

down in the
v026

revealing all your
dirty little secrets

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Scars cover
art of falled
tree at
Heather
Ridge.

Don't Tell

Stanley M Noah

Trees want
to

leave
their roots

and run
away

like young
lovers

behind closed
doors.

The Crying Girl

Michelle Greenblatt

A girl in one of my endless English
classes was crying in one of the endless
corridors normally I keep to myself this time

I asked her what's wrong she told me
she saw the man who raped her
when she 13 she didn't know anyone

who was raped she had no one
she could talk to who could relate
so I told her I was raped

many times as a child she stared
at me then said I didn't look like
the kinda girl who could get raped

she kept staring
I'm pretty small I don't weigh much
she said maybe it's the way I hold myself

and my combat boots always looking
like they can kick some ass but I have never
kicked anyone's ass except

my own I laughed bitterly and wondered
what the kind of girl who looked like
she could get raped looked like

Sliding to Tomorrow

Gay Beck

I walk down rubbled streets,
Beirut, Bombay, and Baghdad,
hated by young and old,
Black, White, Hispanic, poor,
alike in resentment
for my brief visit
to the museum of squalor,
a display of suffering,
an exhibition of shame,
a show that will continue
until spectation ends.
But then I suddenly realize
this is not a third world nightmare,
we're in America,
declining to decay,
since no one knows enough
to stop the fall.

Man With Guitar

Douglas Holder

And when he riffed
his girth
was no obstacle.
He rose
like beckoned
from above.
His head craned
like a meaty swan
following the music
like some
driven
Egyptian hieroglyphic—
face twitching
as if it
was synchronized.
His eyes tightly
locked
on the singers.

And
all I could see
were his
agile, manic
fingers.

CHAPTER 5

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC PRINCIPLE

Kenneth C. Eng

Akin to the lifelike plasmons of plasma physics, the universe behaves similar to a biological organism. The early universe, in its simplicity and lack of stellar organelles, could be seen as a cell, whereas the modern-day universe can be viewed as a multicellular organism trying to evolve into an animal. Although this may seem like a useless set of ideas, it is significant in the search for truth. The reason for this is that art is a key factor in existence, and a primary element of art is anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism has been one of the most influential elements in the history of mankind's imagination. The Hindu god Ganesh, who was the deity that represented the removal of obstacles, was manifested in the form of an anthropomorphic elephant. The greek minotaur, which lurked in the mythical labyrinths as a fearsome beast, was embodied as an anthropomorphic bovine. Furthermore, many of the Egyptian gods, such as Anubis, Sekhmet and Horus, were all anthropomorphic in nature and important to the ancient civilization's spiritual beliefs. Clearly, mankind has an infatuation with half-man half animals.

There is a logical reason for this (as there is for everything). Firstly, let us denote "animals" as creatures that are incapable of explicit or advanced choices and are not highly self-conscious. In other words, they act primarily on the *unconscious* instinct. Also, let us denote "humans" as organisms that can make advanced choices and are sentient of themselves to a greater degree. Humans, in this sense, would act on *conscious* will. Of course, as with all things in the macrocosm, relativity prevents one from making such blunt definitions and classifications without being bombarded by the criticism of strict, mathematical bounds, but for the purposes of this piece, these terms shall be used loosely and conceptually for the sake of representing an essential idea. Animals and humans are primarily separated by their capacities to ponder the self, universal purpose, and most importantly, aesthetics.

This separation is important to recognize, since beings that cannot

think are not actually conscious (having no thoughts would prevent an entity from experiencing the universe, thence forcing it into a state of unconsciousness). Thus, if animals are unable to ponder the Ultimate Purpose in existence, they do not truly think, and thus, do not exist as conscious beings. Those who cannot contemplate reality may as well be machines that are meant to merely follow the set of physical rules that the cosmos endowed them (the laws of physics, a.k.a. the genetic code of the biological universe). One might even question whether or not such beings as bacterium, chairs, or inanimate objects are really conscious at all, even though they came from the same origin in space and time as all conscious beings.

Humans, on the other hand, are generally endowed with the potential to cogitate the meaning of life, and are thus capable of comprehending the Ultimate Purpose and striving it toward its end. These creatures are blest with intellect, and with this intellect, they can be classified as conscious. However, as with all things, consciousness can exist at many differing levels along a continuum that branches from insentience to sentience, containing all shades of gray in between (like fuzzy logic). Just how conscious is every human?

One phenomenon that can demonstrate the varying grades of awareness is known as blindsight. This condition usually occurs in people who have suffered damage to the optical processors of their brains and are incapable of receiving conscious visceral stimuli, making them essentially blind. Notwithstanding, they are still capable of receiving visual data, as experiments have shown that people with this handicap can, if forced to guess, correctly locate and/or describe things they were not aware of viewing. Many scientists attribute this remarkable trait to the potential of the brain to utilize alternate routes in the transmission of cerebral stimuli to the subconscious, rendering it possible to know something without even being self-aware of knowing it. Accordingly, this stunning research has been applied to the study of animal intelligence, as it is assumed by the mass majority that animals are incapable of making advanced decisions.

Blindsight may not only apply to animals and brain-damaged humans, but to all humans at one point or another. For instance, it is known amongst the psychological community that when people are in a state of hypnosis, it is possible for a hypnotist to extract information buried deep within the psyche that the subject is not even aware of in ordinary waking consciousness (see any hypnosis book, including What Is Hypnosis by Andrew Salter). Such information can include the memo-

ries of past conversations, minor details from an environment that the person would not be able to recall during regular sentience, and sometimes recollections of languages the person was never trained in (the phenomenon known as xenoglossy). It is even possible, for certain subjects, to be instructed not to remember anything that transpired while in hypnosis, conclusively making it possible for people to have knowledge without even knowing that they had it!

On a more quotidian scale, hypnosis actually affects everyone at least twice every day – once just before waking and once just before sleeping. While handling certain tasks, such as driving, organizing papers, day-dreaming, and perhaps even writing, humans can slip into minor states of hypnosis (again, as accepted by the majority of the psychological community). In fact, most of our lives are spent in slight trance when carrying out minor duties, fantasizing or concentrating deeply on complex calculations such as those of accountants and astrophysicists. Since hypnosis is agreed by most psychologists to be an altered state of consciousness, and is driven in part by the unconscious, it is not absurd to state that the unconscious is an enormous factor in our existence. Further, because unconscious behavior is attributed to animals and conscious behavior is a virtue of humanity, then it is not unreasonable to declare that humanity possesses a highly animalistic visage.

