

[Wednesday] 27 November 1991: For a while I shall, among other things, look at reincarnation¹. But, I take the stance that we do not know, and though it must be admitted that I do believe I have lived before, and unless achieve enlightenment shall live again. As it expertly pointed out by C. J. Duncase even the fact that I do not remember these rebirths does not devalidate them². So here to it.

“If immortality be untrue, it matters little whether anything else be true or not³.” Another way of saying that all religions are based on one’s belief in the afterlife. “The knowledge that death is not so far away, that my mind and emotions and vitality will soon disappear like a puff of smoke has the effect of making earthly affairs seem unimportant and human beings more and more ignoble. It is harder to take human life seriously, including one’s own efforts and achievements⁴.”

Man chooses a body and temperament to suit the purposes he has chosen to come back for, that he may learn a particular virtue. I am not my present persona. It is only the outward garb I chose to put on, as an actor in a farce. It is no more men, than last year’s style is. I am not an unchangeable stagnant being, but ever changing. No, this present person is not me, nor the one I had at the age of five. But, it is one I chose to learn a particular trait. Others too, I should not hold them to be bad or good, for they are neither⁵.

¹ I am surprised at for how long I have wrestled with these issues. I still take the fact of death, and more importantly the uncertainty of when this will happen, to be one of the greatest factors in any moral consideration. It’s amazing to me how this variable—how long one will live—is so important and yet so unknown. So much hinges on this.

² Oh, 18 year old Christopher, that is a relevant fact. It isn’t that I am opposed to the idea of reincarnation, but there is a philosophical principle that I have learned to hold dearly: the person asserting the positive claim bears the burden of proof. So, while I am not opposed to the idea of reincarnation, and I like the idea of heaven, I don’t believe in them because I don’t think there is evidence for them. There are times that I wish there were a heaven, I wish I could believe in heaven, but, I am reminded of this principle. So, I don’t believe I have lived before. I don’t believe it not because I have evidence against it, but rather I don’t think there is evidence for it.

³ Apparently this quote comes from Henry T. Buckle.

⁴ This clearly is a major issue in ethics. How should we respond to the transiency of life? The truth is that I don’t think it matters if we live to be 70, 700, or 700 million. To some extent, we would always bemoan life’s length. On the one hand, it will always be too short. If I were to live to be 700 million, I would probably be sad that I would miss the explosion of the sun. It’s also too long, as we spend many years in decay and we worry about things far off into the future (if I were to live billions of years, I would probably already start worrying about the sun’s explosion). There is no right number. Perhaps, really, the issue is maximizing the number of one’s peak years. All in all, I am in agreement with Prometheus in Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* when he says,

I know not if this earth on which I stand is the core of the universe or if it is but a speck of dust lost in eternity. I know not and I care not. For I know what happiness is possible to me on earth. And my happiness needs no higher aim to vindicate it. My happiness is not the means to any end. It is the end.

It is its own goal. It is its own purpose.

⁵ I am constantly surprised at how often I see myself in these notes from twenty years ago. I still put a great deal of emphasis on growing and changing. It’s weird to see this mixture of continuity and change in these journals till present. I regularly take stock in myself to see if I am growing as a person. I also believe that others should be given the freedom to grow and change as well. I think this is why I like the Paula Cole song “Me” so much; I agree that I am not the things I own. Indeed, the bigger point is that I can grow and change and still be me. In the past several years, especially, I have picked up and learned many activities that were a part of my identity at one point. I have learned bowling, poker, opera, hiking, and so forth. I am all of these things, and at the same time I am something else.

I think there is a deeper question: is there a self? Notice that the first question about the self is not what is it, but is it. While Buddhism teaches the idea of *anatta*, or no self, I think this is somewhat odd in the following sense: if there is no self, to what would karma attach to? Having said this, there is some truth to this idea. After all, there are words that we would use to describe ourselves that apply at one time and not at another: student, wife, mother, professor. So, in this sense, it seems that our conception of self is constantly changing. Indeed, in this sense, perhaps the best metaphor for self is the one Heraclitus uses: a flame or a river. We cannot step in the same river twice because it has changed and we have changed.

If we argue that our self is our memory, this seems flawed because memory is deeply malleable. Is our self our hopes/fears, likes/dislikes, behaviors, and such? If so, these also change. Is the idea of self simply the constellation of roles that we play?

Death is not real, it is only an illusion⁶. Buddha said it, Lao Tzu did, and even Jesus said to those who brought⁷ the dead to him, that they were just sleeping. But death is still, “that uncharted land, from whence no man returns,” as Hamlet says. We have all returned from the grave, why is it we forget. Perhaps it is best we do so.

