

N – The ‘No!’ Pain & the ‘No!’ Gain

Dear: As I mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, there’s another part of “M” that I review when I’m walking but that I didn’t show you – in part because it didn’t fit well in the previous chapter and in part because it’s just a “one liner” that immediately runs into what I review for “N”. So, let me start by showing you what I review for both “M” & “N” when I’m walking (and for that matter, also for “O”, which has some ideas linked to what I review for “N”):

M: Morality. The morality of the mystics: **Obey!**

My morality: use my brain as best I can. **Evaluate!**

Masks – manipulated by others to behave in certain ways.

N: *No! “No” to masks; “No” to need – there’s no objective standard; “No” even to some instincts – or at least constrain them.*

*As to which ones and by how much, the answer is in the acronym NO:
N = “Nothing too much”, and O = “Openness” (with myself).*

O: Openness, Opinions, & Objectives:

Practice openness (and honesty) with myself; tact with others.

Opinions: Derive all opinions from reliable data and tested hypotheses. Never base an opinion just on rumor – or feelings – or authority, never stop testing the hypotheses on which an opinion is based, never fail to examine the reliability of the data, and never abandon the scientific method.

Objective: Never forget to ask, “What’s the objective?” Neither priorities nor moralities can be established until the objective is known. But be careful: the ends don’t justify the means; the means are ends in themselves; the important question is: what’s the most important “end”; that is, what’s the most important objective?

Now, let me start trying to explain what I mean by the above – with the objective (and the hope) that you’ll find something of value to you.

First, I should point out that the idea of “masks” is from an author (whose name I’ve forgotten but who probably was a psychologist or psychiatrist)

who wrote about a concept that I hadn't appreciated and that really "hit home" when I read his or her popular "self-help" book, which probably has "Masks" in its title. The concept is that a large part of "growing up" is, first, to identify the masks that we put on when we were children, and then, having the courage to remove those masks that we deem undesirable. By "masks" the author meant ideas and behaviors that parents, friends, classmates, teachers, preachers, and others stimulated us (or even forced us) to adopt, as part of our "socialization".

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) wrote something similar in his *Studies in Pessimism*:¹

There is an unconscious propriety in the way in which, in all European languages, the word 'person' is commonly used to denote a human being. The real meaning of 'persona' is 'a mask', such as actors were accustomed to wear on the ancient stage; and it is quite true that no one shows himself as he is, but wears his mask and plays his part. Indeed, the whole of our social arrangements may be likened to a perpetual comedy; and this is why a man who is worth anything finds society so insipid, while a blockhead is quite at home in it.

Of course, much of such socialization is highly desirable (from not urinating in one's clothes, to not using physical force to settle an argument), but in other cases, the "masks" that we're forced to wear are horrible (from "believing" that the color of a person's skin is important, to "believing" that there's some giant Jabberwock in the sky who watches our every move and knows our every thought, and from "believing" that some "ordained" cleric is intelligent and wise, to "believing" that we have no choice but, for example, to fight in some stupid war). Thus, by *masks*, what the author meant (and what I review as a part of "M") is that all of us are: *Manipulated by others to behave in certain ways*.

With this part of "M" (and with the part of "N" that immediately follows, beginning with "No" to masks...), I remind myself that removing masks can be difficult (even painful) and may require substantial resolve (and re-enforcement of that resolve!), even for masks that I've concluded are undesirable. And thus "The 'No!' Pain" of this chapter's title. In spite of the pain, however, I've concluded that many of my "masks" should be removed, because removing them can lead to substantial gain (and thus "The 'No!' Gain", of the chapter's title). And the purpose of this chapter, Dear, is

¹ Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/7/3/10732/10732-8.txt>.

to convey to you that, perhaps, you, too, would profit from, first, examining the masks that others have forced you to wear (especially those derived from your religious indoctrination) and, then, identifying which of those masks you may want to try to remove.

But be forewarned, Dear: based on my experience, I'm certain that you'll find that many of your masks are attached with some powerful and "sticky" emotions (fear, love, hate...), and these emotions will probably reappear when you try to remove the masks. Yet, let me affirm that there's wisdom in the common expression: "No pain; no gain." But, Dear, please don't underestimate "the 'No!' -Pain", i.e., there can be a lot of pain in affirming "No!" I think that this pain is not adequately acknowledged, for example, in the familiar line: "Just say NO!" (to illegal drugs). My response is: "Of course I heartily agree with the concept, but whaddya mean 'Just say NO!'? Saying 'NO!' to some things and some people can be extremely difficult!"

Maybe I feel more than normal pain of saying "No!" to people – although I admit to the possibility that this is just a "cop out" on my part. My thought is that, as the youngest child in my family, I was trained very early not to say "No" to my older, bigger, and stronger brothers. Probably most big brothers train little brothers this way, based on the unfortunately enduring principle "might makes right" and the powerful emotion of fear, e.g., "Gimme that or I'll pound ya".

Although I'm not sure that I've correctly identified the cause, I expect that such physical and mental abuses were sufficient to cause me difficulty both with my telling other people "No" and with anyone telling me "No". And then, it didn't make life easier that I married your grandmother, who is the most strong-willed person I've ever met – at least it didn't help my mental state. Of course it helped me in many other ways, and I admit that her "strength of character", her ability to demand "NO!", is one of her many competences that I admire; it's just that...

Anyway, and again, although I don't expect to be able to demonstrate that I have correctly identified the cause of my difficulty in saying "No" (and now, I'm not really that interested in trying to!), I have no doubt that strong emotions arise (which I assume are tainted by fear) whenever I encounter confrontations. These emotions may also be the cause of my propensity to seek solitude. I remember seeking solitude as a child (before I was old enough to go to school) and remember my mother commenting on it: I used

to get up at dawn to go out to play, alone (e.g., with my toy cars and trucks, to the dirt pile). And now, 60 years later, I still enjoy being alone (and still go out at dawn with my truck to the dirt!), especially when I'm confused and desire to understand its cause.

In any event, maybe my childhood experiences explain why I enjoy, so much, the “show of strength” displayed in the line (I haven't the faintest idea who created it – but I thank whoever did!) that's now so common that I've seen it on bumper stickers: “What part of NO don't you understand!” In contrast, I've seen my oldest grandchild taking charge, appropriately telling “the kids”: “No!” Yet, never once have I seen her resort to the principle “might makes right”, although sometimes I've seen her report errant behavior to your parents.²

In contrast to my experiences, Dear, yours may lead you to prefer to be with people and to be in charge. Thus, I wouldn't be surprised if you find that some details that follow will be of little value to you – although, of course I hope that you'll find something useful. Further, maybe what you find “useless” will be more useful to other children – such as those who were forced to follow a certain grandchild's “tyrannical” ways!

Meanwhile, an example that may “hit closer to where you live”, Dear, is that it may be painful for you to apply the concept that “sometimes it's kindest to be cruel”. If so, consider the possibility that the source of this pain is that you were indoctrinated, since you were a child, with “be kind to one another” (as were most of us). To remove this mask, to violate this indoctrination (or perhaps more correctly described as the need, sometimes, to over-rule our “kindness instinct”) can then be very stressful: it's as if we were children again, afraid of losing affection from someone important to us (e.g., our mothers) or of being beaten for our misbehavior (by anyone from family members to classmates). When I'm walking, I normally fortify my resolve to remove the associated “altruistic mask” (or just remind myself of

² Incidentally, Dear, I trust you see that that use of punishment by parents is somewhat different from applying the principle “might makes right”. Thus, for a child's benefit (or better, to help ensure the survival of the parents' genetic code), a child must learn to obey parents. Unfortunately, most parents (and sometimes even stupid grandparents) use physical force (e.g., spanking) to stimulate the powerful emotion of fear to train a child to obey: if a child is spanked for not stopping when told to do so, then next time, the resulting fear may remind the child to stop when told to do so, e.g., before being hit by a car. I expect that, similarly, most animals use fear to train their offspring. Slowly, slowly, however, surely more parents will discern ways to train children without resorting to physical abuse – which is a huge topic that I'll take up in an X-chapter.

the mask that I'm wearing) with *No to need – there's no objective standard*, which I'll now try to explain in some detail, in case you find that you're wearing a similar mask.