In addition to blindsight and hypnosis, neural editing and coercion/suggestion also prove that most humans act on reflexes that they are completely unaware of. The majority of individuals typically have brains that edit out certain mundane information within their environments, such as typical objects or objects that it has seen many times before. It has evolved only to notice things that are amiss and/or strange, as the logical path of efficiency would require the mind only to process data that is significant. Just as well, humans evolved to have instinctual parameters that make them more inclined to act in accordance to a particular society's regulations, as those who obeyed society were more likely to spread their genes. The famous Milgram experiment, in which subjects were tested for their opinions against a majority belief system, certainly proved with disturbing results that most humans would readily comply with the views of a collective consciousness rather than trust their own observations. John F. Schumaker, in his book Human Suggestibility, cites that many extraneous factors influence people's opinions and conceptions of reality. In one instance, he references an experiment that tested how people reacted to the way identical questions were asked, and stated that the results

indicated a direct correlation between the manner a question was posed with and the answer elicited forth. Obviously, humans are not as free-willed as many humanists frequently boast.

What has this to do with anthropomorphism? Supposing that there exists a duality between humanity and animals, it is easy to see mankind as anthropomorphic, being part-conscious in a self-aware sense, and being part-unconscious in the emotional, irrational sense. Since the only way to derive the Ultimate Truth of existence is through the use of logic and logic alone, there is no foreseeable way to implement emotions in any part of the equation, unless emotions form a variable within a logical formula for truth. Thus, those who use emotion, namely the humans that are more toward the primitive side of the human-animal spectrum, are farther from achieving that goal than those who act on a more conscious basis. The only way to terminate existence and find/accomplish the meaning of life is to be conscious of why one does what he does in life, so in essence, what every intelligent human seeks (or should seek) is to find this ultimate purpose and to end its anthropomorphism. To be free of the unconscious is the guiding element behind the search for truth.

However, the unconscious is a permanent factor of existence and cannot be deleted. Therefore, the only possible way to be free of it would be to unite with it and understand its nature, which was earlier described. After which, it would be necessary to comprehend the rest of the cosmic equation that drives our existences in order to eliminate the unconscious anthropomorphic element entirely and gain true consciousness. This is the essence of the **ANTHROPOMORPHIC PRINCIPLE**.

Like the early universe that was trying to grow into a multicellular organism and the modern universe trying to evolve into an animal, we are organic microcosms that are striving to develop into the epitome of consciousness. Of course, the issue of why the beginning of time would necessarily have to create humans that were imperfect to begin with would arise, but this can be resolved in the fact that quantum mechanics and relativity are certainties in existence. By the laws of quantum mechanics, nothing remains stable, entities can exist in two places at the same time, and chaos rules supreme along a boundless and indefinitely extensive continuum. Relativity guides the shapeless tides of time and space in the observable macrocosm, making all things subjective on a larger level, temporal and spatial. Applying these two facets of spacetime to humans, one can conclude that the universe's opposing visages of microcosm and macrocosm blended with every human to make them chaotic by quantum

mechanics and orderly by relativity. Essentially, we are walking, talking manifestations of unification theory, as it requires both quantum mechanics and relativity to create the nature of the human species – Quantum mechanics to endow man with the unpredictability and variation inherent in the human collective (variation which can also be proven to be absolutely necessary in the fact that a multiversal 0th Dimension would contain every possible human) and Relativity to grant the ability to order mankind according to generalized and sometimes “fuzzy” classification systems. With limitless chaos, man would be meaningless and completely uncontrolled by any purpose, and with relativity by itself, the very existence of the 0th Dimension would be contradicted. Thence, we are living Theories of Everything, quantum gravity anthropomorphisms.

An infinite number of these potential humans can exist outside of our perception by the Uncertainty Principle, yet even this immense variation can be ordered along a continual spectrum. Accordingly, it is not unreasonable to state that since the humans that do not search for truth are less conscious than those that do search for it (the more humanistic ones), the former should be treated more as anthropomorphic machines than as respectable people. Only those that effect the universe by seeking to understanding it are the ones that matter, for all others may as well just be mechanisms working under the guise of unobserved uncertainty. In other words, the animalistic humans that live just for the sake of sustenance and occasional indulgence in family, friends, foods, etc., can be easily replaced by the infinite amount of potential men and women that can be created along the never-ending chain of hominid reproduction (because if we never observe a process, our perception is the only force left in the uncertainty principle to decide how that process was actually carried out). While this may seem denigrating, one must consider that the men and women who succumb to societal and/or cosmic pressure are not only childish, but also incapable of making choices and thusly not conscious. They may as well be dead already, as they can be easily replaced by other similar humans that may or may not retain some materialistic attributes needed by society. On the other hand, one must also contemplate that the 0th Dimension in its endless possibility does contain humans that strive for truth. These humans are the ones that matter, for the ultimate war of the universe centers around them.

Let us refer to the one human that does find the ultimate truth as “Animantis”, after the insect that is highly sacred to the Chinese as a

lone warrior species. Whoever achieves the supreme purpose would be united with this Animantis, and only one human can accomplish such a feat. If there is more than one consciousness, then existence, by the laws of causality, should not terminate, as the final state would include total bliss, simplicity and unification with the non-temporal genesis.

However, if Animantis is to find the truth, he must find that through other causal occurrences. Albeit the degree of consciousness places all things in a subjective spectrum of sentience, it still holds that other sentient entities in the universe caused him to discover the meaning of life. It can then be contested whether or not Animantis is the actual creator, or whether he “stole” the idea by deriving from other sources. What if another being taught Animantis how to add $3+3$? What if it taught him differential equations, linear algebra and quantum mechanics? Would Animantis incarnate as a creator or as the created?

The answer is both. If time were to be viewed as a landscape template of causal events linked to one another (ala Infinitieth Dimension) instead of as a linear worldline, then it can be understood that the unconscious would allow Animantis to be both the designer of existence that also designed himself. Fundamentally, the unconscious can never be observed by conscious organisms (according to definition; see “Everything You Need To Know About Certainty” in *Down In The Dirt Magazine* Volume 8) and so every causal event can branch out to an infinite number of effects by the unconscious’ mere existence. Therefore, after completing the meaning of life, Animantis would revert back to his own creation, the non-temporal beginning that encased within it the meaning of life as an origin and end united. All timed events would collapse back upon him in a stasis-like peace without time’s warlike changes. Animantis, at that point, should become his own “god”, so to speak, or his father’s father – the totality of existence in one, unbreakable whole. Let this whole be named the **ULTRADIMENSION**.

