that I probably saved my son's life by getting out of there.

Lessons come hard. The harder they come, perhaps the better they stick. One I learn from the isolation tank experience is to beware of people who always want to talk about your problems, but never theirs. Don't trust them. Don't go babbling about your life to strangers. There are dark souls in the world, and they search for the darkness within you, or the weaknesses.

Demons attack when you try to pull free of their influence. That's how they hold you. On the way out the door, they blame you for everything to preserve their egos.

That night, after leaving the place, I walk around my apartment carrying a knife, peering out of the windows into the night. I don't think that I have ever felt so terrified in my life.

The next day, I call Lisa and tell her I am coming back. I start packing up everything. In two days I am done. I call my parents for help and borrow some money from them. A moving truck comes the next day and everything is loaded up.

I drive down to Denver and stay overnight with Frankie. I feel ashamed and my nerves are totally frazzled. It seems to me that Frankie has lost respect for me too. Am I projecting? At some point, I go into the bathroom and throw up. There is an ugliness in my body that I need to purge. I feel a little better afterwards.

It is the beginning of December, and the snow is coming down. I say goodbye to Frankie and head back down into the flat, open plains of the Midwest toward Indiana. I feel depressed and disheartened and carry the whole nightmare back with me into the dark depths. I have fallen off the mountain.

Jim has done me a favor. (Or maybe it is God?)

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I feel that I don't want to think anymore. I want to run away from the world of psychology, philosophy, and the realm of ideas. It is all too much. The experience with the sensory isolation tanks is the straw that breaks the camel's back. My intellect recoils against itself. I lose faith in my intellect. I lose faith (it has been coming) in the intellect itself.

I just want to re-connect with Lisa, to feel love and comfort and companionship. I want to retreat back into the womb.

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Marlo is a big man. Around six foot three and 230 pounds, he wears thick gloves and a heavy white overcoat that hangs to his feet and is covered in grime and blood. He works in the frigid cold, in a storage and distribution center. It is a giant freezer warehouse. Every couple of weeks, I come up and see him to pick up a load of frozen seafood and head back down to Indiana. The place stinks of frozen meat and frozen fish—tons and tons of frozen beef, cod, haddock, pork, catfish, perch, and squid.

Marlo and I talk. He is a friendly and pleasant soul. He is the foreman of the place and has been working in the warehouse for a long time. This is his life. He lives somewhere close by, I believe, in Chicago. We talk about the future. I tell him about myself, at least a bit, how I have a Ph.D. and used to be a college professor. But now I work in a fish market and drive the company truck to pick up frozen fish for the market in the big warehouses in Chicago. Marlo tells me that there is hope for me; I have my degree and will find a way back into something better. He says that for him, though, this is it. He doesn't have much education, and he will probably spend the rest of his working life in this big warehouse, monitoring the inventory, overseeing the arrival of shipments, supervising his work crew, and moving huge crates and boxes of frozen food on his forklift. He seems quite accepting of this. I admire him. But I wonder what he does when he goes home at night. Does he sit in front of the TV, watching sports and drinking beer? I wonder what brings joy and purpose into his life. Perhaps he is a wise man, a Zen master, who has found Nirvana amidst the frozen cod and perch.

After picking up my load, I drive back down on the interstate, leaving the crowded and noisy streets of Chicago for the bleak, gray world of Indiana. Getting back to the fish market, I unload the boxes of frozen fish and seafood and help Louie, the owner, unpack and clean it all. The fish needs to be washed under cold water to thaw it out, and then it needs to be cut up and filleted. Louie has taught me how to filet fish, and he teaches me about the different types of fish. I work in a long, white coat soiled with blood, like Marlo. It is cold in the fish market. It is January and the back door is kept

open to allow fresh air to come in and clear the place of the stench of fish, which is forever present.

Louie is a small man, around sixty years of age. He walks hunched over and never smiles or laughs. He tells me that his plan for the future is to keep the fish market going till he reaches retirement age at sixty-five. Then he will retire, hoping to have a least one or two years where he can relax and, of all things, go fishing before he dies. God—does that sound depressing to me. But Louie gives me a job when I am down and out, though it seems to him (quite rightly so) that with a Ph.D. in psychology, I would hardly want to work in a fish market. He doesn't think I will last. God knows how I convince him that I can see some kind of career working in the place. I guess I really believe that I want to escape from the world of ideas.

One night, after the market has closed, I head out to the parking lot to get my car and drive home. Paul, an old faculty friend of mine from the college I taught at in Indiana, is waiting outside to chat with me for a few moments. Perhaps Paul feels sorry for me, for we get together every so often to talk and maybe have a cup of coffee. That night I am down (as usual) and going over again, for the umpteenth time, how I got myself into the present situation. A year before, I was a college professor; six months earlier, I was heading out to Colorado, to a romantic adventure amidst the Rockies, to write science fiction stories. Where am I now? Frozen, like the fish, filleting perch in some God-forsaken strip mall back in Indiana. Paul says that maybe I am paying for some really big sins.

