

Y10 – Your Reality & Your Future

Dear: You might think the most reliable information you possess is that you exist. But in reality, as I tried to show you in earlier chapters (e.g., see **Ih**, **Ii**), the probability that you exist is “only” about 0.999... [continue on for a total of 25 nines]...9 . Granted that the result means that you can be fairly confident that you do, in fact, exist, but you should allow for the possibility (of about 1 chance in 10^{25}) that you’re just a simulation in some humongous computer game (and so, too, for everyone else).

Instead, the most reliable information that’s available (at least, as far as I know it can be stated with more certainty than any other claim) is that, in reality, no god exists (or has ever existed). The probability of the truth of the statement that “no god exists (or has ever existed)” is very roughly 0.999999999999... [continue on for a total of ~500 nines]...9 . Stated equivalently, the probability that any god exists (or has ever existed) is about 1 chance in 10^{500} , i.e., 0.0000... [continue on for a total of 499 zeros]... 1. Therefore, adopting the concept that no god exists (or has ever existed) is safer than getting up in the morning; it’s safer than the assumption that your parents will always try to help you; it’s safer than putting your money in the bank; it’s safer than buying treasury bonds; it’s safer than your assumption that you and the rest of the universe exist; it’s a safe as you can get!

But there are other assumptions that you can make that seem quite safe. For example, and for reasons that I’ve tried to summarize in these **Y**-chapters (tying up some loose ends), I guarantee you (as near as I can guarantee you anything) that, if you’d test the following premisses, then you’ll find them to be reliable and – in and of themselves – they’ll cause you zero troubles:

Your thoughts exist (at least as electrochemical signals in your brain), the universe is natural, and information about it can be gained *via* the scientific method.

As far as I can make it out, such IS reality: not only yours, but everyone else’s. In contrast, the premiss – the delusion – that any god exists has caused and continues to cause an enormous number of people an enormous amount of trouble.

I'd go even further. I'll bet you "dollars to doughnuts"¹ that a huge body of evidence could be assembled that would lead to the inescapable conclusion that no idea has caused humanity more horrendous problems than all the (therefore, damnable) "god ideas". And if you think about it, it's all the more amazing that such "god ideas" have caused so much trouble, given that there's absolutely zero evidence supporting the speculations that any such gods exist or ever existed! Further, it's not as if humanity needed to adopt silly speculations about gods to get itself in trouble: think about interpersonal problems, resource depletion, environmental pollution, over population, starvation, illness, crime, wars...

But then (as I've tried to show you in earlier chapters, e.g., in the "excursion" **Ix**), the god idea was concocted by primitive people, not to cause problems, but to solve them. Thus, given that primitive people had (and in fact, all animals have) robust instincts to promote the survival of themselves and their families, they almost certainly concocted the god idea in (misguided) attempts to promote their dual survival goals. And thus, ancient thinkers deserve some credit for how imaginative they were in developing models of the world and their place within it – even if those worldviews (still promoted by ignorant and conniving clerics of the world) seem crude in the light of current knowledge.

Consider a few summary illustrations.

- *Personal Issues (Health, Illness, Good Fortune, etc.)*
Faced with their precarious existence, their being buffeted by the apparent randomness of nature, and their experiences that tribal leaders were sometimes receptive to humble entreaties for forgiveness and for favors (especially if bribes were offered!), primitive people deserve credit for concocting models of the world in which various gods were in control and who would be responsive to their entreaties (and bribes) – and thus all the solemn sacrifices and humble prayers to the gods. But it conflicts with the adjective 'modern' that "modern" people should still practice similar rituals (and in some cases, refuse best-available medical help).
- *Natural Phenomena (including Weather Phenomena, such as winds, thunderstorms, tornados, etc., Terrestrial Phenomena, such as floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, etc., and Celestial Phenomena, such as stars, comets, meteors, eclipses, etc.)*
Confronted by frightening and in many cases fatal occurrences of an enormous number of totally perplexing and many times enormously powerful natural phenomena, primitive people deserve credit for concocting models in which the

¹ Ha! How things change! The expression "dollars to doughnuts" used to mean that you were offering your competitor amazingly generous odds. That was in the days before doughnuts cost so much!

phenomena were assumed to be caused by actions of the gods (and in some cases were assumed to be the gods, themselves), showing their powers and who needed to be appeased (with signs of humility, with prayers, and with sacrifices). But it conflicts with the verb ‘teach’ (i.e., “to impart knowledge”) that adults should now “teach” their children that, for example, the names of the days of the week are anything but silly references to “immortal” gods long since dead [i.e., Sunday = the Sun god’s day, Monday = the Moon god’s day, Tuesday = (the sky god) Tiu’s day, Wednesday = (the wind-god) Woden’s day, Thursday = (the thunder god) Thor’s day, Friday = (the wife of Woden and mother of the gods) Freya’s day, and Saturday = (the god of time, i.e., the Greek god Cronus or the Roman god) Saturn’s day].

- *Social Issues (Customs, Laws, Justice, Government, Wars, etc.)*

Puzzled by an amazing “moral sense” (e.g., empathy and reciprocal altruism, which are advantageous for the survival of social animals such as dolphins, monkeys, elephants, and people), associated customs, laws, and concepts of justice (which Nature teaches all animals including humans as soon as they become aware of their surroundings), herd, pack, and even warring instincts (similar to those in most animals), etc., primitive people (unaware of evolution) deserve credit for concocting models in which the gods defined morality, customs, laws, justice, etc., chose rulers, dictated the course of wars, and so on. But it conflicts with the verb ‘think’ that modern people should still “think” that the Bible should be permitted in our courts, that the Ten Commandments should be displayed in public buildings, that Congress should initiate its sessions with prayers, that “In God We Trust” should be on our currency, that it’s useful and even imperative to say “God bless America”, and so on, i.e., promoting the speculation that any god ever had anything to do with interactions between and among humans.

- *Biological Phenomena (Birth, Death, Cycles for Vegetation, etc.)*

Faced with the amazing process of birth, the frightening prospects of death, the annual cycle of the growth, maturation, dormancy, and “rebirth” of vegetation, primitive people deserve credit for concocting models in which humans (and for that matter, some gods as well, such as Osiris, Mithras, and Jesus), participated in cycles similar to that of vegetation, proceeding from “dormancy” (death) to “rebirth” (life after death), and similar speculations. But it conflicts with the noun ‘adult’ that any “adult” still believes in such silly ideas, which don’t have a shred of data to support them.

So, given the crude state of knowledge when religions were concocted, I don’t think that it’s appropriate to label our primitive ancestors as “delusional religious addicts”. They certainly seem to have been “obsessed” by thoughts about the gods (as revealed in ancient Sumerian and other myths, in Homer’s books, in the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon), but such worldviews were the best that primitive humans could concoct. Yet, why do “modern people” still “believe” such silly ideas?