As you’ve probably noticed by now, if everything is connected by the unconscious, then we are all essentially one, undifferentiated mass of psyche and that all that matters in life is the acquisition of power to attain the Ultradimension. So how do we reach it? How does one become Animantis?

One aspect of humans that animals do not have is the need for **PERFECTION**. Because, in its most fundamental essence, Ultimate Reality is composed of nothing more than a collection of endless possible universes, there are only two things one can possibly do to accomplish the meaning of life and terminate one’s cosmic mission – seek ultimate power over the mul-

tiverse or seek to achieve aesthetic architecture by crafting the universes to one's will. These are the sole two options a being has to do with the reality, but only one of them can be correct. Since the primary motive that drives the actions of all conscious beings is the search for happiness, the path which results in greater happiness is the meaning of life.

Let us analyze the first of the two, indulgence through power (indulgence refers to the use of universes for mere pleasure and perfection denotes the use of universes to build beauty). If one were capable of accessing the multiverses (temporal and spatial) to their full capacity and change reality at the whim of a dream, then he or she could just conquer the world, seize all its riches, dine on caviar all day without dying of apathy and have profuse sex with model men and/or women. Of course, this is every human's ultimate dream to be able to have anything and everything their hearts desire. Howbeit, this path is fundamentally flawed. To seek pleasure is not necessarily equivalent to acquiring bliss. Surely, a being that has full control of reality would have limitless power, which is an extreme form of bliss, but its existence would be bereft of one of the greatest possible forms of happiness that can be – art. Thus, it can be declared that indulgence is incomplete in the mission to accomplish the meaning of life.

On the other hand, the second path, perfection, does fulfill the quest for ultimate bliss. Firstly, one must define perfection, and to do so, the three most powerful sources of happiness must be pondered – power, love and art. A creature with maximum power would be able to shift the state of anything in any way, which is an inescapably desirable capability by its very essence. Love educes an extraordinary emotion in itself, and is thus one of the highest types of pleasure. However, the only way to reach a state of happiness grander than power and love is to arrange the universe in such a way that space and time bring about these elements whilst enhancing them to their maximum capacity. The structure of the causal reality would need to be tuned such that particular events that take place in the dimensional continuum contribute and inevitably lead up to the attainment of an ultimately beautiful life that bears components of power and amour. The third element, art, would be needed to accomplish this.

Aesthetics have been at the heart of humanity since the time of cave drawings. In an attempt to emulate omnipotence, people have sought to create worlds within their minds and express them to others so that they could draw their dreams closer to reality. This is what lures many homo sapiens to become writers. Writers are basically units meant to utilize the multiverses to create stories and/or works that evoke emotive responses

from audiences. Thus, the purpose of one who is detached enough from any particular universe to view the multiverses must be to create a reality that if read or imagined (as in a book or film) would spark an ultimate sensation of bliss through the structured incorporation of fantastic power and love. These two elements are augmented when placed within a timeline that enhances their impact via proper positioning in space and time to formulate beauty, as opposed to having them plopped forth in front of a godlike entity that has control over all matter and energy. Therefore, since perfection is the greater of the two possibilities —

THE MEANING OF LIFE IS TO ATTAIN PERFECTION.

Thence, the only way to escape from our unconsciousness, our *anthropomorphism*, is to understand this quest and cease all mindless behaviors that do not pertain to the journey for perfection. However, although knowing this mission draws one closer to being cosmically conscious, it does not in itself sustain victory. One must utilize his own humanistic sentience to craft ideality, for without the vision of a paragon, none can truly be named supremely conscious. Ergo, even though we may all now be self-aware of this, we are in essence still animals unconscious of perfection. The only question left for us is how to escape the bonds of imperfection that bind us so that we may retreat from the cosmic zoo of anthropomorphism.

Then again, is anthropomorphism itself not beauty?

Sliding to Tomorrow

Gay Beck

I walk down rubbled streets,
Beirut, Bombay, and Baghdad,
hated by young and old,
Black, White, Hispanic, poor,
alike in resentment
for my brief visit
to the museum of squalor,
a display of suffering,
an exhibition of shame,
a show that will continue
until spectation ends.
But then I suddenly realize
this is not a third world nightmare,
we're in America,
declining to decay,
since no one knows enough
to stop the fall.

Disney Dad

Aldo Green

He loves his boy
From sun up
Until something else
Pisses him off
Or he thinks
To himself
Too much of the loss
He lost
So many years ago
He's the dad
That plays ball
But tires easily
With boredom
Loves to go biking
But only to the Park
The kind of dad that loves
Only if it suits himself
And the folks looking on
To the naked eye
He is all that I am not
Perfect and considerate
Kind and respectful
Disney dads take pride
In fooling everyone
Especially themselves
Believing they are Dads
Of great stature and grace
Forgetting the times
They are drunk, high
Mad or abusive

Disney dads are the first
To point out faults
Of others that they see
Blindly in themselves
Then recommend medicine
They wouldn't take
In a hundred years
And yet a Disney Dad is still
Better than an Oprah Mom
Freaking out over skinned
Knees and broken promises
Trying to get to the truth
Of being free
Just like your father

The Picture

Laine Hissett-Bonard

The ungodly loud ringing of the phone not two inches from my head roused me with a start from a pleasant half-doze, and I barely resisted pitching the damn thing across the room; my temper was short at the best of times, but even worse when I was rudely awakened. The number on the caller ID was my bass player's, and I grumbled a good-natured curse as I fumbled the phone to my ear, squinting against the sunshine pouring through the window, its intensity only worsened by the London smog.

"What the fuck do you want?" I tried to start every conversation on a congenial note.

"Well, that's nice, Brian," Scott replied crossly. "What's got your panties in a twist?"

Pushing myself into a reluctant sitting position, I rubbed my eyes with one hand, yawning. "You woke me."

"I don't know any other thirty-three-year-old man who'd be sleeping at three in the afternoon on a Sunday," came Scott's retort, and I laughed in spite of myself.

"Do you know any other thirty-three-year-old man who might actually be wearing panties to *get* into a twist?" I teased.

"A few," Scott replied, "but none as bitchy as you, darling."

"You don't usually ring me during the day," I said curiously, stumbling a little as I stood, but quickly righting myself and making my way to the kitchen for a glass of water. My afternoon nap did wonders for the hang-over I'd woken up with that morning; last night's vodka consumption felt fantastic at the time, but nine o'clock in the morning found me with a different opinion.