Actually, there's more to *No to need – there's no objective standard* than just the mask I sometimes feel the need to remove (for example, to refuse to give a beggar money). In our culture and in all cultures of which I'm aware, altruism is promoted; it's promoted even in communities of dolphins! Certainly it's totally consistent with your dual survival goals to promote and to participate in charity (for example, to try to compensate for the randomness of natural disasters and for the hardships that especially children encounter, through little or no fault of their own). The potential benefit to your own survival is clear (the next tornado may hit you!), and the benefits to your own and to the human genetic code are also clear (especially if one recalls that no one is related more distantly to you than as fiftieth cousin). Thus, the value of altruism is clear by relating it to our dual survival goals (of ourselves and our extended families) – as is the case with all rational “values” (as I'll argue in a later chapter).

But then, as occurs so commonly, various clerics and politicians can take a valuable concept such as altruism to idiotic extremes, especially when it's at no cost to them – and even to their benefit! For example, from the famous (or better, notorious) line from Marx that became a fundamental (or the fundamental) tenet of Communism, “from each according to his ability; to each according to his need”, subsequent communist leaders (such as Stalin) led about 250 million Soviet people into hell on Earth: if people didn't “produce” according to their abilities, they were labeled as “counter-revolutionaries” (i.e., opposed to the communist revolution) and after only perfunctory trials, would be sent to horrible Siberian prisons (for example, those described in Solzhenitsyn's book, *The Gulag Archipelago*) or be executed. Simultaneously, an enormous communist bureaucracy developed to distribute, according to “need”, what little was produced. (Only “little” was produced, because normally the amount and quality of what people produce is proportional to the rewards they receive for their production.) And meanwhile, the bureaucrats concluded that their own need (for cars, summer homes, imported goods, etc.) was very great.

Similar horrors have occurred and still occur in our culture, derived for example from the myth of Robin Hood (robbing the rich to give to the poor – without analyses of who was rich and why, and who was poor and why)

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<http://zenofzero.net/>

and from the crazy concept of Christian charity, giving in order to get into heaven (and to avoid going to hell). And thus, Dear, the point I'm trying to make is that "need" can attract our attention, but it shouldn't be used as a gauge for measuring our altruistic or charitable contributions, because "need" has no objective standard.

Instead of trying to use "need" as a standard against which to judge the amount and kind of your charity, Dear, please try to ascertain the cause of the potential recipient's plight. For example, some questions that you should consider include:

- Is the outcome a case in natural justice, such as being born blind? – in which case charity could be appropriate,
- Is the outcome a case in personal justice? – in which case little charity would be appropriate, or
- Is the outcome as case in social justice (or injustice), such as receiving inadequate compensation for being wounded during a war? – in which case charity would be appropriate.

Of course, there are many cases that are complicated mixtures of different types of justice (such as the case of someone whose home was flooded), and although the decision to build on a flood plain was unwise, perhaps the person could afford no other home – and flood insurance was cancelled (in which case your decision about charity would be difficult). In any case, Dear, please notice that never is "need" a useful measure – because, again, "need" has no objective standard.

For example, helping a millionaire with a flat tire can be a more rational act of altruism (helping to compensate for the outcome in natural justice of running over a nail) than giving a hitchhiker a ride (who lost his car and all his money while gambling). And besides, Dear, if alone, then beautiful young women such as yourself should essentially NEVER pick up a male hitchhiker: for their own safety, all women must recognize the possibility (as I've heard some women say) that any man is likely to recognize no higher "moral authority" than his erect penis. Sorry to be blunt, Dear, but for your own safety, it's necessary for you to have a realistic assessment of the force of most men's sexual "drive" – and the difficulty that many men (if not most men) have saying "No!"

But setting aside further comments on constraining sexual instincts until later in this chapter (and later chapters) let me return to commenting on the altruistic instinct. In all cases of constraining any instinct, your act of highest morality is always to use your brain as best you can: evaluate! And although it may be difficult for you to constrain your altruistic instinct (in part because of the masks that your parents and your church forced you to wear), I hope that, eventually, you'll be able to ignore "commandments" from both the clerics' Jesus (who reportedly said: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor...") and the Gnostics' Jesus (who reportedly said: "If you give to charity, you will harm your spirits"). Instead, Dear, please pay attention to the most brilliant person you'll ever have a chance to know, namely, you!

As I began to describe in an earlier chapter, Ayn Rand (in her book *Atlas Shrugged*) presents compelling arguments for replacing the Christian concept of "charity" with her proposed moral code: "give equal value for value received" (which is similar to Confucius' principle of "reciprocity"). As I also mentioned in an earlier chapter, Rand's code is a double-sided coin. Most people would probably agree with one side: that when receiving goods, services, etc., from others, we should give equal value in return (it's just a complicated way of saying "don't steal"). But the other side of this coin is equally powerful: she maintains that we shouldn't give more than we receive.

If you spend some time thinking about Rand's suggestion not to give more than you receive, I expect you'll begin to wonder: where's the harm? I think that she might have answered something similar to the following. Consider, for example, the idea of giving money to a physically healthy beggar (which is something I don't do, saying to myself: "No; I'm opposed to slavery"). Of course it's the case that Rand's code applies to much more than "just" giving money, but if you'll consider this case, Dear, then the more general meaning of "reciprocity" should be easier to understand.

But, before I start digging into this case of giving money to beggars (and similarly, to clerics!) and explaining what I mean by "No; I'm opposed to slavery", let me comment on the "Christian (and Mormon and Islamic) confusion" about the meaning of money – in case the clerics have managed to confuse you. In fact, whereas my mind was so badly polluted by similar

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ideas (courtesy the stupid clerics of our society), let me start by showing you a summary that I sometimes remember when I'm walking:

“Love of money” isn't “the root of all evil”; refusal to learn is the root of all evil; the root of money is the best in any society: honor, trust, and productivity. No one loves money; people love the security and liberties that productivity, honor, and trust can provide.

Now and in contrast, let me start by reviewing some of what you've been taught about money. Thus, from the Book of Mormon (*3 Nephi 13, 19-24*), you've been taught:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal... Ye cannot serve God and Mammon [i.e., money].

To write the above in his Book of Mormon (BOM), the author (almost certainly Sidney Rigdon) obviously plagiarized the King James Version of the Bible (*Matthew 6, 19-24*), resulting in only a couple of errors, with corrections underlined in what follows.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal... Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Perhaps surprisingly (but perhaps not), the author of the BOM apparently didn't copy one of the New Testament's most famous statements about money – although perhaps Rigdon did include it in his manuscript, and the convicted “money digger” Joseph Smith vetoed its inclusion in the Book of Mormon when he copied Rigdon's draft! In any event, the line is (from *1 Timothy 6, 10*): “The love of money is the root of all evil...” Yet, comparable statements are in the BOM, such as the criticism by Moroni (*Mormon 8, 37*):

For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

Consequently, let me start contrasting some of the above ideas to the principle “always use your brain as best you can.”