Well, in earlier chapters (e.g., **X2**, entitled “EXcavating Reasons”), I dug into some of the (huge number of) possible reasons why “modern” people choose to “believe” such silliness – and I don’t want to go into all that again. Recall: childhood indoctrination, fear, greed, herd instinct, loneliness, mental illness, pack instinct, uncertainty, and so on. Nonetheless, maybe it would be useful to review five obvious reasons why people are religious.

One reason that so many “modern” people still “believe” in supernatural silliness is that so many people are so amazingly ignorant: recall the recent *fatwa* of the top cleric in Saudi Arabia threatening anyone who didn’t believe that the world is flat, recall other rulings of Muslim clerics that evolution is false, consider that ~60% of Americans accept the “literal truth” of the Bible’s description of how the universe and humans began, and so on. From such (and more) the conclusion seems inescapable that the majority of religious fundamentalists are just ignorant bumpkins. Recall the tautology: “[Half of all people have below-average intelligence.](#)”

A second obvious reason why people continue to “believe” in such silliness is simply because of their indoctrination, mostly by their parents. Children aren’t born religious, but they are born with instincts to seek security (e.g., to group into herds and to “follow the leader”), from which the clerics have learned to profit. Also, children soon learn to do as their parents desire. Childhood indoctrination then follows, under the guidance of clerical leaders of the world, many of whom surely must know how silly their worldviews are, but they peddle them anyway, hooked on all the perks that their con games provide. Thereby, the mental virus known as “the god meme” continues to infect additional generations, because effective “anti-virus software” has yet to be developed to protect the minds of gullible children. Surely, someday, laws will prohibit “the clerical profession” from practicing: it’s far worse than prostitution, because it preys on and corrupts the minds of innocent, trusting, gullible children.

A third obvious reason why religions persist is because each religion provides a community, even an extended family, to which “believers” can belong simply by stating that they “believe” (in whatever absurd ideas that the religion’s clerics concoct). The result was recently described well in a news release (to which I’ve changed some punctuation and italicized some text) from the University of Missouri:²

² Available at <http://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2008/0909-palmer-religion-evolution.php>.

“Instead of studying religion by trying to measure unidentifiable beliefs in the supernatural, we looked at identifiable and observable behavior – the behavior of people communicating acceptance of supernatural claims,” said Craig T. Palmer, associate professor of anthropology in the MU [University of Missouri] College of Arts and Science. “We noticed that communicating acceptance of a supernatural claim tends to promote cooperative social relationships. This communication demonstrates a willingness to accept, without skepticism, the influence of the speaker in a way similar to a child’s acceptance of the influence of a parent.”

Palmer and Lyle B. Steadman, emeritus professor of human evolution and social change at Arizona State University, explored the supernatural claims in different forms of religion, including ancestor worship, totemism (the claim of kinship between people and a species or other object that serves as the emblem of a common ancestor), and shamanism (the claim that traditional religious leaders in kinship-based societies could communicate with their dead ancestors). *They found that the clearest identifiable effect of religious behavior is the promotion of cooperative family-like social relationships, which include parent/child-like relationships between the individuals making and accepting the supernatural claims and sibling-like relationships among co-acceptors of those claims.*

“Almost every religion in the world, including all tribal religions, use family kinship terms such as father, mother, brother, sister and child for fellow members,” Steadman said. “They do this to encourage the kind of behavior found normally in families – where the most intense social relationships occur. Once people realize that observing the behavior of people communicating acceptance of supernatural claims is how we actually identify religious behavior and religion, we can then propose explanations and hypotheses to account for why people have engaged in religious behavior in all known cultures.”

A fourth obvious reason for “buying into” religious schemes is that they provide people with mental escape from reality into a fantasy world. Reality can be brutal: death awaits everyone (so, people fantasize that they’ll live forever), loved ones die (so, people fantasize that they’ll rejoin their loved ones after death), injustices occur (so, people fantasize that justice will be realized in another world), and so on. All of which may help explain why slaves, poor people, and people suffering discrimination (including women) were and are among the most religious, and why “religious revivals” are common during times of economic or other social upheavals: oppressed people and losers escape from reality (at least mentally) into religious dream worlds, pretend worlds, fantasy worlds, worlds in which they (like little children) imagine they’re the good guys and will live happily ever after. Karl Marx saw it clearly:

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusion man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses...

A fifth obvious (and important) reason why people adopt religions is that people are finally given answers to the silly question: What's the purpose of life? It's a "silly question", because life is "the purpose"; so, it's asking: What's the purpose of the purpose?! Yet, understanding one's purpose is critical (for you and for everyone), because few people can function without a purpose. But, Dear, if you conclude (as have the vast majority of people in the world) that your purpose is to be happy, then please dig deeper to learn what you mean by 'happiness'. If part of your happiness is derived from doing what others desire (such as believing or not believing in some god or other), then please dig deeper to understand why this makes you happy. Please similarly dig deeper to understand the cause of any happiness. If you do so (for example, as I showed you in **B** how I did it for myself), I expect you'll come to the result that I've repeated many times: happiness is an emotion we feel when we think we're making progress toward our goals – and our prime goal (our prime purpose) is the survival (or the "thrival") of ourselves, our families (whatever we recognize as the extent of our families), and our values. Thereby, Dear, I hope you see that it's Mother Nature who defines for each of us our purpose. An obvious interpretation of all available data is as follows:

- 1) By some unknown method (possibly a symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in a total void), the universe created itself,
- 2) In this corner of the universe, on the crust of molten rock called Earth, a molecule "learned" how to reproduce itself, and

- 3) Your prime purpose is to help that molecule – this human genetic code – humanity – to continue to live, to continue to evolve, by solving our problems more intelligently.

That's what makes you and all of us happy. And by defining the purpose for each and every one of us, Mother Nature has thereby provided us with goals against which we can measure values (such as morality and justice). If only all of us would appreciate that purpose and then measure our values against it, I'm confident that humanity could yet find peace and prosperity – or at least, sustainable development with reduced physical violence.

Meanwhile, though, it's truly amazing how so many people have been conned into adopting purposes prescribed by various “priests”, “prophets”, and other “holy people”. From the perspective that even prehistoric people had a perfectly clear idea of their prime goals (i.e., their dual survival goals, of themselves and their family) – because even other animals obviously have the same goals – then I must admit that the clerics of the world pulled a truly amazing “bait and switch routine”.