"I saw Mik today," Scott said, and already, I didn't like the accusatory tone in his voice.

"So?" I replied warily.

Scott released a heavy sigh into the phone, his patented, world-weary "I've had enough of Brian's bullshit" sigh. "Don't play coy, Brian," he said. "You fucked him last night, didn't you?"

"He told you that?" I blurted, surprised. While I was an incurable loudmouth in regard to my sexual exploits, Mikael was the polar opposite, never giving us so much as a single juicy detail.

“No; you just did,” Scott said, and I scowled.

“Shit.”

“Well, I already knew anyway,” Scott said. “I can always tell when you and Mik have shagged, just by getting one look at his face.”

“Why — is his eye bloodshot again?” I asked, and as I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the wall mirror, my face was a mask of concern. As proud as I had been to bring Mikael to *that* intense an orgasm, a recurrence might indicate some kind of medical condition.

“No,” Scott replied, then groaned. “Oh, Jesus, I thought that was just caused by too much vodka. Is *that* what happened to him?”

“Come on, Scott, get to the point,” I said impatiently. “What are you trying to say?”

“I can always tell Mik spent the night with you,” Scott said, his voice taking on that Papa Bear sternness that I had come to expect from him when he lectured me. The problem was, I couldn’t fathom what I had done to *deserve* a lecture. “He never says a word about it, but the way he looks is enough to tell the whole story. I stopped by his place today, and when he opened the door, Brian...” He paused for a moment, just long enough to drive me crazy with the suspense, before continuing. “He looked like he’s been crying all day.”

My throat tightened, my breath catching mid-inhale. “He... what?” I managed to choke out, my fingers gripping the phone tighter against my ear. “I... I didn’t force him to do anything, Scott; I swear it. He —”

“It’s not that,” Scott interrupted. “You’ve just got to stop using him like this. You must have broken up with what’s-his-name, did you?”

“Yes,” I sputter, “but — *using* him? How am I using him? Mikki’s a big boy — if he doesn’t want to fuck me, he doesn’t have to. How —”

Scott interrupts me again, this time with a note of impatience in his voice. “You can’t keep running to Mik for that kind of twisted consolation every time you break up with somebody, Brian. It’s not fair to him.”

“First of all, I didn’t ‘run to him,’” I said icily. “He showed up on my doorstep on his own. Second, what the fuck are you talking about, ‘fair to him’?” Scott, you’re not being logical. So Mikael gets himself laid whenever Brian gets dumped. So what?”

Scott let out a low growl of frustration in my ear, only slightly tinny through the phone. “Christ Almighty, mate, are you daft? You fucking sod, can’t you tell he’s in fucking love with you?”

I actually laughed out loud; the idea struck me as *that* preposterous. “He isn’t,” I replied, now positive that Scott was pulling my leg. “You had

me going for a minute there, but —”

“Brian,” Scott said slowly, and this time more gently. “Listen to me. Stop being so self-absorbed for just a minute and really *listen* to me. Mikael loves you. I don’t know how you’ve missed it all these years, because I could see it from the very day I joined the band, but he does... and you treat him like shit.”

I didn’t recall ever in my life having so much to say, yet at the same time being so completely speechless. Instead of trying to collect my thoughts to speak, I sat down at the kitchen table with my glass of water and lit a cigarette with numb, fumbling fingers. My first drag was shaky, the cigarette trembling between my lips.

“I know you’re still there; I can hear you smoking,” Scott said after a moment.

“Yes, I’m here,” I replied hollowly. “I’m just thinking about what a dick I am.”

“I won’t argue with you,” Scott said. “I don’t know how you could be oblivious to this... he’s hurting so much, and you just keep adding to it — stomping on his heart every time you let him into your bed, chuck your muck, and then act like it never happened.”

“I...” Trailing off, I had to bite back an automatically cutting retort in my own defense. The truth was, I *had* no defense; it was simply my kill-or-be-killed nature that made me itch to respond with an equally hurtful comment. The difference was, however, that Scott didn’t deserve an attack; I did. The thought that I could be responsible for causing Mikael, possibly the closest person in the world to my heart, pain for any reason made me feel sick to my stomach, and I stubbed out my half-smoked cigarette, grimacing at the sour taste it left in my mouth.

“What are you going to do?” Scott asked finally — always the man who needed a plan, unlike myself.

“A lot of thinking,” I replied honestly, feeling tears pricking my eyes and hearing them in my voice, as well. “Scott... I honestly didn’t know.”

“I know,” he said softly, “but that doesn’t change the fact that Mik’s hurting, and you need to make some decisions. All right?”

“Yes.” Such a small voice rarely issued from my throat. “And... I’m sorry.”

“Don’t tell me,” Scott said. “I’m not angry with you, Brian... and neither is Mik, I’m sure, but you do need to cut him loose and let him live his life. He’s just hanging onto a fantasy. Haven’t you noticed that he hasn’t had a boyfriend in ages?”

Although he couldn't see me, I shook my head miserably. The truth was, I *hadn't* noticed. I had just assumed that Mikael preferred spending his time dating casually rather than getting involved in a serious relationship... the reason behind that never even occurred to me. How could it have? I would never have imagined that the reason could be *me*. "I didn't think about it."

"You haven't thought about a lot of things," Scott said, and although his voice was gentle, his remark still cut deep, making me wince. "I think it's time you did... and when you're done, you need to ring Mik up."

"I will." A tear slipped from beneath my lashes and spilled onto the back of my hand where it rested limply on the tabletop, and I stifled a sob as I hung up the phone. How could I have been so selfish all of these years? I must have broken up with a hundred people in the time I'd known Mikael, and after each relationship ended, I sought comfort, acceptance, and unconditional love from the one person I knew I could trust to provide it: Mikael.

Mikael... my drummer, my best friend, my confidant, my voice of reason. The one who tamed the savage beast in me, the one who kept me grounded. Sometimes my mommy, sometimes my psychotherapist, sometimes my lover... always my soul mate. But how could I have known that he actually *loved* me? How could I have known that he was always so willing to open his arms to me at those times because those were the only times I *would* ever fall into them?

"Well, if you'd opened your eyes, you selfish twat, and thought about someone aside from yourself, you might have gotten a clue," I said aloud, my voice breaking. I couldn't possibly count all of the times Mikael and I had replayed the same scene over and over again: Enter Brian, stage left. Brian tells his sad story, whines about how unsexy and undesirable he must be, all but begs for reassurance. Mikael verbally worships Brian, strokes his ego, tells him he's beautiful and sexy and the other person was crazy not to want him. They fall into bed. Fade to next morning; Brian pretends nothing happened between them, ignoring the hurt in Mikael's eyes. End scene.