And of course, being the good Catholic that I am down deep in my psyche, in spite of my professed philosophical emancipation from religion on the conscious, intellectual level, I get to thinking—get to obsessing—on what the sins are that I am paying for. I think to myself that I should have paid more attention to Laura and our children. I should have appreciated what I had, appreciated that someone really loved me, yet I had thrown it away. I shouldn't have paid so much attention to the world of books.

Or, as another angle on things, instead of becoming unfocused, unsettled, and loose in my behavior after the divorce, chasing after women, etc. etc., I should have concentrated on my job and my academic career. I let my job go to hell.

And I shouldn't have had sex with my students. I feel like I compromised my integrity as an educator. I participated in this life of debauchery and was never really serious about any of them. I am paying for my sins.

I also think that I should have listened to my common sense and not taken Lisa with me to Colorado. I feel guilty about that as well. I helped her to run away from home, from her parents, a bad move indeed. And, of course, her parents followed us out to Colorado, via phone, letters, and a constant haunting in Lisa's mind. One can't have a relationship—married or otherwise—when the parents are in the middle of everything.

And I ran away from Colorado with my tail between my legs, the icing on this ugly cake.

Of course, these are all "should and shouldn't haves"—nuggets of wisdom in hindsight—and on every one of these points of guilt and regret, there is another side to the coin, other points I could remind myself of, but I am in a deep mental funk now, blaming myself—blaming others—blaming, blaming, blaming for all the misfortunes I have encountered over the last six months. My mind is numb in misery.

I head home to the small apartment where Lisa and I live. All of the beautiful things I have accumulated are mostly gone or put away now. I sold a lot of my books in Colorado to get some quick money when we were going broke. Most of the rest of my books are in boxes. I also sold my beautiful stereo system for the same reason. I still have my classical albums but nothing to play them on. My art work is all rolled up and disassembled. Lisa never liked my crazy art anyway, and she told me that her parents especially found it offensive. Much of my furniture is gone. The apartment is stark, bleak, and empty of life, mirroring the state of my soul. This is not the color or feel of a Dionysian adventure, of a Pirsig-inspired embrace of quality, of a breaking free of the conservative normalcy of middle class existence, of an existential, science fiction, metaphysical excursion into enlightenment. This is death. This is a dark gray fog, the true Ganzfeld of the mind and the human spirit.

At times I get angry at Lisa. I explode and start yelling at her. I am carrying the emotional wounds of my bad ending in Colorado. At times I fear that I am perversely replaying the verbal cruelty inflicted on me by Jim and Star, but part of me also blames her for the depressing mess we are in now. I told her that I was heading out west to create a new kind of life. She is the one whose ambivalence began to poison it. To make things worse, she won't talk to me much. God knows what she thinks about where we are supposed to go from here. I try to share my thoughts and feelings, and she sits there mute. Instead of talking to me, she talks to her mother, the very person from whom, just six months before, she had run away. She is pregnant and is concerned about money, about my having a job to support our family.

But I'm not thinking about money. Aside from all the regrets and intermittent guilt trips that I lay both on myself and on her, I am thinking that my passion in life was ideas and scholarship and teaching, and that I threw it all away. Now, disconnected from that way of life, I am miserable and thoroughly deflated. Though I wanted to go out and experience the "real world," what was I thinking when I left teaching and when I left the library? Didn't I remember Waterbury? But I was off chasing Harmony, looking for the other side of enlightenment.

Is this the other side, the other part that I need to comprehend? If it is, it doesn't feel very good.

I am also thinking that there is some kind of disconnect between all of my knowledge and how I have been recently leading my life. What I have studied should have relevance and benefit to life; it should help me to create a life of quality, but instead I find myself in a fish market in Indiana, broke and demoralized. I keep thinking, if I am so smart, then why is my life in such a mess? Again, the thought goes through my mind that the intellect is defective or, worse, that I am defective as an intellectual and scholar—very bad thoughts indeed.

Or was this somehow the absolutely right thing to have occurred? Is this what was needed? Leaving Laura; the abandonment of sense and propriety; the rejection of God in the snowstorm; the Dionysian flight into sex and drugs and rock n' roll; the multiple encounters with evil; losing myself and coming unglued; feeling the sting of insults to the ego and getting nailed to the Cross; getting dizzy in the Rockies and falling off the peaks, rolling all the way back to the Midwest; losing my true passion and love; getting lost in the gibberish of "The Library of Babel"; chasing after Harmony; feeling first hand the drama and pathos and tragedy of life.

Perhaps I had to die.

But then, where do I go from here? Where is the resurrection in all of this? What, in fact, is the next chapter in the book?