Voltaire (1694–1778) concluded, “[the first priest was the first rouge who met the first fool](#)”, but more likely (as I outline in the excursion **Yx**), the clerics' “bait and switch routine” developed over thousands of years. Almost certainly, first it was the people who decided that souls, spirits, gods, etc., existed – probably (as I reviewed in **Ix**) based on their experiences with the shadows, their images (e.g., in pools of water), and their dreams (in which the people's “shadow” or “spirit” or “soul” seemed to be able to wander away from their bodies and participate in the activities of their dreams). In time, people apparently imagined that “the shadows” (or spirits) of their still-remembered ancestors roamed nearby (especially during nighttime). And in time, the people apparently concluded that nature was full of such “spirits”, the most powerful of which (controlling wind, rain, thunder and lightning, volcanoes and earthquakes, eclipses, the movements of the stars, etc.) were gods.

In addition, probably it was also the people who chose their most successful members to “communicate” with the gods (since successes were probably assumed to be signs that such people were favored by the gods). Giving that “communication power” to select people (usually tribal leaders), however, led to the unfortunate reality that power usually corrupts. And with the corruption came the priests.

The priests (the fake leaders of the people) certainly nursed the people's ideas that the gods were in control, but in time, the priests weaned the people from their ideas that "just anyone" could communicate with the gods – to get the people to accept the idea that only they (the clerics) could communicate with the gods. Next, the priests managed to get the people to swallow the silliness that they (the clerics) knew the gods' purposes – and if the people would adopt the purpose of serving the gods, then the gods would reward such servitude. And with that, the "bait and switch" was complete and the first organized religions were born, in which the people became the slaves of the clerics. As Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle, 1783–1842) said: "[All religions are founded on the fear of the many and the cleverness of the few.](#)"

In sum, a huge number of people have made enormous errors, not necessarily in their reasoning (for example, if you assume that you'll go straight to "paradise" if you die in a *jihad*, then it's perfectly reasonable to blow yourself up with explosives tied around your waist) but errors in adopting premisses that are inadequately supported by data. Thus, one of the most pervasive (and persistent and pernicious) examples of confused thought is to accept clerical prescription that values are defined by some god (or gods). As Commander Worf (of the USS Enterprise, in *Star Trek, The Next Generation*) said (as you would know, if your education weren't so sadly deficient!): "[The trouble with gods is you never know what they want](#)" – and the trouble with the damn clerics of the world is that they're always prepared to tell you what the gods want, for a price!

But again, Dear, our ancient ancestors weren't "crazy", and even current-day Muslim suicide bombers aren't "crazy": what they did and what they currently do is entirely consistent with their "beliefs". What's crazy are their beliefs, in turn derived from their worldviews. Thus, their fundamental mistake is to adopt worldviews unsupported by data. Such people violated and continue to violate the *fundamental principle of evaluative thinking*, which can be stated in any of many forms (as I tried to show you in **Ih**). For example:

Just as you shouldn't build skyscrapers on mud and you shouldn't dwell in a house of cards, you shouldn't accept ideas uncritically: adjust the strengths of your commitments to various "beliefs" to be commensurate with the reliability of relevant data. Alternatively: for all your ideas, use all available evidence to evaluate the probability of their validity. That is, "believe" nothing; instead, evaluate probabilities and then go with the idea that has the highest expected value. In a word, evaluate!

But the clerics teach otherwise; they tell their followers to obey, to have faith, to just believe – which is hideous and should be described as it really is: a crime against humanity.

Today, such criminality (or more accurately, immorality) is rampant, with people pursuing their trio of survival goals (of themselves, their families, and their values), with their values dictated by the clerics (who “promise” people that pursuing such values will promote their dual survival goals – even to their and their family’s “eternal survival”). And thus another “suicide bomber” blows up himself (or now, even herself), along with another group of “nonbelievers”, “thinking” that it’s a direct route to a clerically concocted eternal paradise. Similarly, your mother proceeds to divorce your father, “thinking” that he’s no longer any “use” to her (now that he’s abandoned Mormonism), because he’ll no longer be able to whisper her “secret name” to her, allowing her to enter the clerically concocted celestial heaven. What tragedies. What ignorance. What horrible evil. What damnable pests the clerics of the world are. As Goethe said: “[Nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action.](#)”

And who, one should ask, it at fault? In my view, the main fault is not primitive people of the past; in the main, they were probably similar to most people today: too dumb to be anything but followers. From my view, the atrocities should be laid on the tombs and at the feet of all clerical leaders: those who concocted the myths and claimed that they were “true”, and those who today still promote such ignorance as “the truth”. Would that all religious leaders would admit and repudiate the mistakes made by our ancestors and expose the evils caused by these myths, would that they’d admit that we’re all just members of the same human family, in turn closely related to everything that lives on this wonderful Earth, and would that they’d admit to their own mistakes, perpetuating these horrible myths and work to remedy the damages they’ve caused.

Einstein came to a similar conclusion:

[The more a man is imbued with the ordered regularity of all events the firmer becomes his conviction that there is no room left by the side of this ordered regularity for causes of a different nature. For him neither the rule of human nor the rule of “divine will” exists as an independent cause of natural events. To be sure, the doctrine of a personal God interfering with natural events could never be refuted, in the real sense, by science, for this doctrine can always take refuge in those domains in which scientific knowledge has not yet been able to set foot.](#)

But I am convinced that such behavior on the part of representatives of religion would not only be unworthy but also fatal. For a doctrine which is to maintain itself not in clear light but only in the dark, will of necessity lose its effect on mankind, with incalculable harm to human progress. In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal God, that is, give up that source of fear and hope which in the past placed such vast power in the hands of priests. In their labors they will have to avail themselves of those forces which are capable of cultivating the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in humanity itself. This is, to be sure, a more difficult but an incomparably more worthy task...

But the probability seems small that, in the near future, the damnable clerics of the world will yield the prestige and power that their con games generate for them – and the probability seems even smaller that laws will be promulgated prohibiting their mental pollution and child prostitutions. Therefore, Dear, it's up to you to take control over your ideas and your life.

Furthermore, Dear, there are many other people and groups who have tried and will continue to try to control your ideas. Consequently, quite possibly the toughest challenge you will need to overcome on the way to becoming an adult is to take control of and responsibility for your own ideas. To do so, be skeptical, guard your mind against mental garbage, filter out those ideas that will do nothing but pollute your mind.

People learn how to filter ideas through experience with reality. For example, if I had asked a certain two-year old to flap her wings and fly across the room, quite likely she would start flapping her arms, and in her imagination, she would fly across the room. In contrast, when I asked a certain six-year old to do the same, she responded: “**Grampa, you're silly.**”

Please be especially skeptical of any “advertisement” when you find that proponents of the idea have a vested interest in the concept. Thus, be skeptical of the worldview that any Christian, Muslim, or Mormon “believer” promotes, because each promoter has a vested interest in the concept being correct, viz., eternal bliss. And, Dear, please be especially skeptical of the worldview promoted by any cleric: each has a vested interest not only in his alleged future life but also in his current life, i.e., if you buy into any cleric's scheme, he pockets your tithes! In contrast, the ethics of most professions require that members reclude themselves when they have a personal interest in what they profess – but exceptions occur for professional con artists, such as all clerics!