I had spent a lot of years hating myself, but I doubted at that moment that I had ever in my life harbored this much animosity toward the notoriously self-centered, sometimes heartless bastard that I knew most other people saw when they looked at me. I'd always known I could be thoughtless and egocentric — hell, if I wanted to be totally honest, *egomaniacal* was a better word — but this simply went above and beyond. I'd hurt

many people in my day with my self-serving ways, but never... *never* someone about whom I cared so deeply and so all-consumingly. Mikael... God, I had known him since I was a child. He had seen me through my worst years, stayed by my side through my least attractive periods, held my hand through depression and anorexia and even suicidal ideations... And somehow, despite all of that, the man still loved me. He was still willing, despite my idiosyncrasies and my childish behavior and my temper tantrums, to take what he could get, remaining essentially single in hopes that — what? That one of these times, I might just decide that one night with him wasn't enough?

“God, I'm such a waste!” I exclaimed, slapping my palm down on the tabletop hard enough to sting and rising abruptly to my feet to pace the room. Scott was right; how *could* I have missed the signals? It wasn't as if Mikael hid his emotions; one of the many things I'd always adored about him was the way he wore his heart on his sleeve. For being able to read his emotions as well as I'd always thought I could, I had to wonder now how gifted I really was at reading what went on behind his eyes. Obviously, I'd either ignored or somehow missed the signs... or maybe Mikael hid them so well that I simply didn't pick up on them. Somehow, I couldn't believe that possibility, though; after all, Scott had seen it, so it wasn't as if Mikael had concealed it well. No, the problem lay in my own ignorance, my selfish loyalty to number one above all others, and the fact that as long as my own needs were being met, all else was secondary... if that.

I really hated myself at that moment.

Shedding my clothing as I made my way down the hall, I was naked by the time I reached the bathroom, so I stepped into the tub and turned on the shower while standing under the faucet, gasping at the initial blast of cold water that struck me in the face and chest, but holding my ground; if anything, the shock provided a much needed wake-up. Eventually, the water grew warm, and I turned my back to it, allowing the deluge to stream over my slumped shoulders for several minutes while my exhausted mind attempted to grasp the gravity of what I'd learned. It all made perfect sense to me, too; all of the pieces fit. Why *else* would Mikael always be so ready, willing, and, above all, *available* to spend the night with me when I needed him to? Why else did he unfailingly blush to the roots of his hair when I told him I loved him? Why else did he always lay awake, staring at the ceiling, long after he thought I had fallen asleep, with an achingly desolate expression on his face?

And how could I have not pieced this together before?

Stepping out of the shower, I wiped a clear spot on the steam-fogged mirror, regarding my naked-faced reflection with its scornful glare directed back at me. "You're a self-centered prick," I said aloud, watching my mirror twin mouth the words back at me, upper lip curling in disdain. "You don't *deserve* his love."

The melancholy in the eyes of my reflection confirmed that I knew that was true, and I turned away from the mirror, wrapping a towel around my waist before I stepped out into the cooler air of the hallway. In my bedroom, I set out to dress, opening my closet to scan through the racks of clothing, but I ended up instead sinking onto the bed with my head in my hands, filled with a great, gut-wrenching confusion. "What the hell am I supposed to do now?" I mumbled, swiping a hand over my face. I knew I had to talk to Mikael... but what was I going to say? *Look, I know you're in love with me, so I can't shag you anymore.* Was I kidding myself? It was probably just the selfish child in me, but I didn't think I'd be able to give that up. My nights with Mikael were more to me than just in-fuck-ing-credible lays... he made me feel safe... wanted... needed. He made me feel comfortable just being myself, when, around everyone else, I felt the need to wear a mask, to hide the fuck-up I knew I truly was. Around Mikael, I needed no camouflage; he accepted me for what I was... all of me... unconditionally.

Isn't that what love is? my brain whispered, and I chuckled a little, dryly. How would I know? It had been so long since I was actually in love that I didn't know if I'd remember the feeling. I'd been searching for so long for it that I probably wouldn't recognize it if it bit me in the ass. I did know that I was well beyond needing a new partner every night, though; as long as I was regularly getting laid, I certainly didn't mind bedding down with the same person night after night. I got over that little hang-up right around the same time I noticed the first line on my face where there had never been a line before.

Dragging myself up from the bed, I distractedly managed to dress myself, then stood in front of my vanity mirror to apply makeup, sticking out my tongue at the boyish, bare-faced reflection I cast. It was a far cry from the pretty, painted visage I normally presented, as evidenced by several of the photographs tucked into the mirror's frame... most of which, I realized with a sudden, inexplicable flush, prominently featured me and Mikael. There we were on a beach in Mexico, where we had gone on holiday together, this one showing Mikael swinging me around after I leapt into his arms; there was one from a photo shoot for a local music mag

with me in Mikael's lap, my head tucked under his chin and his arms wrapped securely and possessively around me. Oh, and there was a good one — me trying to stick my tongue in Mikael's mouth. Scott had taken that one at my last New Year's Eve party.

My intentions of putting on makeup forgotten, I plucked one of the photos from its place on the mirror's edge and examined it; this one was my favorite, a shot of Mikael from the night I had taken him out for his thirtieth birthday. As he stood in front of the mirror, spiking his short, bleach-blond hair, I had snuck up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder, and when he glanced back at me, my trusty Polaroid captured his expression of innocent surprise — a deer in the headlights face if I ever saw one — tinged with his ever-present, charming good humor, wide-eyed and guileless and absolutely gorgeous in his own unique, uncalculated way. He was wearing eyeliner and that sparkly red shirt I so loved on him, the one that showed off his leanly muscled arms and just a hint of bare chest.

As I examined every minute detail of the photo, from his deep black pupils, dilated from the flash, to the faint shadows cast by the backlighting, from the irrepressible shimmer of his shirt to the soft fullness of his lips, I was struck by a sudden, unexpected epiphany, one that was both shocking and somehow perfectly plausible at the same time: I didn't need random, brainless pretty-boys like the one who'd broken up with me by telephone the day before... not when I had a familiar, much loved, beautiful, quirky drummer right here who was — and, I realized now, always had been — willing to provide me with all of the love I would ever need, who accepted me for all I was and who didn't give a damn if I got old and bald. The thought occurred to me then, too, that I should have seen this coming; ever since we were classmates in primary school, we'd been virtually inseparable, always touching and kissing and professing our love for one another, and everyone who saw us together for the first time assumed that we were lovers based solely on the way we behaved together. I had always assumed that Mikael and I simply had a friendship more open and passionate than most, possibly due to our similar sexual leanings, but, examined now in the cold light of day — much as I now examined this familiar picture — it became clear to me that all of these years, through bullshit and victories and disappointments and laughter, we'd really been meant for each other all along.