The statement “the love of money is the root of all evil” is another candidate example from the Bible for being one of the stupidest statements ever made. In fact, it contains multiple stupidities. One stupidity is the assumption that anyone “loves” money. Certainly some people desire money (and work to earn money), but I’ve never met anyone who “loves money” – though they certainly appreciate the things that money can buy, such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, some security, and so on.

A second stupidity in “the love of money is the root of all evil” is the claim that all evils are associated with money. Would that it were so! If so, a huge number of crimes wouldn’t exist, e.g., all “crimes of passion”, such as those associated with jealousy – as reportedly practiced by God! In contrast, Dear, let me remind you again of Socrates’ assessment “There is only one good, knowledge; and one evil, ignorance” [where by “ignorance” I expect that he meant “refusal to learn”], and then, shortly, I’ll show you some of the evil caused by the ignorance in the statement “The love of money is the root of all evil” – and in the clerics’ evil of refusing to learn.

And a third stupidity (more to the point that I want to make) is that whoever wrote and whoever promotes the ignorant idea that “The love of money is the root of all evil” doesn’t understand the meaning of money. Thus, Dear, and especially because you’ve indoctrinated with this ignorance since you were a child, please follow Ayn Rand’s advice and consider the question: What’s the root of money?

Approximately 2,500 years ago, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book or Chapter V, Section 5), Aristotle (one of Ayn Rand’s “heroes”) saw a large part of – and if not the meaning, then the significance of money:

All goods must therefore be measured by some one thing, as we said before. Now this unit is, in truth, demand, which holds all things together (for if men did not need one another’s goods at all, or did not need them equally, there would be either no exchange or not the same exchange); but money has become by convention a sort of representative of demand; and this is why it has the name ‘money’ (*nomisma*) – because it exists not by nature but by law (*nomos*).

Unfortunately, the English word ‘money’ is significantly different from the English word ‘law’ – but to remind us of the link between ‘money’ and ‘law’, we could use the “legal word” for ‘money’, i.e., “legal tender”.

But digging deeper, Ayn Rand (in her book *Atlas Shrugged*) points out that the root of money is more significant, namely: productivity, honor, and trust. For example, Dear, when I work to “earn money”, I accept money for my services (rather than, say, a sack of potatoes), because I *trust* that the rest of society will *honor* the piece of paper called money, providing me with goods and services in exchange for my *productivity*. For example, at the grocery store, I trust that I can exchange my earned money for some food (other than, for example, potatoes). In turn, the grocer accepts my money trusting that suppliers and workers will continue this chain of honor, trusting that others will also honor claims on their goods and services. And so on it goes: a wonderful chain of trust and honor associated with productivity.

Any suggestion, then, that money is the root of all evil is to suggest that honor, trust, and productivity is the root of all evil, which is about as ridiculous a statement as ever made. Its antithesis is closer to the truth. Money isn't the root of evil; it's a symbol for the best in any society: productivity, honor, and trust.

Now, consider adding the (overused!) word “love”, as in “the *love* of money is the root of all evil.” Consider the silliness of that statement. On the one hand, certainly we should “love” (enjoy, take pleasure in, protect) the fact that members of our society are sufficiently productive, honorable, and trustworthy to be able to rely on pieces of paper (or other forms of money) that promise goods and services for productivity, rather than demanding that the goods and services, themselves, must be exchanged (i.e., an economic system based on bartering). And on the other hand, if the author of this stupid statement from the Bible meant that the “root of all evil” is in accumulating these promissory notes, I would suggest that most people try to accumulate these promises to provide for themselves and their families in times of trouble, e.g., in case of economic “downturns” or illnesses, or to protect themselves in their old ages (when they'll no longer be able to earn more promissory notes) to try to ensure that they won't become a burden on their families or on society, and so on.

In contrast, in still another example of stupidity, the clerics' Jesus specifically recommends against (and even warns against) setting aside any savings. In the BOM, this idiocy is the essence of *3 Nephi 13, 25-34*, which was copied from the King James Version of the Bible (*Matthew 6, 25-34*) and which includes

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“... take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on...” and concludes with “Take therefore no thought for the morrow...”

No one in his or her right mind would abide by such nonsense: to be a good Christian or Mormon, you're not to have a savings account?! No one in his or her right mind would preach such nonsense – although it's easy to understand why a con-artist cleric would try to convince his followers (his “marks”) that it's “ungodly” to have a savings account – rather than give the money to him!

For those cases in which collection of such promissory notes (money) seems excessive, I would suggest that rather than looking for evil, one should look for the possibility that the “miser” feels greater than normal insecurity, possibly from experiences as a child. But setting such pathological cases aside, I would maintain (again) that rather than “the love of money [being] the root of all evil”, the antithesis is closer to the truth: the love of money demonstrates the best both in “the lover” and in society: the person who works to protect his or her family, tries not to be a burden on others, and who appreciates and perpetuates (with productivity) honor and trust in society. Stated differently, how I wish that whoever concocted and whoever perpetuates such stupidity would have used or would now start using their brains – in ways other than to con people out of their money, thereby destroying the best their societies!

That is, I don't deny the clerics' cunningness: generally, it's not easy to set up and operate a good con game. Thus, I can understand clerics trying to convince their “marks” that “the love of money is the root of all evil”, because if people fall for the con, the clerics plan to profit by relieving the people of their money! But I wonder, as one possibility, why that the clerics aren't concerned that some people would demand more logic, responding: “Good heavens; if money is so evil, I sure don't want to contaminate you clerics by giving you any of this evil!”

And as another possibility, I wonder why, if the clerics have sufficient cunningness to establish and operate their con games, can't they see the huge harm that they've caused and continue to cause humanity? Don't they care? What's the pathology of such evil? I can agree with Socrates that the root of such evil is ignorance, but in the case of the world's clerics, I wonder what causes the ignorance. Is it refusal to learn or inability to learn? Or do the

damnable clerics know full well what they're doing but prefer to be parasites? But then, surely, for any human to choose to be a parasite (rather than a productive member of one's society) shows immense ignorance. So then, are all clerics just "flat out" dumb? Has their mysticism so badly warped their minds that they can no longer think?

Anyway, Dear (as somewhat of an aside and should you ever be so inclined), you could probably fairly easily "turn the tables" on the con-artist clerics of Christianity and Mormonism.³ Thereby, you could (at least theoretically!) terminate the money-collection schemes of Christian and Mormon clerics (amounting to about \$6 billion per year in Mormonism and which surely amounts to at least ten times more, separately in Christianity and Islam).⁴ Should you desire to overturn the collection tables of at least Mormon and Christian clerics, a good lever to grasp is a quotation attributed to both the clerics' and the Gnostics' Jesus. Thus, in the Gnostics' *Gospel of Thomas* you can find:

100. "They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, 'The Roman emperor's people demand taxes from us.'

He [Jesus] said to them, 'Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine.'" ⁵

Similarly, in the Bible (at *Matthew 22, 21* and *Mark 12, 17*, and *Luke 20, 25*) the clerics' Jesus states (responding to a similar question about paying taxes):

Render therefore unto Caesar what is Caesar's [whose image was engraved on the money of the time]; and unto God the things that are God's.

³ Similarly, Jesus reportedly "turned the tables" of Jewish "money exchangers" – although, as I'll show you later, that was another mistake by Jesus.

⁴ Dear, you can find details on the internet about this figure of \$6 billion per year in Mormonism (e.g., in an Associated Press article dated Monday, July 28, 1997 and entitled "Time Magazine: LDS Church 'Most Prosperous' Religion"). Also, an article in the 21 February 2003 issue of the Wall Street Journal by Elizabeth Bernstein and Eileen Daspin states: "The religious community can hardly afford to alienate more members, especially after scandals and missteps in recent years. Giving to religious organizations was flat in 2001, at \$81 billion", which I'm essentially certain means \$81 billion only in the U.S.