In general, please keep in mind the critically important question: What's the objective? If someone tells you “**Love one another**”, ask yourself “**What's the purpose?**” If someone tells you “**Love your enemies**”, ask yourself: “**To what end?**” Do your best to understand the objectives being promoted; then, compare those objectives with your own. If you find conflict between the objectives being promoted and your own, and if you're certain of the correctness of your own objectives, then tell whoever is promoting objectives that conflict with your own to “**blow it out your ear**”. In brief, Dear, please rely on yourself: use your head, use your brain as best you can, make your judgments by reasoning from data, in a word, **evaluate** – that's the act of highest personal moral value.

Dear, if anyone proposes that you adopt some idea (including any ideas that you might find in this book!), then please ask yourself: “**What's its value?**” Further, for all ideas that you've already consciously adopted, you should re-examine them to determine their current values. And given your religious indoctrination, most important is for you to examine the values of ideas that you accepted in the past, especially those you adopted subconsciously and those you adopted when you were a child, insufficiently knowledgeable or insufficiently skeptical to question their values. As Nietzsche said:

A very popular error – having the courage of one's convictions. It is rather a matter of having the courage for an attack upon one's convictions. Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies.

When you were a child, it was good that you were obedient to your parents – to adopt the premisses, purposes, principles, policies, practices, and procedures they dictated. Doing so was of value to your survival. But the goal of maturation is for youngsters to learn how to think for themselves. And now that you're setting out on your own, although your parents (and grandparents) will continue to try to help you, it's your job to think for yourself. In general, Dear, please don't “**surrender in obedience**” to anyone or to any idea – and especially not to some “**God the Father**”, some “**Mother Church**”, or any con-artist cleric.

Subject only to constraints imposed by Nature, your life belongs to you. It's for you to determine how high you can fly. Those who promote any other policy, those who require that you follow them like a sheep, those who demand that you surrender your thoughts to them, those who seek to make

you an intellectual slave, are evil. One way or another, defeat them: don't follow, lead; don't believe, be skeptical; don't have faith in someone else or someone else's scheme, figure it out for yourself; don't obey, **evaluate**.

I urge you, Dear, to develop faith in your own abilities, to believe in yourself, to develop your own thoughts, to follow the path where your own evaluations of the data lead. That's the essence of Zen. As Alan Watts wrote in *The Way of Zen*:

[Zen] is primarily a way of liberation for those who have mastered the disciplines of social convention, of the conditioning of the individual by the group. Zen is a medicine for the ill effects of this conditioning, for the mental paralysis and anxiety which come from excessive self-consciousness.

Again, Dear, the essence of humans is our ability to think, to judge, to evaluate. We're not sheep. We're not to obey some shepherd and his sheep-dog priests. With our amazing brains, we're capable of conceiving scenarios about the future, judging the moral value of each possible act, judging the motives of other people, choosing what to do (i.e., choosing the act that has highest probability of promoting our trio of survival goals), and then, critically important, we're able (with practice) to generate the perseverance needed to succeed in spite of all the obstacles that others put in our path, the pitfalls they dig, and the chains with which they try to enslave us.

Leave religions to the brainwashed, the brain damaged, and the brain dead. As Socrates reportedly said more than 2400 years ago: “**To find yourself, think for yourself.**” As Montaigne said more than 400 years ago: “**The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself.**” And as the American poet E.E. Cummings (1894–1962) said:

To be nobody but yourself, in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you just like everybody else, means to fight the greatest battle there is to fight and never stop fighting.

And the way to win that battle, Dear, is “simply” to use your brain as best you can, which is the essence of morality. Unfortunately, though, your parents hoodwinked you, just as your mother was hoodwinked by her parents, they were hoodwinked by theirs, etc. Your parents taught you that you could trust them, they taught you that you could have confidence in their judgment – and then, they taught you to “believe” absurdities. Remember Voltaire's warning:

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.

The absurdities are legion: that people are to “have faith” in some magic man (or giant Jabberwock) in the sky, that the people are to obey the giant Jabberwock’s commandments (as relayed by his “spokesmen”, the con-artist clerics with the collection plates), that the Israelites are God’s chosen people, that Blacks possess “**the mark of Cain**”, that abortion, masturbation, homosexuality... are “**abominations before the Lord**”, that “infidels” are... And the atrocities followed. If there’s truth in the Bible (a very dubious assumption) the Israelites committed (against innocents living peacefully in Canaan) the worst atrocities in the history of the world (based on percentages of people and on the details of the atrocities described in the Bible). The Christians murdered millions of “infidels” during the Inquisition, slaughtered millions of Muslims during the Crusades, and “exterminated” approximately 20 million Native Americans. Since the 7th Century, Muslims enslaved more than 20 million people. Mormons massacred a wagon train of people just over the hill from where your grandmother and I now live. The “god-fearing” Nazis “exterminated” six million Jews during the Holocaust, and so on, including current atrocities of Muslims, e.g., “9/11”.

In his book *Holy Daze: Coming to Grips with Religion, the Holy Daze of Humanity*, Chester Dolan summarized the situation well:

No one explains how declarations that are manufactured out of whole cloth, that have absolutely no predictive content and therefore no demonstrable connection with our lives as we live them day by day, are supposed to serve as a guide for planning our future. What such declarations do is to condition every nervous system that takes them seriously that it is perfectly sane to ignore the world in which we live, and to live instead in a world of pure fantasy.

The man who is willing to accept the doctrine of Christian [or Muslim or Mormon or...] faith is one who is willing to relinquish all hope of knowing the truth. He accepts all, doubts never, vegetates. He is a slave, a hollow shell into which others can pour all manner of stupidities. Having a conscience, being honest, are empty phrases for him, as he has relinquished his own right to think and is acting only because others are acting through him. He refuses to be honest with himself, no longer talks things over with himself, no longer meditates, contemplates; he only absorbs like a sponge, without discrimination. If he has convictions, they are metamorphized and petrified lies, and not even his own lies but those of colleagues, priests, and politicians who want to use him.

If to accept blindly, without the play of reason, is faith, it follows then that what the world needs is not more faith, but more people who think with their own heads and not with the heads of others.