Grinning widely, I carefully tucked the photograph back under the mirror's frame and reached for my mascara, but something Mikael had said to me only a couple of weeks ago resurfaced in my mind, giving me

pause. I had invited “my boyfriends,” as I sometimes liked to call Mikael and Scott, over to my flat for the evening to gorge ourselves on gossip and junk food; Scott had gracefully bowed out, claiming “family obligations,” although Mikael cracked on the phone that Scott probably just didn’t want to deal with the cattiness of a pair of old queens like us. When I answered the door that evening to find Mikael standing there, he gave me a good-natured frown and asked me why I was wearing makeup.

“I didn’t want to be ugly for you, darling,” I teased, batting my mascara-heavy lashes, but Mikael gently took me by the arm and led me to the bathroom, where he flicked on the light and positioned us in front of the mirror.

“You’re not ugly,” he said, wrapping one long, slender arm around my chest from behind and kissing me softly on the temple. “Look at yourself. You’re beautiful. I don’t want you in makeup; you don’t need it. You don’t need to hide yourself from me, because I love you just the way you are.”

God, how those words took on a different ring as I replayed them in my head now... and the thoughts that filled my mind caused a flush that began to build, spreading from the fireball in the pit of my stomach, until every part of me was tingling pleasantly. Dropping my tube of mascara on the dresser, I grabbed my knit cap instead, settling it on my head and leaving my flat with nothing more than some cash in my pocket, thoughts of the future in my head, and a deep, penetrating, fuzzy warmth in my chest.

On the cab ride to Mikael’s place, I stared out the window at the sights of London passing me by, wondering exactly what I was going to say to Mikael when I arrived. What *could* I say? Of course, it would have to be delivered with my patented candor in order to sweep Mikael off his feet.

“Mikael, I love you.”

That was true, of course, but I said it all the time; it wouldn’t have nearly the desired punch if it wasn’t accompanied by something more definitive, more *me*.

“Mikael, I want you for more than just your cock.”

Well, that was a start.

“Mikael, if I was a woman, I would bear your children.”

That one made me smirk a little; it sounded just like me: shocking, bold, and more than a little queer.

The ride was short, and, after tossing a few extra pounds the driver’s way, I nearly ran up the sidewalk to the front door of Mikael’s building. I slipped in behind a carpet-muncher with a buzz cut and camouflage pants, nodding politely although she glared suspiciously at me as I ignored the

lift and bolted for the stairs. Perhaps, without my makeup, I appeared butch enough to pose as her competition.

Rapping briskly on Mikael's door, I fidgeted nervously as I waited for him to answer, my breath quick from my dash up the four flights and my heart pounding from something much more than simple exertion, and my breath caught in my throat as I heard him shuffling around inside the flat, the chain rattling inside the door. "It's me, Mikki," I called before he even had a chance to speak, and I hated the mousy, helium-infused timbre of my voice, but at least it would leave him with no question of my authenticity. "Let me in."

"Brian?" I heard the chain fall a second before he pulled the door open, and I felt the breath being sucked from my lungs at the sight of him. Yes, his lovely brown eyes were red-rimmed and over-bright, it was true... but he was still a vision, even barefoot in sweat pants and a ridiculously ancient Tina Turner t-shirt, his hair, now cropped close and back to his natural brown, bearing the unmistakable mark of a recent, extended meeting with his pillow. "What are you doing here?"

"We need to talk," I said softly, and as he stepped aside to admit me, I still had no idea what I was going to say to him... but somewhere deep inside my fragile, trembling soul, I knew that no matter what I said, his arms would open wide to allow me to fall into them again...

And this time, for good.

alone and watching

robert paul cesaretti

A man sitting by the window, the street below
people passing, traffic, a city
alone and watching, knowing his thing
limits, of what he can do, should do, should not do
to contain himself,
watching himself
that's the deal, the people who passed below,
what he desired

The Black Belt Chorus

Cheryl Lynn Moyer

One day Rosa Parks was just too tired
Of accepting that's how things are
Martin Luther King had a prophetic vision
He wouldn't live to see the mountaintop

Sweltering heat, poverty, racism and despair
Still claim all the breathing space
Between the catfish ponds and the cottonfields

The blind, the crippled, the poor, the elderly
Bundle up in layers hugging their own warmth
To sleep at night... staring at falling stars
Through their cracked and rusty sky
Children nibble a mouldy potato

Abandoned cars, corpulent vultures
Loveless dogs walking nowhere
Claim these back rural dusty roads
Raw sewage pours into the open grass
The sun bakes it all hard and crusty

You can clean motel rooms for a dollar each
Walk four miles to wash a white woman's clothes
Beg a ride to the grocery store

Mothers sing their Baptist prayers
For your children's sake you stay alive

College educated students have escaped
Rewarded with real jobs, real pay, real benefits
In the cities and way up north
Their mothers used a switch with loving hands

To help them find their blackbird wings

But once they've tasted

Respect, human dignity, a life worth living

They can't go home again

They can't sleep there

There's no peace in their souls

Only fear, anger, defiance

And the god damned bloody tears

Direct Line

Ken Dean

Alan Beretti had arrived early to work that fateful day, around seven AM. He passed the usual security personnel and service workers who were just coming on shift as he headed for the elevator. There were some items he wanted to get an early start on. Legal contracts needed to be finished today if he wanted to continue to succeed and move up in the prestigious law firm where he was presently employed.

He pressed the one-hundredth floor button after entering one of the South Tower elevators.

The elevator didn't stop at any other floors since the bustle of the daytime activity hadn't begun yet.

He exited the elevator and headed for his office. As he walked down the hallway on the way to his office he passed Lucy Pavorini in her secretarial cubicle. Wow...didn't realize she came in this early! Luckily he had landed an office space with a window facing east which let him see some of the city and the water beyond. A great view like that sometimes

helped put things in perspective.

Alan unlocked the office door and proceeded to set his satchel by his desk and shed his overcoat, placing it on the chair in the corner. He was just about to get out the work that required immediate attention when his cell phone rang. It was in his overcoat pocket, and he had to rush over to grab it out. Flipping it open automatically answered the call.