I think it is important to note that the great Buddha was only *a* Buddha⁸. I, you, the whole world is a Buddha under the dross of ignorance. Buddha only showed those men how to clear the dross⁹.

⁶ Again I would argue that the real issue here is one of ignorance: no one knows what happens after we die. We don't know. I have always liked what Chuang Tsu says in his *Inner Chapters* in this context:

Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tsu, dreamed I was a butterfly flying happily here and there, enjoying a life without knowing who I was. Suddenly I woke up and I was indeed Chuang Tsu. Did Chuang Tsu dream he was a butterfly, or did the butterfly dream he was Chuang Tsu? (Feng & English, 1974, p. 48)

He also has another great way of putting this:

How can I tell if love of life is not a delusion? How can I tell whether a man who fears death is not like a man who left home and dreads returning? Lady Li was the daughter of a border guard of Ai. When the Duke of Chin first took her captive, she wept until her dress was soaked with tears. But once she was living in the Duke's palace, sharing his bed, and eating delicious food, she wondered why she had ever cried. How can I tell whether the dead are not amazed that they ever clung to life? (Feng & English, 1974, p. 45)

On the other hand, I cannot ignore the example of Achilles in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. For example, it is said that Achilles had a choice about his destiny, especially in regards to the desire for *kleos* (to be talked about after one dies):

I carry two sorts of destiny toward the day of my death. Either,
if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;
but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life
left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly. (IX. 411–416)

In this, he chooses the short life with lots of glory. However, in the *Odyssey* there is this wonderful scene where Odysseus is talking to Achilles' ghost and the ghost says,

O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying.
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another
man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,
than be a king over all the perished dead. (11.488–491)

The truth is, we don't know what happens after we die. Maybe it's good, maybe bad, maybe nothing.

⁷ I left this one in here as another reminder that I very often misspelled and misused words. What's with brought, devalidate?

⁸ This is true! In the past year, I have developed even more of an appreciation for Buddha and Jesus. I have especially come to appreciate more how Buddha solely says himself as pointing the way to something beyond himself. He believed that if even his words got in the way of one obtaining enlightenment that one should discard his words. I have also come to appreciate Jesus more, and Christianity less. The turning point for me was when I considered the context and the exchange in the story of the Good Samaritan. In this, Jesus wins a verbal joust and gives the greatest up-yours to the lawyer who was challenging him (*Luke* 10: 25–37):

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him;

Always think of the transiency of life. Always think of its vicissitudes¹⁰. Do not cling to the tide when it comes in, neither fear its going away. Do not waste time in idleness and quarreling, for life is short. Do not

and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

To fully appreciate this, we must realize that the Samaritan's were the Al Qaeda pedophiles of their day. They were the lowest on the totem pole.

⁹ Is this true? Are we all supposed to have a spark of innate goodness?

¹⁰ The older I get, the truer I think this is. Indeed, I might even say this is one of the top ethical principles to keep in mind. I used to feel a great tension here with this idea and what Rand called the "benevolent universe principle." In short, her idea was that if you lived in accordance with reality that you would achieve your values. I think this is much too strong a position. At best, however, I would argue that living in accordance with reality can only increase the chances that we will obtain our values, but this will not guarantee it. I don't think this is a malevolent thought, but rather a recognition that even though life is ordered, shit does happen. I have written a paper on this using poker as an example. In short, poker is ordered so that we know that on occasion a pocket 72 off-suit will beat pocket aces. On any account, there are several great ways to phrase this idea, but two of my favorite come from an old Chinese story, Herodotus, and the story of a king who had a ring made that said, "this too shall pass". First, the Chinese story:

There once was a farmer. One day the farmer's only horse broke out of the corral and ran away. The farmer's neighbors, all hearing of the horse running away, came to the farmer's house to view the corral. As they stood there, the neighbors all said, "Oh what bad luck!" The farmer replied, "Perhaps."

About a week later, the horse returned, bringing with it a whole herd of wild horses, which the farmer and his son quickly corralled. The neighbors, hearing of the corraling of the horses, came to see for themselves. As they stood there looking at the corral filled with horses, the neighbors said, "Oh what good luck!" The farmer replied, "Perhaps."

A couple of weeks later, the farmer's son's leg was badly broken when he was thrown from a horse he was trying to break. A few days later the broken leg became infected and the son became delirious with fever. The neighbors, all hearing of the incident, came to see the son. As they stood there, the neighbors said, "Oh what bad luck!" The farmer replied, "Perhaps."