As you know by now, it's my considered opinion that organized religions are just institutionalized ignorance: ritualized regurgitation of hypnotic hypocrisy. In turn, religious faith is fodder for fools – and if there's only one general principle I've reviewed that you'd be willing to adopt, Dear, I'd suggest: *It's foolish to follow fools.*

But if you're willing to consider another general principle, then I'd suggest: *Rather than live in a delusion, normally it's better to live with reality.* As Philip K. Dick (1928–1982) said: “*Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, [it] doesn't go away.*” And as the American humanist and poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) said: “*Pointing to another world will never stop vice... [only] shedding light over this world...*”

In particular, the reality of Mormonism, i.e., the damage caused by living in that delusion, is truly astounding. As an example, consider the following.³

MORMON WOMEN, PROZAC® and THERAPY

By Kent Ponder, Ph.D.

Background:

From insights gained during and after my doctoral study of the psychology of cognitive-dissonance conflict, I have for many years become increasingly concerned about the profound mental torment of numerous innocent Mormon women, especially because the tormented are so often among Mormonism's “best and brightest” with regard to: (a) intelligence, (b) education, (c) propensity for clear rationality, (d) sense of factual conscientiousness.

During the last six years I have conducted extensive research, consisting partly of interviews conducted face to face and by telephone, fax and e-mail, of nearly three hundred individuals... I have been motivated to produce this report by the increasingly massive and heart-wrenching extent of the problem, which so deeply offends my sense of justice and compassion...

³ An excerpt from the 2003 article at <http://home.teleport.com/%7Epackham/prozac.htm>. At this webpage you can find the following information about the author: “Kent Ponder, a life-long member of the LDS church, has studied and taught linguistics at several major U.S. universities, working professionally with over two dozen languages and cultures. In addition, he has broad professional experience in marketing and communication research and consultation.”

Why Are So Many Mormon Women Severely Depressed?

As noted above [earlier in Ponder's article], Utah is about 70% LDS, and women lead men in depression (by about double). Why is Utah #1 in the US in antidepressant-drug use, notably Prozac®? Why are twice as many *women* affected? A standard answer is that LDS women are overworked, heading large families, struggling to meet too-high expectations of perfection. There's some truth in that, but there are other, more *fundamental*, reasons.

Three realities are *much more basic*. In the Mormon Church:

1. For females, “One size fits all”,
2. Females obey males from birth to death,
3. Females lack control of their own life choices.

Any Mormon reading this report will recognize that virtually *all* LDS girls are taught from childhood to do all 24 of the following:

- Be respectfully, politely, humbly and *gratefully* subservient to Mormon males in personal demeanor, activities, beliefs, plans and thought.
- Not be, nor aspire to be, nor hope to be, independent from authoritarian males, nor independent in thought.
- Attend male-directed religious services.
- Participate in male-directed activities. (Even female-led projects are organized under male authorities.)
- Attend male-directed weekday seminary classes in addition to academic school.
- Obey all male-hierarchy-generated directives.
- Submit to male-originated personal-matter (including sexual) private interviews.
- Obtain a Patriarchal Blessing which usually promises becoming a mother in Zion if faithful and obedient.
- Do genealogy research on male-headed (patriarchal) family lineages.
- Marry an LDS man in an LDS temple.
- Accept counsel from her husband, and not as just his opinion, but as God-inspired revelation.
- Look to her husband as *essential* to her entry into the best category of Heaven.
- Have children, more being far better than few.
- Raise all of her children in this exact-same system.
- Attend only the chapel assigned to her residence address, regardless of preference.
- Accept that if she and family attend any other than this chapel, she and they cannot enter Mormon temples.
- Know that her *husband* may, in the next life, marry *numerous* additional wives.
- Know that *she* may *not* marry *any* additional husband, here (if still married to the first one) or hereafter.
- Accept callings to work in church, auxiliary and welfare-project organizations.
- Make several forms of financial contributions, ten percent tithing being only one.

- Teach her children to become missionaries to convert other individuals into this same system.
- Teach this same system to her grandchildren.
- Teach her daughters and granddaughters to obey males at home and at church
- Never openly criticize any doctrine, practice, directive or male authority related to any of the above.

That's the "One Size Fits All Females" list of 24 items. Each LDS female gains and retains respect, and even acceptance, only by adhering to the behaviors and attitudes above, assigned to her by others, most often males, rather than freely chosen by herself.

I'm sorry to be blunt, Dear, but surely no sane female would chose to join such an organization – nor would any male with an ounce of decency or with the smallest inkling of the concept of love. In Afghanistan, as I recently saw on TV, male members of the Taliban would beat women with sticks if they appeared on the streets without "proper" attire (with only their eyes showing through slits in their *burka*); to keep Moron women in line, male members of the LDS Church approve Prozac for "their" women. And to at least hold their membership numbers relatively constant, the LDS Church has members produce as many children as possible (who are then brainwashed in the same male-chauvinist crap) and it has brainwashed Mormon "missionaries" keep such hideousness hidden when they attempt to recruit new members.

And of course it's not just Mormonism that I criticize; it's the entire "god idea". As I've shown you in earlier chapters, many other people are similarly critical. Below are a few more examples. The first example is what Emma Goldman succinctly wrote in her *Mother Earth Journal*, February 1916 in an article entitled "The Philosophy of Atheism":

The philosophy of Atheism represents a concept of life without any metaphysical Beyond or Divine Regulator. It is the concept of an actual, real world with its liberating, expanding and beautifying possibilities, as against an unreal world, which, with its spirits, oracles, and mean contentment, has kept humanity in helpless degradation.

Recently, Michael Shermer summarized it well:

Science is not the affirmation of a set of beliefs but a process of inquiry aimed at building a testable body of knowledge constantly open to rejection or confirmation. In science, knowledge is fluid and certainty fleeting. That is at the heart of its limitations. It is also its greatest strength.

More than a century ago, the American Humanist and poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) described his view of the enlightening influence of the scientific method:

Science, testing absolutely all thoughts, all works, has already burst well upon the world – a sun, mounting, most illuminating, most glorious, surely never again to set. But against it, deeply entrenched, holding possession, yet remains... the fossil theology of the mythic-materialistic, superstitious, untaught and credulous fable-loving, primitive ages of humanity.

In a recent article entitled “Science Must Destroy Religion”, Sam Harris expanded on Whitman’s theme:⁴

Most people believe that the Creator of the universe wrote (or dictated) one of their books. Unfortunately, there are many books that pretend to divine authorship, and each makes incompatible claims about how we all must live. Despite the ecumenical efforts of many well-intentioned people, these irreconcilable religious commitments still inspire an appalling amount of human conflict.

In response to this situation, most sensible people advocate something called “religious tolerance.” While religious tolerance is surely better than religious war, tolerance is not without its liabilities. Our fear of provoking religious hatred has rendered us incapable of criticizing ideas that are now patently absurd and increasingly maladaptive. It has also obliged us to lie to ourselves – repeatedly and at the highest levels – about the compatibility between religious faith and scientific rationality.