“Hello”, Alan said, “Who is this?” He hadn’t checked the caller ID before answering.

“Get out, Alan”, the voice on the phone said. “You have to get out quickly.”

“Get out? Who is this? And how do you know my name?” Alan answered in a puzzled tone.

“All I can tell you is that you have less than two hours to *get out* of that building or you *will* die. I know it for a fact. You only have time to grab your laptop and satchel on the floor by your desk. Then get out quickly...in fact, get on the subway and get out of Manhattan altogether...you live far enough away to be safe.”

Alan was getting chilled now...how had the stranger on the phone known those details?

“How can I trust you?” Alan asked. “This could be a crank call.” There was something peculiar about the voice on the phone. He could hear a strange background hiss along with a slight echo...as if both speakers were at opposing ends of a tunnel made of tin.

“I’ll give you one minute to verify that I know what I’m talking about. I know a secret about you that only you know...you’ve shared it with no one else.” The voice shared the secret to Alan.

Alan suddenly felt faint...no one else could have possibly known what the stranger had shared! “You see Alan...I’m you...no one else could have known what I just told you. I’m you calling from about six months in the future.” “Don’t faint Alan...I felt the same way when I received this very same phone call six months ago.”

The voice on the phone continued. “After the turmoil of that day was over, I started to wonder...how exactly do communication transmissions work? Is it possible that they may cross over to another dimension, time, or existence? So I tried to call my own cell phone number at 7AM every morning, but wasn’t able to make a connection until now. I knew that I would eventually get through...because I am still alive today in the future. I’m not sure if it will ever be possible again. But I will keep trying. I may be able to reach you again.”

“I’ve spent too much time talking!” the future Alan said, “*Get out and away now!*”

Alan flipped the phone closed. He was shaking. If all this was true and it really was *himself* on the phone...then he must move quickly. He left everything as it was except for grabbing his satchel, overcoat, and of course, his cell phone. He left the office, walking hurriedly down the hallway past Lucy’s cube...Wait!!

“Lucy!” Alan tried to keep calm as to not cause her to be overly nervous. “You have to get out of the building and as far away as possible now! It’s not safe!” “Why?” Lucy asked. “Everything seems OK.” But he had to try to get her out! “Could have sworn I heard a fire alarm.” Alan lied. Hopefully she took his advice. “No Alan, I’m not going to leave! Maybe you’re having a panic attack about work or something.” OK...Alan thought. I guess there was no convincing her.

Alan hurried into the elevator and punched for the ground level. He rushed out into the lobby walking as fast as he could while trying to warn everyone he encountered that the building wasn’t safe and they should get out now.

Looking at his watch, he realized that fifteen minutes had passed! He hurriedly found the nearest subway entrance and boarded a subway car heading towards his apartment near Atlantic Ave. in Brooklyn.

After arriving home, he quickly found a vantage point and used his binoculars to watch towards the World Trade Center. He watched in horror as the planes exploded into the two buildings and their ultimate collapse. He had averted disaster thanks to his future self. But he was deeply saddened at the loss of life in the attacks. Some of the people he had warned must have survived to tell the tale of the strange man warning of disaster, for he was eventually questioned and cleared by the FBI. He had no ties to any terrorist organizations.

Lucy Pavorini was never heard from again...she was counted among the missing. How he wished she would have left also. Alan should have been a hero and forced her out.

He didn’t know if the future Alan Beretti would ever be able to reach him again. But from that day forward he always made a point to try his own cell phone number occasionally...especially at seven AM. Words of wisdom can come down from the future. Alan made it a point to *always* check his voicemail.

RAGE

Mel Waldman

My father shoved the knife in my hand and screamed: “Kill me!”

I dropped the knife and ran out of the kitchen. Since then, I’ve been running for almost 50 years, even after his death, afraid of the terror, rage, hatred, helplessness, and despair in him and me.

He died 17 years ago. And in the last decade of his life, he suffered two deaths. Clutched by Alzheimer’s, he lost his mind before he passed away.

His third wife forced him out of his Beverly Hills, Florida home, claiming he had threatened to kill her. And although we seemed connected only by rage and mutual hatred, I took him in.

He stayed with me for three months. At first, we raged against each other. Yet buried beneath our rage, I believe, was a crazy, wild, sad love we could not express directly to each other. I think Dad was terrified of such intimacy. I know I was.

He left when we were starting to know each other. It was our beginning. Yet he never let it develop. A beautiful potentiality was not fulfilled. It was our end. He had a dark rendezvous to keep.

When he returned to Florida, his wife made him sign some legal forms and quickly placed him in a nursing home. Protected by a slick lawyer, she seized and got all his possessions.

Inside the nursing home, he deteriorated rapidly. The first death swept across his shrinking mind and vanishing identity. And before the second death came, he had lost his rage too. I’m told he used to sit quietly in the dayroom. Yet from time to time, he grew a big fat grin, revealing a gold tooth and an instinct for survival. Once a raging bull, he had become a “sweet, old man.”

In the end, he possessed only two words-“yes” and “no” and nothing more. The memories of his son, daughter, and brother were deleted from his mind, lost in a microscopic chasm between synapses, falling far into the abyss of oblivion. And his mind, almost nonexistent, was severed from his body.

Unaware of his raging past and oblivious of his current surroundings, one day the little man slumped over in his chair after lunch and died of a heart attack.

His last exit was a silent secret unnoticed by staff hypnotized by the long-lasting soap opera AS THE WORLD TURNS.

His body was shipped back to Brooklyn for the funeral. Then he was buried in a Long Island cemetery next to my mother who died many years ago. Finally, he was home, beside the woman he truly loved, bereft of the rage that had fueled his violent existence.

But he left me behind, not knowing how to feel about him. Before he returned to Florida, I forgave him. I mean, I thought I did. I had this grand catharsis and let go of my rage, and struggled to love this powerful little man, five-four with a thin moustache and large cataract glasses, whom I had dreamed of killing all my life.

My rage was a snowstorm that had buried my love in a deep snow. Yet still, my hidden love emerged after the windswept rain ripped through the icy walls of hatred and destroyed the antediluvian fortress that separated us.

Letting go of my rage was the most frightening event of my adult life. (And ironically, in the end, without your rage, Dad, you became a victim of the woman who betrayed you. She sent you away to die. And you went quietly, mindlessly.) And it seems I've had to rage again, from time to time, to feel alive in the old primitive way, before I forgive again.