⁵ In this statement, Dear, the Gnostics' Jesus makes a distinction between what's his *versus* what's God's probably because he is referring to the "bad god" of the Old Testament (i.e., Yahweh or Jehovah); but the point that I want to make is that the Gnostics' Jesus apparently wasn't interested in collecting money.

These statements suggest that neither the Gnostics' nor the clerics' Jesus wanted any money – a practice that subsequent clerics definitely abandoned! Incidentally, these statements also suggest (incorrectly) that money “belonged” to “the government”, rather than being a symbol representing a person's productivity plus trust and honor among the people.

When writing the BOM, the author (almost certainly Rigdon) couldn't plagiarize the King James Version of the Bible (for a change! – at least, not if he were to continue the ruse that the “golden plates” were inscribed before the time of Caesar!), yet he (or possibly Joseph Smith) wrote an even more sweeping statement in *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Section 63, line 26), claiming that, through Smith, Jesus stated: “I, the Lord, render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.” That is, even if “the Lord”, HIMSELF, acquires any money, he disposes of it, giving it to the government!⁶

Consequently, Dear, whichever reference you choose, any of the three quotations provides leverage to overturn the tables holding the clerics' collection plates: clearly, Jesus doesn't want any money! Meanwhile, of course the clerics of all religions will quickly point out other “scripture” from their “holy books” that “justify” their collection of “tithes”, but you might then want to point out that such payments are obviously for the clerics' benefit, not for “the Lord's”, who clearly wants nothing to do with money!

Anyway, Dear, with those “preliminaries” and that “aside” out of the way, let me return to Ayn Rand's moral principle “give equal value for value received”, applied to the case of deciding whether to give money to a beggar (or any con-artist cleric). Thus, suppose that you yield to a beggar's or a

⁶ By the way, Dear, if you will carefully read Section 63 of the Mormon's *Doctrine and Covenant*, I expect that you, too, will see evidence of a major confrontation between Rigdon and Smith. As you can find from other sources, upon his return to Kirtland [Illinois] Rigdon apparently found that Smith was engaged in adultery, including attempts to bed even Rigdon's daughter. I suspect that Smith's shenanigans were responsible for Rigdon's “wrath” that he wrote into the start of Section 63 of the *Doctrine and Covenant*, which otherwise was a document to encourage the people to “buy into” the idea of buying land. But Rigdon probably wrote too much criticizing Smith, since apparently Smith revolted. That is, I expect that Rigdon wrote up to line 54 (which contains a message for “foolish virgins”, possibly meaning his daughter), but then, I expect that Smith added the last few lines, starting at line 55:

“And now behold, verily I say unto you, I, the Lord [aka Joseph Smith!] am not pleased with my servant Sidney Rigdon; he exalted himself in his heart, and received not counsel, but grieved the Spirit; wherefore his writing is not acceptable unto the Lord [i.e., to me, Joseph Smith!] and [he] shall make another; and if the Lord [i.e., Joseph Smith!] receive it not, behold he [Rigdon] standeth no longer in the office to which I [the Lord, aka Joseph Smith!] have appointed him.”

cleric's plea for money. Then, please consider what you receive in exchange for what you give him (or her, as the case may be), seeking to satisfy "give equal value for value received".

One thing that you expect to receive is gratitude. You may or may not get it, and if you do, the gratitude may or may not be sincere. In any case, please consider: of what value to you is any such gratitude? One possible answer is that the recipient's gratitude may give you a "warm, fuzzy feeling"; if so, you may want to try to identify its cause. Quite likely its cause is that you have been told (and possibly scolded) since you were a child to "be generous", to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you", and similar. That is, quite likely your "generosity" provides you with a garbled "survival signal", with the original signal sent by your parents or teachers or some clerics. That is, Dear, you may be wearing a "mask of unevaluated altruism", which someone slipped on you while you were unaware.

Another aspect of your giving money to a beggar or a cleric could be extortion: you pay, so you won't be harmed (either directly and physically or delayed and mentally, such as with worries about being robbed or being sent to "eternal damnation in hell"). I wouldn't be surprised if such fear is the reason why women (generally of smaller stature than men) generally seem to be more "generous" (more afraid?) than men, giving alms to beggars (usually men) and apparently willingly filling the clerics' collection plates – although maybe women are generally more generous than men (I've never felt a strong enough desire to dig into data that might help me decide). Further, I wouldn't be surprised if similar extortion – similar fear – is at the root of many of the welfare programs in our society, with the rich paying to try to keep the poor from becoming violent (which doesn't always work, as we know from some of the riots that have occurred in slums of some of our cities). Thereby, no doubt, the giver receives some "value" (namely, absence of riots), but this doesn't distort the fact that the "real game" is extortion.

In fact, if fear enters into "altruism" (as in the fear of "eternal damnation in hell"), then the result is different only in degree, not in kind, from armed robbery. A robber might put a gun to your head and say: "Your money or your life". You would then undoubtedly conclude to yield your money, but equally obvious, you didn't receive equal value for what you gave, because the robber had no right to your life in the first place. That is, with the formulation of his plan, the thief concluded that you don't have the same

right to your life as he does to his. He claims your life, and later in the execution of his plan, he proposes to sell you his claim of ownership of your existence. When people understand what's occurring, conquer their fear, and organize against the perpetrators of such extortion, they put the extortionists in prison; unfortunately, this has not yet been achieved in our society, in which the clerics are permitted to continue practicing their extortion, frightening the people with an imaginary hell and bribing them with promises of an imaginary heaven.

But anyway, returning to the point I was trying to make, if you give money to a beggar or a cleric, you may get a "warm and fuzzy feeling" (which can be a garbled signal, possibly from your parents) and you may get some "survival signals" (derived from extortion, either from real threats on your life or from imagined threats of hell), but there are many other possibilities. One "positive possibility", which you may detect, is that the beggar or cleric is actually attempting to improve conditions for recipients that he has identified (such as the beggar's children or some disadvantaged member of the cleric's "flock"). If so, and if you assist, there's a possibility that the ultimate beneficiary of your alms may yet provide you and society with substantial benefit (anything from a new scientific discovery to some protection provided by a future policeman, fireman, soldier, or similar).

Even in such cases, however, some obvious questions arise. If the beggar or cleric is physically fit and if the help-wanted ads show that many jobs are available, why doesn't this person work rather than beg? What data and criteria are available to permit judgments that the ultimate beneficiaries are more "in need" than your own children or the children of families with whom you're more familiar? Why give alms to "middle men", rather than helping the ultimate beneficiaries directly? Why channel funds through middlemen who have no training in social science (viz., clerics) rather than through a program run by professional social workers? What "commissions" do the middlemen charge for their services? In the case of the Mormon Church, for example, what happens to the more than 90% of the money collected that isn't used to help the poor? For example, does the president of the Mormon Church really need to spend more than a million dollars per year on himself – on his expense account, alone?!

Meanwhile, for street beggars who in good economic times appear to be physically fit and without a family, I do my best to totally ignore them saying (to myself): "I don't recognize any claim that you make on my

existence, even your claim to what I hear or see.” And if I fail in my attempt not to hear or see them, because of their aggressiveness (which commonly leaves the impression of a threat, and therefore suggests extortion), then I refuse to give them money, saying (again to myself): “No, I’m opposed to slavery.” To them, I say nothing, if necessary looking through them.