At that same time in China, a war broke out between two rival warlords. In need of more soldiers, a captain came to the village to conscript young men to fight in the war. When the captain came to take the farmer's son, he found the young man with a broken leg--delirious with fever. Knowing there was no way the son could fight, the captain left him there. A few days later, the son's fever broke. The neighbors, hearing of the son's not being taken to fight in the war and of his return to good health, all came to see him. As they stood there, each one said, "Oh what good luck!" The farmer replied, "Perhaps."

I suspect our ignorance about how things will turn out also underlies Solon's advice as reported in Herodotus:

But until he is dead, you had better refrain from calling [a man] happy, and just call him Fortunate. It is necessary to consider the end of anything . . . and to see how it will turn out, because the god often offers prosperity to men, but then destroys them utterly and completely." (1.32)

Finally, Attar records the fable of a powerful king who asks assembled wise men to create a ring that will make him happy when he is sad, and vice versa. After deliberation, the sages handed him a ring with the words 'This too will pass' etched on it.

The broader issue, however, is whether the world is just. I see no reason to think that it is. To see this, consider the other animals. Is the world just to the plankton who is swallowed up with millions of others in the gulp of a whale shark? Is it fair to the antelope picked out by the lions? Is it fair to the actor or actress or just didn't have that one break. In this, I think Ayn Rand her short story "Her second career" came the closest to telling the truth about the relationship between effort and certain types of success. Winston Ayers, the great screenwriter, tells Claire Nash, the great Hollywood actress why he won't write for Hollywood. He says,

vainly lament, but realize nothing is permanent and learn from it the emptiness of life. Be compassionate to all creatures. If Buddha man finds a man suffering from a heavy burden, he shares the burden with him.

History shows this with the rise and fall of similar civilizations, “the world is like a burning house that is that is always being destroyed and being rebuilt. People, being confused in their minds by the darkness of their ignorance, lose their minds in anger, displeasure, jealousy, prejudice, and worldly passion¹¹.”

I must rail against the notion that “men must be somebody, women must find somebody.” I see how men used, and wrote, the Bible to justify their egocentric way of dogmatically and unconditionally dealing with issues in a relationship, “my way or the highway” was the byword. To have such a myth perpetuated throughout time is a barbaric representation of a mankind using their “God” and religion to justify their own ends.

As a rule, in relationships between dominant and subordinate groups, the subordinate groups members always possess a greater understanding of the dominant group members and their culture than vice-versa.

I see how I the other day reacted in anger to pushing by another. Just reacting left me out of control as to the true best way to handle the situation, and placed control into the other person’s hands.

Ask a person who is ill (i.e., pissed at you) why they are so, don’t just react. They may not be in touch with how they feel, so just probe.

[Friday] 29 November 1991: It is said that the ultimate secret to getting everything I want is the willingness to do whatever it takes to accomplish it. And, as the Buddhist say, thoughts are things (i.e., objects) and positive thoughts lead to a way to get the things I want accomplished¹².

Also I must ask why people, I included, want relationships so bad they fear anger? We truly believe, deep down to our core that we are separate. Anger, like all emotions, should not be repressed. But acknowledged. As James says, “be slow to wrath,” and as God says to Jonah, “does thou well to be angry?” Anger is natural result of possessions, and only till we see that can we agree with don Juan, that nothing is important enough to get angry over. I say that, not to suppress anger, but that by fully acknowledging anger, that is immediately what is found¹³.

Buddha, Jesus, and the Tao are all titles, applied to one man, but we can all become the Christ, the Buddha, or the old man.

“Man’s finitude, the extent to which his life depends at every point on factors which he neither make nor controls, may well lie at the heart of the religious impulse.” –Houston Smith

Is reincarnation, God, man’s supremacy so, or does man only wish it so. Reading meaning into things where there is none?

“You see, I believe that screen actresses are not great artists, rare talents, exceptions. They are not one in a thousand, they are just one out of a thousand, chosen by . . .”

“By?”

“ . . . chance.”

Claire said nothing. No proper words would come to her.

“Look about you,” he continued. “Thousand and thousand of girls struggle for a place in the movies. Some are as beautiful as you are, and some are more beautiful. All can act as you act. Have they a right to fame and stardom? Just as much or just as little as you have.”