The conflict between religion and science is inherent and (very nearly) zero-sum. The success of science often comes at the expense of religious dogma; the maintenance of religious dogma always comes at the expense of science. It is time we conceded a basic fact of human discourse: either a person has good reasons for what he believes, or he does not. When a person has good reasons, his beliefs contribute to our growing understanding of the world. We need not distinguish between “hard” and “soft” science here, or between science and other evidence-based disciplines like history. There happen to be very good reasons to believe that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. Consequently, the idea that the Egyptians actually did it lacks credibility. Every sane human being recognizes that to rely merely upon “faith” to decide specific questions of historical fact would be both idiotic and grotesque – that is, until the conversation turns to the origin of books like the Bible and the Koran, to the resurrection of Jesus, to Muhammad’s conversation with the angel Gabriel, or to any of the other hallowed travesties that still crowd the altar of human ignorance.

⁴ Copied from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-harris/science-must-destroy-reli_b_13153.html,

Science, in the broadest sense, includes all reasonable claims to knowledge about ourselves and the world. If there were good reasons to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, or that Muhammad flew to heaven on a winged horse, these beliefs would necessarily form part of our rational description of the universe. Faith is nothing more than the license that religious people give one another to believe such propositions when reasons fail. The difference between science and religion is the difference between a willingness to dispassionately consider new evidence and new arguments, and a passionate unwillingness to do so. The distinction could not be more obvious, or more consequential, and yet it is everywhere elided, even in the ivory tower.

Religion is fast growing incompatible with the emergence of a global, civil society. Religious faith – faith that there is a God who cares what name he is called, that one of our books is infallible, that Jesus is coming back to earth to judge the living and the dead, that Muslim martyrs go straight to Paradise, etc. – is on the wrong side of an escalating war of ideas. The difference between science and religion is the difference between a genuine openness to fruits of human inquiry in the 21st Century, and a premature closure to such inquiry as a matter of principle.

I believe that the antagonism between reason and faith will only grow more pervasive and intractable in the coming years. Iron Age beliefs – about God, the soul, sin, free will, etc. – continue to impede medical research and distort public policy. The possibility that we could elect a U.S. President who takes biblical prophecy seriously is real and terrifying; the likelihood that we will one day confront Islamists armed with nuclear or biological weapons is also terrifying, and it is increasing by the day. We are doing very little, at the level of our intellectual discourse, to prevent such possibilities.

In the spirit of religious tolerance, most scientists are keeping silent when they should be blasting the hideous fantasies of a prior age with all the facts at their disposal.

To win this war of ideas, scientists and other rational people will need to find new ways of talking about ethics and spiritual experience. The distinction between science and religion is not a matter of excluding our ethical intuitions and non-ordinary states of consciousness from our conversation about the world; it is a matter of our being rigorous about what is reasonable to conclude on their basis. We must find ways of meeting our emotional needs that do not require the abject embrace of the preposterous. We must learn to invoke the power of ritual and to mark those transitions in every human life that demand profundity – birth, marriage, death, etc. – without lying to ourselves about the nature of reality.

I am hopeful that the necessary transformation in our thinking will come about as our scientific understanding of ourselves matures. When we find reliable ways to make human beings more loving, less fearful, and genuinely enraptured by the fact of our appearance in the cosmos, we will have no need for divisive religious myths. Only

then will the practice of raising our children to believe that they are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu be broadly recognized as the ludicrous obscenity that it is. And only then will we stand a chance of healing the deepest and most dangerous fractures in our world.

As a case in point, Dear, there's you, your reality, and your future. Your reality may be that it will be difficult to "kick the habit", but actually, I don't see it: you seemed to get over believing in Santa Claus quite effortlessly. But whatever your reality is, face it. Others have kicked the habit; maybe if you visit the website <http://www.exmormon.org/>, you'll "get some pointers".

Your reality, also, is that you'll need to make your own decisions. Remember (as I wrote in **D**, dealing with "Digging for Decisions") that our choices are always in pursuit of some goal or goals. In preparation for making your decisions re. religion, I recommend that you make as big a list "as it takes" to evaluate the various pathways that might lead you toward your goals. I can't construct such a list for you (only you know your goals), but let me just mention a few items that you might otherwise have overlooked and that you might want to consider.

1. I'm sure that one of your prime goals is not to hurt other people, especially those who haven't hurt you. I'm sure, also, that you appreciate that no one has done so much for you as your mother, and therefore, that you don't want to hurt her. I suspect you've concluded that it would hurt her (and her mother) if you don't continue to practice the religion in which you've been indoctrinated; therefore, their opinions may have a strong bearing on your decision.
2. Whatever your decision, it'll probably have less impact on your father and your mother's father. Although I'm not certain, your "other grandfather" seems to consider your religion as a "convenient fabrication" – convenient for steering people to behave in desirable ways. And now that your father has abandoned the religion in which you've been indoctrinated (and he seems to be even opposed to it, because of its fabrications), he may be pleased if you discard it.
3. If you've read this far in this book, you probably have a fairly good idea of the opinions of your father's mother and father, but if I were you, I wouldn't worry about their opinions: if they don't like your decision, that's their problem!
4. Realize that your decision will have an influence on your brothers and sisters. They'll be observing the consequences of your decision – and will use the data they acquire to make their own decisions.
5. Realize, too, that your decision is revocable: we're fortunate that brave people in the past successfully constrained the power-mongering clerics, and it's now illegal

for them to torture “heretics” and burn “apostates” at the stake for rejecting their primitive science. Therefore, if you reject the indoctrination that the clerics have perpetrated, then not only can they now do little beyond entreat you to return (and complain if you don’t) but also, if you subsequently choose to “return to the fold”, you’ll be welcomed back with extended arms – and collection plates!