My thought re. slavery is derived from Rand’s idea about money. Representing productivity, honor, and trust in our society, the money I have in my pocket represents our society’s trust that the goods and services I supplied (and for which I was paid money) can be exchanged for goods and services supplied by others. If, because of a mask forced on me (leading to garbled survival signals from extortion or similar), I should give some of this “trust” to the beggar, then it would mean that I would be committing some honorable person to providing the beggar with goods and services that the beggar never earned (except through capitalizing on confused thought or through extortion). That means that, by giving the beggar money, I would be enslaving some honorable person to work for this beggar for nothing. And I am opposed to all forms of slavery.

Apologists might argue that, because I earned the money honorably, it’s mine to do with as I please, including giving to a beggar. But if I do that, then the beggar becomes a slave owner, e.g., if he buys food, then he has everyone from farmers to dishwashers working for him, while he gives nothing in return. Yet, that the beggar becomes a slave owner might be argued as irrelevant, because my earning the money already represented a commitment from everyone from farmers to dishwashers. I would agree that such an argument is logical, but my conclusion is that it misses the point.

For me, the important point is this: within the entire system of productivity, trust, and honor called money, there is the implicit agreement that all of us will be as productive as we can. Everyone from the farmer (and the hired hands who picked the crops, the chemists who created the fertilizer, and so on) through to the dishwasher (and the engineers who designed and the plumbers who installed the water system, etc.) worked very hard to produce the system in which we’re so wonderfully prosperous. To promote someone’s benefiting from this system who contributes nothing is, to me, immoral: he wants slaves; I won’t help him get any.

This is not to suggest that I don’t give anything to beggars or clerics – just not money! Thus, simultaneously with my not giving them money, clearly I

help them toward the higher “moral plane” to which they aspire! That is, the obvious moral code that any beggar or cleric puts into practice is more stupidity from the New Testament, namely: “It’s more blessed to give than to receive” and “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” Therefore, Dear, obviously beggars and clerics propose to do me a great favor, by providing me their service of accepting alms! Far be it for me to cause them grief! I will even invite any beggar or cleric to take some of the money from his cup or collection plate and give it to me, so that they will then become the one “more blessed.”

In fact, if a beggar or cleric will empty his entire cup or plate of money into my hands, I’ll even put in a good word for him, so that he will receive his “treasure in heaven”; I’ll say: “God bless you!” And surely to give up one’s place in heaven, where one can sit all day at the foot of God Almighty HIMself, is the most generous act of all – which I guess then assures that I get to sit for eternity and smell God’s stinking feet! Wow! Maybe other people have also thought this all the way through, and that’s why they proceed to put money in the beggar’s cup and the clerics’ collection plate – to avoid going to heaven!

Sorry, Dear, but as I’ve warned you multiple times, sometimes stupidity really gets my “cynical juices” flowing. To try to turn them off, let me take a bit of a “side-trip”.

In particular, while I’m addressing relationships between morality and money, let me insert an application to the case of inheritances, which may be of some use to you some day. Specifically I want to address the question: if you adopt a “moral code” similar to “*evaluate*” or “*use your brain as best you can*”, or “*apply the scientific method in daily life*”, and a “judicial code” similar to “*everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence*” or “*give equal value for value received*”, then I would hope that a certain grandchild would seriously consider the question: is it right for me to accept an inheritance from my grandparents?

If you do adopt ideas similar to the above as tenets of your moral code, Dear, then one aspect of inheritances (with which I expect that you’d then agree) is that it’s perfectly “moral” to leave an inheritance to one’s chosen heirs. For example, your grandmother and I worked very hard to obtain the relatively few promissory notes that we hold. Society has accepted the obligation to

* Go to other chapters *via*

honor these promissory notes in any way we choose – though not without planning to rip us off, big time, via various “inheritance taxes”! Therefore, if we choose to give some of these promissory notes to our grandchildren, then that’s perfectly within our right (and no one’s business but our own).

On the other side of this coin, however, is that it becomes your business if you should become one of the designated heirs. I hope that you would then ask yourself: is it morally right for me to accept these promissory notes that my grandparents accumulated? Thereby, I hope you’d ask yourself: would I become a slave owner, receiving benefits that I didn’t earn? I hope that such questions bother you, Dear, and hope that you will answer such questions in a manner similar to the following.

In such situations, the key question to ask (a question that I consider to be so important that I remind myself of it in **O** when I’m walking) is: *What’s the objective?* The obvious objective that your grandmother and I pursued was to accumulate some promissory notes so we’d be able to meet at least the bare necessities of life until nature took its course with us. Recall that one’s own survival is an objective with a rather high priority – for without life, it’s rather difficult to pursue any other (then, lower priority) objectives. Yet, even as I write this, I’m prepared to give my life to save yours; therefore, clearly my prime objective is to help these genes go on. Therefore, if the inheritance you receive helps these genes continue, then clearly it would be used exactly as we desire (and, I trust, as you desire); consequently, it would seem totally consistent with your grandparents goals for you to accept the inheritance – subject, however, to some major limitations.

If you use the inheritance to “party ‘til you drop”, or buy a sport’s car, or give it to some con-artist clerics, or..., then it would mean that you would be buying bogus survival signals, or adopting slavery, or promoting some worse-than-useless “cause”, or... Such usage of the money was clearly not what we had intended, i.e., to help these genes continue (and to prosper). In contrast, if you used the money to support your college education, or invested it to support your children’s education, or to build the money into an even larger inheritance to leave to your own grandchildren, then such usage of the money would clearly be consistent with our objectives (and with the objective and associated moral code that I hope you’ll adopt).

On the other hand, if your education has already been arranged sufficiently and if you don’t plan on having children, Dear, then please think about other

people in our society and even about all humanity, people who are related to you no more distantly than as fiftieth cousins. Also, think of the huge amount that you inherited from the past, including everything from spoons to quantum mechanics. Then, with such thoughts and for the conditions stated, maybe you would conclude to use your inheritance to help repay for all the other things that you (and your grandmother and I) inherited from our society. Thereby, you might choose (as examples) to add books to some library or some free internet-access sites, or create a scholarship at the local university, or establish a foundation for “free thinkers”, or similarly try to help people throughout the world to use their brains as best they can.

But that aside set aside (!), let me return to my main point. All the above has dealt with only one (rather trivial!) example of the masks I’ve found that I’ve been wearing (similar, I expect, to one that you’re wearing), the one I’ve been calling the “altruism mask”. I call it a “rather trivial example”, Dear, because rarely do beggars confront me, since rarely do I wander on the streets of large cities. Yet, I did go through some details in hopes that you begin to see what I mean when I review: *No to need; there is no objective standard*. What I hope you’ll glean from the example is something similar to the following.

Each of us wears a huge number of masks, many of which our culture has trained us to wear, in most cases without our being aware. As a part of growing up, I hope that you’ll examine the masks you’re wearing, to make sure you want to continue to wear them. I don’t know if Socrates was correct in saying “the unexamined life isn’t worth living”, but I’m certain that you’ll be more pleased with your life if you examine and understand why you want to do what you have “tendencies” to do. In many cases, we do things (such as give money to beggars) because we were trained to do so – and trained in a manner similar to how animals are trained. I encourage you to examine your behavior, and then, decide for yourself what masks you desire to continue to wear (and why).

Further, not only does all the above (dealing with altruism, charity, money, and so on) relate to just one of perhaps hundreds of “masks” that most people wear but also, it’s a mask (similar to many) that has been affixed by more than just our culture. That is, similar to many other masks, this “altruistic mask” is commonly a complicated mixture (or maybe better, a “multi-layered mask”), derived in part from our “cultural conditioning” (nurture) and part from our “altruistic instinct” (nature).