“Do you realize,” said Claire, and her voice made funny little gurgling sounds in her throat, but she was past caring about her voice or what it said, “do you realize, Mr. Ayers, that you are speaking to a woman who is considered one of the world’s geniuses?”

“The world,” said Winston Ayers, “would never have seen that genius, if someone hadn’t told it so—by chance.” (pp. 93-94).

¹¹ This is from one of the teachings of Buddha.

¹² I am not sure the Buddhists actually say this, and it sounds a lot like the idea behind the *Secret*. While positive thoughts may not hurt, I am not sure they have a causal power.

¹³ I don’t know what I am trying to say here. The bigger issue is about the place of anger in a person’s life.

“Do not accept what you hear by report, do not accept tradition, do not accept a statement because it is found in our books, nor because it is in accord with your belief, nor because it is the saying of your teacher . . . Be ye lamps unto yourselves . . . Those who, either now or after I am dead, shall rely upon themselves only and not look for assistance to anyone besides themselves, it is they who shall reach the topmost height.” – Buddha— “When ye know of yourselves, ‘these teachings are not good; these teachings when followed out and put in practice conduce to loss and suffering’— then reject them.¹⁴”

Should we pray to Jesus? I don’t think so. Jesus never said to¹⁵, and Buddha said, in effect, “When I am gone don’t pray to me . . .” “Buddhas do but point the way, work out your own salvation.”

Differences per se are rarely “the problem” in relationships, the problem is instead our reactivity to differences¹⁶.

In relationships, we need to decide how much of another person’s behavior we are willing to put up with.

Meeting intensity with intensity—meeting reactivity with more reactivity—only escalates things further.

Or as the Buddhist say, don’t meet stone with stone or cloth with cloth, meet cloth to stone.

People tend to want to keep the status quo, no matter how bad it is, instead of changing.

Society is still under the delusion that men have the power, and they share it with women. Until it is seen that women have the power—innately—then will be seen as benefactors and will be uneasy about giving up the power. Women have the power just because¹⁷.

When people complain that another won’t listen to reason, it usually means they won’t follow that person’s advice.

Buddha¹⁸ says desire is the cause of all human suffering. What does he mean¹⁹? That my desire that causes us to separate ourselves from our fellow man and succeed at the expense of others, causes suffering. Anything that separates is not only violence, but causes suffering.

¹⁴ This is something that I deeply like about Buddha and Buddhism.

¹⁵ There are several passages in *John* that seem to counter this.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (*John* 14: 12-14)

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (*John* 15: 16)

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you (*John* 16: 23)

¹⁶ Is this true? It seems that the idea is that anyone could be a good partner with anyone else. It reminds me of a line from a Melissa Etheridge song (“Testify”) that I really like. The line is, “it’s not the love that dies but the understanding ways.”

¹⁷ Ok, 18 year old me, saying women have the power “just because” will not cut it. Knowing you, I think you meant to say that both males and females innately have equal power. Yes, if others believe that that males innately have more than females, then it males will see themselves as giving up power if they share with women.

¹⁸ I have noticed that there is a lot of Buddhism in these sections. This is somewhat surprising, as up this point I had been far more interested in Taoism. There are three things that come to mind in this context, however. First, the issue that ultimately caused me to leave the Home as soon as I did had to do with Buddhism. Second, when I moved to Chilhowie, I remember that the Sunday School class I was in was studying other religions. Finally, I remember reading *The Secret Oral Teachings in Tibetan Buddhist Sects* around this time.

Near the end of my senior year, I had responded to an offer to receive a copy of *The Teachings of Buddha* from some organization. The main houseparent of the time, Ben, had opened my mail and kept this from me. You can imagine my anger that he was going through my mail, and, even more that anyone would try to tell me that I couldn’t read something. This issue was one of the main one’s that ultimately lead to my leaving the home. I have always been fiercely intellectually independent, and I was not going to allow anyone to tell me the books I could and could not read.

I ended up getting a copy of this book, and took it with me to Chilhowie. When I got there, the Sunday School was discussing other religions and everyone had to pick another religion. Everyone else in the class picked other denominations. So, since the church was Baptist, they picked Methodist, Episcopalian, and the like. I decided to pick Buddhism, and decided that I would deliver Buddha's first sermon. So, I spent a week or so memorizing his first sermon and when it came time for me to give my section, I stood in the front of the room and gave his sermon.

¹⁹ The word here is *dukkha*. At its heart, *dukkha* is insatiability, and is the opposite of *sukha* (contentment). The idea here seems to be that we always crave more than we really need, and it is this craving that is the root of suffering.