6. If you decide to abandon your indoctrination, realize that you’ll then be effectively abandoning many of your friends, for I’m sorry to suggest that many (if not most) of them required, as a condition of their “friendship”, that you continue “to believe”. You may be disappointed both in losing friends and learning that their friendship was so shallow that it required you to “think” in certain ways, but realize that, normally, very few childhood friendships continue into adulthood. People move on; people change; whatever you do, you’ll meet new people and make new friends. On the other hand, it does appear to me that, when you move to a new community, the move can be substantially easier if you do continue to be involved with your church: instant “friendship” seems to be available. In contrast, for “the rest of us”, it usually takes substantial time to meet new people and make new friends (although the process can be “expedited” by joining various clubs already established in your new community, including health clubs, bridge clubs, rock hounds, artist clubs, the Red Cross, hospital volunteers, and so on, including Humanist organizations).
7. If you decide to reject your indoctrination, then simultaneously, you’ll be rejecting substantial “structure” in your life (which, in the case of your religion and at least to an outside observer, seems to be overwhelmingly pervasive). Much better than I, you know what this entails. If you’re concerned about losing all these “social activities”, realize that similar activities are available “for the rest of us”, if we choose to participate in them (including participating in sports, musical activities, dances, parties, and even picnics, helping others *via* various volunteer organizations, involvement in various political organizations, and so on). There’s no doubt that, if you seek to become involved in such “outside” activities, more effort on your part will be required than when the activities were organized by your church, but I suspect you’d find that your additional efforts will be rewarded, in part because you’ll meet more stimulating people.
8. If you decide to reject your indoctrination, realize that you’ll also be abandoning much if not all of the “certainty” in your outlook on life. As is the case for most if not all religions, in yours you’ve been taught that if [whatever], then [so-and-so] – as if life (including “life after death”) could be all neatly arranged and predetermined. The “rest of us”, in contrast, have had to learn to “go with the flow”: if [whatever], then maybe [so-and-so], but then maybe [something else]. I suppose I could develop an analogy between going for a rowboat ride in a smooth pond (with some cleric with his idle hand on the rudder!) *versus* riding a rubber raft down a “white-water” river, but I’ll skip it. Let me just say that if you choose to reject your indoctrination, you’ll need to learn to consider options, estimate probabilities, take chances, and hang on!

9. If you decide to abandon your religion without rejecting the idea of God, then you'll need to face the possibility that your "immortal soul" will then be condemned to "eternal damnation". But then, as I tried to show you in an earlier Y-chapter, there's also no way for you to falsify the idea that your "eternal soul" will be "eternally damned" for buying into the clerics' con game, rather than thinking for yourself! That is, all such ideas are just silly speculations that belong in the trashcan of human mistakes. Therefore, the only sensible procedure is to live your life as best you can, based on reliable data – and let the random chips fall where they may.

10. And finally for my list (although probably not for yours!), I'll include an idea for which, if you decide to abandon all (silly!) ideas about all gods, you probably should try to prepare yourself – even though no preparation is possible! [Yes, I meant to write that!] If I had more skill as a writer (and the inclination!), here I could introduce any of many stimulating analogies – maybe about cleaning cobwebs from a closet, or curtains being drawn back, or windows being opened, or sunlight breaking through the clouds. But without such skill (or even the inclination), I'll just say that, should you choose to abandon your indoctrination, you'll perceive the opening of a mental curtain – and an entirely new vista will appear: all people, the whole world, and the entire universe will appear entirely differently. You'll see poor, struggling people trying to make sense of it all, and you'll want to help them (especially the children); you'll see the damnable clerics of the world, preaching primitive Egyptian and Mesopotamian "science" for the billionth time ("like parrots on a dead branch of knowledge"), trying to be the first to confuse the 10 billionth person and always trying to gain power over people by conning them out of what they produce; you'll see all life on earth bustling with amazing activity but buffeted terribly by too many confused humans, unable to comprehend that they're just part of the whole; and you'll also see an amazing universe that, with effort, we humans will be able to understand and explore, and with luck, we'll be able to find some other life-form with whom we can cooperatively understand and explore still more.

And so, with all those items in my list (and all the items in your list), what do I recommend that you do? Uh-uh, kid. That's your decision. No one can make it for you. No matter who strongly recommends what, the decision remains entirely yours – as do all the consequences.

As for the consequences, as for your future, as for what you might become, although it isn't true that "I don't have a clue", what's definitely true is: It's up to you (*Tuum Est*)! Nonetheless, I'd add: I hope that you'll evaluate your opportunities with more than just your heart and that you'll accept only those constraints imposed by Mother Nature and by yourself. In addition, I'd encourage you to consider what others have suggested.

For example, consider the composition called *Desiderata*, whose Latin title means “things desired”. It was written in 1927 by Max Ehrmann (1872–1945), a poet and lawyer from Terre Haute, Indiana. It brings back memories for me (it was one of the few posters that my daughter permitted me to post in her room!), it has an interesting little story behind it (when distributed in New England by some pastor, people thought it was written by a Medieval monk!), and it may be what the author was writing about when he wrote in his diary: “I should like, if I could, to leave a humble gift – a bit of chaste prose that had caught up some noble moods.” It starts as follows:

Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and haste
and remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly and clearly and listen to others,
even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story.
Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others you may become vain or bitter,
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.
Keep interested in your career, however humble;
it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.
Exercise caution in your business affairs,
for the world is full of trickery.
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is.
Many persons strive for high ideals
and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself.
Especially do not feign affection.
Neither be cynical about love,
for in the face of all aridity and disappointment,
it is as perennial as the grass.
Take kindly the counsel of the years,
gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.
But do not distress yourself with imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline be gentle with yourself.
You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars.
You have a right to be here...

Ehrmann continued his *Desiderata* as follows, but I'm not "keen" on the rest [for reasons that I'll include as comments in brackets]:

And whether it is clear to you or not,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

[‘Should’ is a “judgment call”; judgment implies intelligence; yet, no data support the assumption that the inanimate universe has any intelligence. Further, as I’ll suggest in **Z**, the universe’s “plan” may be to return itself to its original state of total nothingness. If so, and if our goal is to help intelligence continue, then we “should” do what we can to stop the universe from “unfolding as it should”!]

Therefore be at peace with God,
whatever you conceive him to be,
and whatever your labors and aspirations in the noisy confusion of life,
keep peace with your soul.

[Of course, I'm not "keen" on the use of the meaningless words ‘God’ and ‘soul’.]

With all its sham and drudgery and broken dreams
it is still a beautiful world.
Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

[Here, too, I would have suggested changes. For reasons that I’ve explained in an earlier chapter, “strive to be happy” is a silly goal: happiness is just a “survival signal”; if you’ll strive to achieve your goals, happiness will “come along for the ride”.]

Consequently, Dear, if Ehrmann had asked me for comments on a draft version of his *Desiderata*, I would have suggested his stopping where I did (above), or if he felt he wanted it to continue, then I would have suggested the following changes (including quoting, without attribution, the Egyptian city governor Ptahhotpe, from the twenty-fourth century BCE):

In your labors and aspirations in the noisy confusion of life,
There will be sham and drudgery and broken dreams,
But if you’ll look, you’ll find much beauty in the world
And you’ll find happiness in making progress toward your goals.
And whereas you must make choices,
Chose: “Be cheerful while you are alive” –
And do what you can to help intelligence go on.