By “altruistic instinct”, I mean that, similar to dolphins, people seem to have been “bred” to be altruistic (by evolution, i.e., by natural selection, whereby a species has a survival advantage if its members are altruistic, helping one another survive). Thereby, altruism is probably “hard wired” into the genetic code of humans (and dolphins!), perhaps manifested in ways in which our brains are formed – and therefore, in ways that we think. And although I don’t know enough about either anthropology or biology to know how much of one’s “altruistic mask” is nurture vs. nature, I’m certain that none of altruism has anything to do with any giant Jabberwock in the sky – except in so far as the clerics have contaminated clear thinking.

But meanwhile, as I was beginning to try to describe, there are perhaps hundreds of other masks that each of us wears and that have both cultural and instinctive “layers”. And what I want to do, now, is mention a few of such masks that I’ve found that I’ve been wearing (and expect that you are wearing), to show you what I mean when I review:

*N: No! “No” to masks; “No” to need – there’s no objective standard; “No” even to some instincts – or at least constrain them.
As to which ones and by how much, the answer is in the acronym NO:
N = “Nothing too much”, and O = “Openness” (with myself).*

In showing you what follows, my goal is to encourage you to expend effort understanding all the masks that you’re wearing. I hope that, someday soon, you’ll gain the strength needed to remove those masks that you decide are undesirable, whether their origin is instinctive or from cultural conditioning – in particular, and especially in your case, the masks that your parents and their clerics managed to force you to wear, ever since you were a baby.

Now, Dear, you might think that surely your old “grandfather with the beard”, who reportedly rejects all religious indoctrination, wouldn’t also reject “natural instincts”. “Isn’t he the one who’s always praising Mother Nature, as if she were the goddess who should be followed – the successor to Jehovah?!” Well, Dear, is that’s what you’re thinking, then I’m sorry to disappoint you: I found that Mother Nature (or, better, natural instinct) is also inadequate to “show us the way, and the truth, and the light”. I grant you that she’s much more competent than Jehovah (or any other god), but when you start digging into details, you’ll find that, many times, she needs to be constrained, with your brain.

A major problem with relying on Mother Nature (i.e., relying on our instincts) is that our instincts have evolved (and continue to evolve) so slowly compared with the rate at which cultures change. That is, our instincts have evolved slowly, over eons, while radical changes in our culture can occur even during a person's lifetime. As a result, our instincts can be astoundingly and terribly "out of date" or "out of sync" relative to our culture. Let me illustrate with a few obvious examples.

Some of our instincts are, of course, as reliable today as they ever were: if either a rock or a Frisbee is headed for your head, Dear, then rely on your instincts: duck! Also, I encourage you to rarely constrain your instinct to breathe – except when you're under water without an air supply! But as a counter example, consider the fact that most Americans are over-weight, viz., 'corpulent' or 'obese' or just plain 'fat'! Why? – besides the obvious reason that we eat too much and get insufficient exercise.

The explanation for obesity that I would have you consider, Dear, is failure to constrain an instinct. Of late, there has been some culture constraints on our instincts to eat and to avoid physical activity – a constraint not normally promoted by clerics (probably because for the past multi-thousand years, they've commonly been the fattest people in any society!) – but instead, promoted by members of the medical profession. Obviously, however, such constraints haven't been very effective. In turn, Dear, I would have you consider that a root cause of the problem of obesity is "simply" that our instincts (the "hard wiring" in our DNA and/or in our brains) can't keep up with rates of cultural change.

Thus, in the time period roughly between 100,000 and 10,000 years ago, no doubt there were survival advantages to "stuff oneself" after a successful hunt. Thereby, the tendency to "pig out" became instinctive. Yet, there was also survival advantage not only in maintaining one's health (i.e., not becoming too fat) but also in staying sufficiently fit to be successful on the next hunt. Thereby, these bodies of ours developed the "instincts" (out of necessity) both to eat plenty when food was available and to stay physically active and fit.

But Nature rarely seems to "know" how to constrain herself, except through excess! Wherever she finds an opportunity, she seems to try to expand: where there is nothing, she expands into it (e.g., the universe!), where there's

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barren land or water, she starts things growing, and where there's "excess" food, humans (and most other animals) first increase their individual fat contents and then expand the population. Thereby, eventually, the excesses disappear, and as today throughout most of the world, the population reaches a new equilibrium, with individuals struggling to survive against newly developed scarcities.

And therefore my point (which undoubtedly is obvious to you) is that our instinct to "pig out" was developed over thousands-or-more generations, but culture can change rapidly, much too rapidly for our instincts to keep up. During the first phase of the agricultural revolution (which started less than 10,000 years ago), people "pigged out" and obesity became a problem. During most of the subsequent 10,000 years, the population in each agricultural region grew so rapidly that, eventually, only a relatively few people (e.g., the clerics) were able to continue to "pig out", while "peasants" and "heathens" stayed thin – some to the point of starvation. With the industrial and scientific revolutions, which led to enormous increases in agricultural productivity (so that, for example, during the past 200 years, America has shifted from ~97% of the people being farmers to now only ~3%), again almost all of us have had the opportunity to follow our instincts and "pig out". And thus, Dear, the need to constrain an "out-dated" instinct: a case of a "No-pain" for a different type of "No gain" – without a hyphen!

I'm sorry to have (once again!) "belabored" the obvious, Dear, but I wanted to make sure that you were convinced of the need to constrain at least one instinct (the instinct to "pig out"), so that you would then give serious consideration to each of a huge number of other instincts. Thereby, I hope you'll see that you'd be wise to decide to constrain some instincts that you continue to "follow" (or that you plan to follow).

To start to try to describe what I mean, let me list a few of our "instincts", alphabetically:

To Abuse, Accumulate, become Addicted, commit Adultery, Agree vs. Argue, Altruism (Compassion, Cooperation,..., Reciprocation), Appease, Avenge...

Barricade, Beg vs. Begrudge, Belong, Blame, Brag, Breed, Bribe, Bully...

Cajole, Compete, Compare, Conceal, Condescend, Condemn vs.
Condone, Conform vs. Confront, Consume, Control, Cooperate, Covet,
Criticize,...

Deny Death, Daydream, Deceive & Delude and to be Deceived &
Deluded, to Destroy what we Despise and Detest, Disagree, Disapprove,
Dispute, Disparage, Disrupt,...

Etc., etc., out to an including Xenophobia (meaning the fear of foreigners,
with the 'x' pronounced as if it were a 'z'), Yelping (similar to various
animals), and perhaps even behaving like a Zombie (as clerics demand!).

Now, Dear, maybe you disagree that all of the actions listed above are
“instinctive” – or maybe disagree even with the idea that they all have an
instinctive component. If so, certainly I'd agree that many contain “cultural
components”. Further, I'm not adverse either to removing some items from
the list or to adding others, because I've not given any of them much
thought. But let me at least give some hints about what seem to me to be
“instinctive components” of some of the actions I listed.

Thus, if you wonder if it's instinctive to be Abusive, think of the way your
puppy abused your shoes and the way so many animals fight each other, so
abusively. As for Accumulate, think of accumulations by squirrels and pack
rats. For Addiction, I think of the way my daughter's horse would search
her person for apples or carrots. And as for Adultery being instinctive, you
may want to wonder if your parents and teachers told you the full story
about the birds and the bees (!): consider more fully the implications of
Darwin's principle of natural selection, and read some recent scientific
literature.

Now, I don't want to belabor the instinctive component of Adultery, Dear,
but let me mention a few points, because from them, you might better
appreciate the need to use your brain as best you can to guide your own
actions (just as in cases of altruism and eating). Thus, recent scientific
studies have provided data on the “adulterous behavior” of birds that support
obvious deductions from Darwin's principle: the genetic code of a male bird
gains a survival advantage if the male impregnates many females. Similarly,
after females have mated with a male who assists in building a nest, females
will seek impregnation by other males, because there is a survival advantage
to the female's genes to be “unfaithful”, for example, in the event that the

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genes of the first male (the one who went to all that work to help build the nest!) are in some manner defective.