I could have killed you many times throughout the years. But I chose to love you secretly instead. It was the buried secret I kept from you and me.

POSTSCRIPT 1

I have this recurrent nightmare. I wake up in the middle of the night and go into the bathroom. I look in the mirror. You stare back at me, smiling sardonically, knowing you have swallowed my soul. I scream a long soulless scream and die.

POSTSCRIPT 2

Awake, I ask the dark silent questions: Is it contagious? Is it inherited? Will I look in the mirror one day and not know I am there? Will I die before I die?

A Is For...

Raud Kennedy

I enjoy talking about people
in the third person
who're seated next to me.
They could be geniuses,
but I'd still sound superior
as I tread on their insecurities
with my hand of friendship
on their knee.

NIGHTS DARKEST

Philip W. Perna

It's on nights darkest
That I want a cigarette,
A painted woman on my knee,
And one-hundred beers
All lined up like Uncle Sam's
Not-yet-dead soldiers
(We Want You!),
Waiting to be knocked back,
One after another,
With their twist-off helmets
And bodies studded with sweat.
It's on nights darkest
That I want to be a madman
With my words.
But I hold out for better,
Something to impress them with—
Like juggling
Or catchy phrases
In Zimbabwean.
Because I know full well
That the pink-bellied dawn
Is just aching
To catch me in some misdeed,
Some foul-feathered lark
Of calamitous proportions.
A momentary lapse into being me
All over again.
The creeping sun—
That imp's eye! That Mother Hen!—
Will eat up the night,
But never the longing
It will undoubtedly
Leave behind
Like something venereal
And not wholly unpleasant.

the state of the nation

Janet Kuypers

my phone rang earlier today
and I picked it up and said "hello"
and a man on the other end said,
Is this Janet Kuypers?
and I said, "Yes, it is, may I ask
who is calling?"
and he said, Yeah, hi, this is
George Washington, and I'm sitting here
with Jefferson and we wanted to
tell you a few things. And I said
"Why me?" And he said Excuse me,
I believe I said I was the one
that wanted to do the talking.
God, that's the problem with
Americans nowadays. They're so
damn rude. And I said, "You know,
you really didn't have to use
language like that," and he said,
Oh, I'm sorry, it's just I've been
dead so long, I lose all control
of my manners. Well, anyway, we just
wanted to tell you some stuff. Now,
you know that we really didn't have
much of an idea of what we were
doing when we were starting up
this country here, we didn't have
much experience in creating
bodies of power, so I could understand
how our Constitution could be
misconstrued

and then he put in a dramatic pause
and said,
but when we said people had
a right to bear arms
we meant to protect themselves
from a government gone wrong
and not so you could kill
and innocent person
for twenty dollars cash
and when we said freedom of
religion we included the separation
of church and state because freedom
of religion could also mean freedom
from religion
and when we said freedom of speech
we had no idea you'd be
burning a flag
or painting pictures of Christ
doused in urine
or photographing people with
whips up their respective anatomies
but hell, I guess we've got to
grin and bear it
because if we ban that
the next thing they'll ban is books
and we can't have that
and I said, "But there are schools
that have books banned, George."
And he said Oh.

Janet asked if we could include this in an issues of **Down in the Dirt**, because her husband read the following passage from the book **the Language Police**. Because we've never published anything from the editor of the magazine we started as a supplement to, we thought we'd let her poem *The State of the Nation* have some space here, so we could share what she learned about how different groups of people historically have had problems and wanted to ban classis books.

(from *The Languyage Police*, chaoted 5, *Censorship from the Right*, by Diane Ravitch, about banned and challenged books)

Many book-banning incidents were never challenged by the courts. ... Parents, teachers, and students sued the local school board and the superindendent to prevent the book banning. ...During the 1980s and 19980, and after, there were numerous challenges to book by parents and organized groups. ... The thirty "most frequently attacked" books from 1969 to the early 1980s some that offended adultsfrom different ends of the political spectrum. The list included:

The Adventures of Hucleberry Finn by Mark Twain

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger

Deliverance by James Dickey

A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemmingway (I actually *had* to read this for my high school english class...)

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck

Lord of the Flies by William Golding (this is *another* one I had to read for class, and it was a good book, and the original movie for this was *also* very good...)

1984 by George Orwell (yeah. this one too, I read it in junior high school, in 1984, and *loved* it...)

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey (if you've seen the movie, can you *really* say that this should be banned?)

The Scarlett Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegur

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

SUICIDE - THE HEALTHIEST CHOICE

Kenneth C. Eng

When most people hear of suicide, they typically think of depressed losers, misfortune, injustice and other negative things. What most people don't realize is that suicide is not necessarily something unfavorable. In fact, it can be a useful tool.

Look at it this way – most people spend about 90% of their time working (I am not a statistician, but I think it is still safe to say that it's about 90%). The vast majority of jobs out there involve tasks that people hate – administrative duties, burger flipping, stocking shelves, etc. Obviously, most people are not rich and never get rich for as long as they live. In fact, most people on the planet probably hate their lives.

Why then, don't they commit suicide? If they're just working to sustain themselves, then they're pretty much existing to postpone death. This is as silly as having a battery that exists to change its own batteries. Does it really matter if they die at age 20 rather than age 80 if they don't really get to do what they want in life anyway?

I'm not trying to be cynical here; nor am I ranting. I am simply trying to elucidate a point I have made in many of my books – a life without a mission is one not worth living. I say if you're going to be alive, do what you really want to do, and if you lose, shoot yourself. It's better than hanging onto existence for no reason other than to exist.

But you might be thinking – if that was really a positive mantra, why don't more people do it? The answer is that society is in the habit of discouraging suicide. They make people take suicide education courses in school, they show commercials making self-destruction look bad; Eventually, this effects the weak-minded majority at a subconscious level, and they automatically view suicide as a negative act. Keep in mind, the morale and efficiency of one's civilization depends on the survival of its peons, and if peons keep killing themselves, then society as a whole suffers. One must ask himself, however, how important it is to keep the people in charge (people who won at life) happy. Is it so important that you want to make yourself suffer for another few decades?

The purpose of this essay is not really malignant. It is actually benign. I think if people have the option of committing suicide, then that gives them more freedom to fight for what they really want (With suicide as a choice, one does not have to worry about damaging his long-term interests). It makes me sad to hear 50-year-old people complain that all they do is “work to eat and eat to work”. Hopefully, this piece will encourage people to improve their perspective on life – and how overrated it is.

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down in the dirt