Meanwhile, Dear, although similar adulterous behavior would also be genetically favorable for humans, I trust that you see why the instinctive component of adultery should normally be constrained. And of course, it's not because some giant Jabberwock in the sky said "Thou shalt not commit adultery", but because for humans, there are many important aspects of sexual relationships, besides breeding. In fact, with the world's current overpopulation, breeding is fast becoming a highly undesirable consequence of sexual relations!

Let me put it another way. As just a single illustration of the clerics' viewpoint, from no doubt thousands of such illustrations, let me re-quote what Mormon "Elder" James E. Faust (of the "Quorum of the Twelve Apostles") wrote in his article entitled "Will I Be Happy" in the May 1987 issue of the Mormon "magazine" *Ensign*:

The scriptures clearly and consistently condemn all sex relations outside of legal marriage as morally wrong. Why is this so? It is so because God said so.

What unadulterated balderdash! I talked to God the other day, and she vehemently insisted she never said any such thing! She said that a bunch of con-artist hustlers (Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Rigdon,...) wrote such stupidity by themselves, claiming God as their authority. Yet, God did relay that she did agree with me that, generally, adultery is dumb!

Dear: In later chapters, I'll comment on some of the many reasons for restricting sexual bonding to just a single partner, including the wisdom of protecting the emotional and physical health of all concerned. Here, I'll just mention that sexual intercourse can (and usually does) lead to the closest ties that you can have with another human, surpassing even your ties with your parents. The mutual support that such bonding provides (which in turn relies on substantial honesty and openness) is normally one of the prize possessions (if not THE prize possession) of one's life, whether or not it leads to children. Consequently, Dear, if an adulterous affair would in any way damage this "possession", then the adultery would be a most grievous error, damaging oneself. Further, if the bonding has already led to children, then adultery can cause the children (and in some cases other adults)

substantial pain and harm. That is, Dear, adultery is usually dumb – and I urge you to use your brain as best you can.

From those (brief!) comments about adultery (and my earlier comments about altruism and over-eating), I trust that it's obvious, Dear, that thorough examinations of the desirability of constraining instincts would be an enormous undertaking. Not only could it require the rest of this book, it could potentially include an enormous number of different topics, in fields spanning from various aspects of psychology to social science, politics, and law. Meanwhile, I expect that you'll be pleased to learn that I don't have sufficient competence to approach the subject through any of those disciplines – although, in a typically cantankerous manner, you might object that my incompetence hasn't deterred me from addressing other topics! [Child: one mask that I think that you should make sure is fitted snugly is the one labeled “respect your grandfather”!]

Looked at differently, the desirability of constraining some instincts can be considered to embrace the entire subject of morality. From this perspective, deciding what ‘morality’ means is the same as deciding what instincts “ought to be” constrained. But I want also to ignore this “philosophical” approach (save for the few comments I made in one of the **M**-chapters about the philosopher Kant's crazy ideas that morality “transcends” nature, which means he thinks that ‘thinking’ transcend nature, with which I totally disagree). Instead, in the rest of this chapter, I want to focus just on a few instincts that you may want to constrain, and for them, address the question: using your brain as best you can, and being open and honest with yourself, how can you see how to constrain such instincts – and by how much?

And in case you get lost in the verbiage that follows, Dear, let me state the answer here. As given by Seven Sages of Ancient Greece, the answer is “Moderation in all things,” and as stated alternatively by Terrance: “Nothing too much.” Of course, those answers lead to the questions: What's meant by “moderation”? and “How much is too much?”, but I trust that you'll see how to answer those questions – by using your brain as best you can.

Particular instincts, which I hope you would consider constraining, are some that (almost certainly and without your realizing it) the clerics (and others in our society) have been manipulating ever since you were a baby. These instincts include our tendencies to socialize, start families, form into tribes,

follow leaders, and be obedient, as well as our desires to be accepted by others, to be supported, to avoid death, and so on. In this chapter, I don't plan to address all such instincts that clerics and others manipulate – or even provide a very thorough description of the few that I do plan to address. I'll address more, and in more detail, in chapter **X2**, entitled “EXcavating Reasons (for Religion).” Nonetheless, let me at least sketch at least a few ideas for your consideration.

For example, consider again our instinct to avoid death, which I already commented on in an earlier chapter (**F**). When considering how much to constrain this instinct, Dear, I hope you'll find a reasonable balance between taking risks versus being afraid of your own shadow, and between worrying about the finiteness of your own life versus dreaming about “eternal life” with some giant Jabberwock in the sky. I'll dig deeper into this topic in **X2** with comments on “religious neuroses” (in particular, with the neurosis known as “necrophobia”, which means “fear of death”); for now, let me leave the topic with the wisdom of the Seven Sages: “Moderation in all things.”

As another example, consider our instinct to reproduce and our instinct to group into families. For essentially all animals, the “mothering instinct” seems to be one of the most powerful instincts – sometimes even more powerful than the instinct to avoid death. I know that a father's instinct to protect his children can also be powerful (especially to protect one's daughter!), but I doubt if it matches a mother's instincts. But for both, constraints are needed, not only because overpopulation is perhaps the world's most serious problem but also because if you overprotect your children, you'll weaken them. I commented a little on this topic in an earlier chapter and I'll return to it in a later chapter (**P6**); for now, let me just summarize by repeating: “Nothing too much.”

As still another simple example, consider our instinct for “socializing”. Of course we humans are “social animals”, Dear, but I certainly hope that you strike a moderate balance between socializing and developing your individuality. Similar to ants, we humans can profit from “teamwork”, but meanwhile, let's at least hope that any human is much more than an ant! You undoubtedly enjoy “just hanging out with friends”, Dear, but much of “hanging out” is mindless. Thus, I expect that you'll neither write a poem that moves many people nor remove the inadequacies of Dirac's version of Schrödinger's equation while “hanging out” with your friends!

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In particular, a part of the “social instinct” that can easily get out of control is what’s commonly called “the herd instinct”, which no doubt is a large factor in “gang membership” and which appears, I suspect, in every instance of “mob behavior”. Many times “mob behavior” has occurred associated with various religions, for example, the horrible cases of “witch hunting”, killing of “infidels”, and “holy wars”. I’m reminded of a penetrating line by Allen Wheelis: “One can often recognize herd animals by their tendency to carry bibles.”

But more relevant to your past and potentially future behavior, Dear, I would have you consider two special features of the “herding instinct”: 1) the survival value of the herd instinct (whereby predators are able to successfully attack only those members of the herd at its outer perimeter; therefore, all members of the herd try to get to the protection of the center, keeping the herd tightly packed), and 2) the major (or at least most imminent) threat to the survival of most humans in this country is not from natural causes but from other humans. Consequently, humans seem to have the tendency to form into various groups or “tightly-knit tribes”, such as various religious groups.

Consideration of those factors leads me to suspect that many people I have known profess a belief in god mostly because they seek the safety (from their “prime predators”, i.e., other humans) by joining a convenient and apparently non-threatening herd of other humans. In times past, these herds were commonly the dominant religious organizations in the community; for many young people in this country, these religious organizations must seem so absurd that they choose, instead, to join “other” gangs. For the future, I hope not only for fewer threats from other humans (and therefore less impetus to join herds) but also that people will choose to join more rational groups (for example, Dear, in many communities within this country there is now an organization of secular humanists – whose addresses you can find on the internet).

Usually as part of the “herding instinct” – but in some cases separate – is the apparent “instinct” to show obedience and subservience to leaders. For example, Dear, if you could consider the matter openly and objectively, I suspect that you’d see little difference between a dominant ape, wolf, or other animal demanding genuflection (or ‘deference’ or ‘obeisance’ or even ‘reverence’) from “inferior” members of his pack *versus* what’s demanded

of any cleric from his congregation or any politician from followers. In the case of following religious leaders, however, it's rather amazing that people willingly genuflect (e.g., in whatever manner they pray, be it on their knees or on their faces), even without the "top dog" [whoops, I spelled it backwards again!] showing his fangs (or even his face!) – such being the power of human imagination.

But I would especially have you consider, as well, some other ramifications of the human propensity to form into groups (tribalism), follow leaders (obeying orders), and the commonly associated xenophobia (i.e., fear of foreigners). These ramifications include provincialism, intolerance, and racial bias. All dictators (from Moses, Muhammad, and Joseph Smith to Hitler, Stalin, and Mao) manipulated the people's "tribal instinct"; all organized religions continue to capitalize on it. In fact, essentially all societies normally instruct their school children in such "evils", by promoting the "tribalism" known as "school spirit" (complete with semi-religious "school mascots") and in most if not all cases, there's little difference between "patriotism" and "tribalism".

Please, Dear, consider the dangers of promoting tribalism in the modern world, as if humans were still members of primitive tribes of hunters and gatherers. Perhaps the worst of it is that, with tribalism, we follow not "learned behavior" (which can potentially be corrected with better education), but we're following "instinctive behavior", with codes "hard wired" into our brains – and rewiring the brain is much more difficult than rewriting software!

Let me try to make my point this way. Until someone can say, with sincerity, something similar to what Socrates said, then that person is still a "tribalist". Socrates said: "I'm not an Athenian, or a Greek, but a citizen of the world." In contrast, some of the most hideous statements ever made are: "I'm a Jew" or "I'm a Catholic" or "I'm a Muslim" or "I'm a Mormon" or "I'm an American". Would that all people today would say something similar to what Socrates said, e.g., "I'm not Caucasian, Negroid, or Oriental; I'm not a Hindu, Hebrew, or Hispanic; I'm not a Mormon, Muslim, or Mongolian; I'm not an American, European, or Asian. I'm a human!"

Dear: if someone should ask you if you're a Mormon (or a Muslim, or a Christian or a Jew or a Hindu or...), then I hope that, someday, you'll have the strength to feign a puzzled look on your face, simultaneously cocking

your head slightly forward, as if to say: “If you asked what I think you asking, ya gotta be kidding!” Or if someone should ask you if you’re American (or British or Russian or Chinese or ...), I hope that someday you’ll develop the skill to snicker back, simultaneously blowing a small amount of air through your nose that’s just barely audible, as if to say “Are you for real?”

And then, Dear, after expressing your disgust at such stupid questions, I hope you’ll answer something similar to: “What?! I’m an ‘Earthling’. Where are you from?” You might even want to add: “Are you from a different planet? A different star system? A different galaxy? If so, I’d really like to learn about you, because, after all, we’re all the universe I’ing. But if you’re a Mormon or Muslim or Christian or Jew or Hindu or whatever, from America or Britain or Russia or China or where ever, then forget it: I’ve already experienced more than enough of primitive tribalism.”

And I’m sorry, Dear, if, once again, I’m belaboring the obvious, but please let me continue for a bit longer. Just for fun, maybe you’d like create your own brand of tribalism. For example, before you go to class tomorrow, maybe you’d like to paint your left-pinky pink. Then you could be a member of a bit of provincialism called the “pink-pinky persuasion”. And whereas some people might frown upon that bit of tribalism, then automatically you’d become a member of the “persecuted pink-pinky persuasion”. And who knows, if you created yourself a “handbook” full of rules and regulations and racism (similar to the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon), then in time, you’d be member of “the persecuted pink-pinky persuasion of preferred people”! If then, similar to the Jewish people, you adopted the Ancient Persian’s god as your “standard”, you could then be a member of the “persecuted pink-pinky persuasion of people preferred by the Persian God” – and if history is any guide, your primitive provincialism might be able to proceed to pollute humanity for thousands of years.

But, once again, I’m getting carried away. As I’ve repeatedly said, stupidity really gets my “cynical juices flowing”. To try to calm down, let me mention that maybe women provide more hope for humanity than do men for constraining humanity’s instinct for tribalism. I have the impression that women are less “tribalistic” than men, and if data support that impression, I wouldn’t be surprised if “the weaker sex” has a weaker tribal instinct because during the past 100,000 years or more, there were survival advantages for such behavior (for women who were captured, traded, sold

* Go to other chapters *via*

into, or in some other manner joined other tribes). Thereby, maybe the tribal instinct was never “naturally selected” (or maybe, not so strongly selected) for women as it was for men. If this hypothesis is correct, then perhaps more progress toward international peace will be made by promoting women to lead the development of better international relations. And, too, they must lead in promoting planned parenthood. Certainly it would be a step forward if all priesthoods were restricted to females. Then the next step would be if all religions were abandoned!

But another problem may be waiting in the wings: maybe women are more “genetically inclined” than men (i.e., have a stronger instinct) to follow rather than lead, including the tendency to “worship heroes” (such as various rock stars). Maybe this explains a part of why women seem to be generally more religious than men, more than willing to do what the clerical leaders tell them, including being subservient to their husbands. The result could be dangerous for humanity, especially since all political leaders, priests, and other “power mongers” tap into this instinct to follow – which is still another instinct that all of us need to learn how to constrain and by how much. But let me push until a later chapter (**P9**) further comments about power mongers and the need to constrain our instinct to follow. In that chapter, I’ll emphasize a principle that I consider important: “Follow principles, not people.” Here, to end this chapter, let me return, again, to the need to declare “NO!”

Dear: although we’re all just part of nature, for each of us to promote our dual survival goals, we must learn to use our brains as best we can – rather than just follow our “natural instincts”, some of which can be multi-thousands of years “behind the times”. Many of these “instincts” lead to extremely powerful emotions, which are commonly hidden behind multi-layers of “masks”, some of which we’ve put on because of societal pressures. In any case, when we attempt to remove these masks, then some powerful personal emotions and instincts can emerge.

In fact, I’ve found that it’s also difficult to remove the masks, because sometimes, it’s not at all clear to me who the “real me” is! That is, Dear, on the one hand, I know that I have a huge number of inadequately examined instincts, just as, I expect, everyone has. On the other hand (and also, I’m sure, similar to everyone), I know that I’ve been exposed to a huge number of “social pressures”, pushing me for so long (ever since I was a child) to

behave in specified manners. Consequently, Dear, sometimes I have great difficulty in deciding who the “real me” is.

If someday you similarly seek to find out who you are, Dear – to try to identify your “true nature” – then maybe what I’ve learned will help you: I’ve learned that it’s critical to be open and honest with myself. That is, when you ask yourself why you did (or want to do) a certain thing, then you must keep on digging, always being open and honest with yourself, until you finally see what objective you’re pursuing – and why. And thus, Dear, what I remind myself in N as it evolves into O:

*N: No! “No” to masks; “No” to need – there’s no objective standard; “No” even to some instincts – or at least constrain them.
As to which ones and by how much, the answer is in the acronym NO:
N = “Nothing too much”, and O = “Openness” (with myself)...*

Which I’ll try to explain in the next chapter, labeled **O**. Oh, and by the way, when’s the last time you got some exercise? I’m sure that (similar to the rest of us) you have an instinct to “goof off”, but...