I’d also have you consider the wonderful little poem written by James Leigh Hunt (1784–1859) and entitled *Abou Ben Adhem*:

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
 Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
 And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
 Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
 An Angel writing in a book of gold:

Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
 And to the Presence in the room he said,
 “What writest thou?” The Vision raised its head,
 And with a look made of all sweet accord
 Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”
 “And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”
 Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,
 But cheerily still; and said, “I pray thee, then,
 Write me as one who loves his fellow men.”

The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
 It came again with a great wakening light,
 And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
 And, lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest!

Hunt wrote the above poem in 1838, the same year that Joseph Smith received the amazing revelation “**from the Lord**” that all members of his church were to pay him 10% of their income to keep his con game going. Would that my grandchildren had memorized the above poem rather than the Mormon “Articles of Faith”! But anyway, what’s done is done, and what you’re now faced with is reality.

If you do decide to reject your indoctrination, then realize that you’ll then need to start defining yourself. In this book, I’ve tried to give you some suggestions for your consideration; a nutshell summary is: consider Humanism. Additionally, though, I’d encourage you to explore how others have tried to define themselves, e.g., consider the following examples.

At <http://www.calresco.org/action.htm>, in a web page entitled “Complexity Theory: Actions for a Better World”, Chris Lucas quotes the following from Martin Brofman:

No one but you “makes you” feel angry, or sad, or depressed, or happy, or sexy, or bored, etc. Since you are now in the process of deciding for yourself about your life, and your choices, and your actions, and your feelings, and what you see, why not own your decision-making power on all levels?

Perhaps in the past, when you've looked at a situation which you did not consider optimal, you've decided what someone else should have done differently, or should do differently in the future. When you really own your power and your freedom, you do not do that any more – rather, you only decide what you could have done differently then, and what you can do differently from now on, in the future.

At <http://www.arthurmjackson.com/w2a3c.html>, in Chapter Two of his online book *Science of Ethics: A User's Guide for Modern Humans*, Arthur Jackson states the following.⁵

Below are the Ways of Wisdom judged necessary to achieve a sustainable belief that one's life has meaning. These are working assumptions – open to revision, clarification, or replacement with updated information... The Ways of Wisdom have value to the degree that they are useful to individuals and as a starting point for experimentation, organization, discussion, and testing.

1. Recognize that human beings are the ultimate reference system.
2. Endeavor to maintain and develop the human species. Support efforts to develop Enlightened Communities.
3. Seek to understand. Pursue Wisdom.
4. Recognize that all knowledge rests on faith/beliefs and must always be open to questioning.
5. Strive to make the best choices possible.
6. Know and struggle to improve yourself; work to be physically and psychologically healthy.
7. Develop and adopt a perceptual framework in which pain does not prevent the achievement of a sustainable belief that your life has meaning.
8. Help and be helped by other people.
9. Work to increase knowledge and all creative and artistic endeavors. Adopt an inspiring life goal.
10. Support efforts to ensure that every child is provided a loving, nurturing environment and all the things necessary to become an Enlightened Person.
11. Make of your life a spiritual quest. Work to become an Enlightened Person.

In his book *Holy Daze: Coming to Grips with Religion, the Holy Daze of Humanity*, Chester Dolan wrote:

Faith in the sense that religionists use the term, it turns out, is equivalent to the loss of confidence of the individuals of the human species to achieve their goals on their own. This seems to be borne out by the adherence to religion among the poor, the spread of religion in times of depression and conflict, and the greater success of all religions to proselytize among deprived populations wherever they may be. It may

⁵ To get to the book, start at <http://www.arthurmjackson.com/wpre.html>; his home page is at <http://www.arthurmjackson.com/Mentor.html#a1>.

also explain the lack of initiative clearly evident among the fanatically religious who see little point in struggling for a better world when they are only nonentities in a vast system of omnipotent forces and obscure agencies beyond their abilities to understand or control. Men who are liberated from all such folderol are able to work with serenity and unshakable confidence in their own abilities to achieve.

In Einstein's Autobiographical Notes, he wrote the following:⁶

When I was a fairly precocious young man I became thoroughly impressed with the futility of the hopes and strivings that chase most men restlessly through life. Moreover, I soon discovered the cruelty of that chase, which in those years was much more carefully covered up by hypocrisy and glittering words than is the case today. By the mere existence of his stomach everyone was condemned to participate in that chase. The stomach might well be satisfied by such participation, but not man insofar as he is a thinking and feeling being.

As the first way out there was religion, which is implanted into every child by way of the traditional education-machine. Thus I came – though the child of entirely irreligious (Jewish) parents – to a deep religiousness, which, however, reached an abrupt end at the age of twelve. Through the reading of popular scientific books I soon reached the conviction that much in the stories of the Bible could not be true. The consequence was a positively fanatic orgy of freethinking coupled with the impression that youth is intentionally being deceived by the state through lies; it was a crushing impression. Mistrust of every kind of authority grew out of this experience, a skeptical attitude toward the convictions that were alive in any specific social environment – an attitude that has never again left me, even though, later on, it has been tempered by a better insight into the causal connections.

It is quite clear to me that the religious paradise of youth, which was thus lost, was a first attempt to free myself from the chains of the “merely personal,” from an existence dominated by wishes, hopes, and primitive feelings. Out yonder there was this huge world, which exists independently of us human beings and which stands before us like a great, eternal riddle, at least partially accessible to our inspection and thinking. The contemplation of this world beckoned as a liberation, and I soon noticed that many a man whom I had learned to esteem and to admire had found inner freedom and security in its pursuit. The mental grasp of this extra-personal world within the frame of our capabilities presented itself to my mind, half consciously, half unconsciously, as a supreme goal. Similarly motivated men of the present and of the past, as well as the insights they had achieved, were the friends who could not be lost. The road to this paradise was not so comfortable and alluring as the road to the religious paradise; but it has shown itself reliable, and I have never regretted having chosen it.

⁶ Copied from <http://www.einsteinandreligion.com/freethink.html>; originally from Einstein's *Autobiographical Notes* (Open Court Publishing Company, LaSalle and Chicago, Illinois, 1979, pp 3–5).

And as still another candidate for your consideration, I'd ask you to think about details in the following impressive "Credo" that Dave Krieger has posted on his website.⁷

This document is forever under construction.

Epistemology

1. Finite beings can never know absolute truth.
2. The scientific method – guess, test, repeat – is the best recipe yet discovered for finding closer and closer approximations to truth.
3. A seeker of truth is willing to abandon beliefs when faced with contrary evidence.
4. Faith is the desire not to know what is true.

Ontology

1. The belief in an omnipotent god who monitors and meddles in our personal affairs is a paranoid delusion.
2. If existence has a purpose, it is to discover, create, and understand.
3. Consciousness is the degree to which a complex information system is capable of observing itself.
4. Conscious systems, such as the human brain, are the tools with which the universe contemplates itself.
5. Information exists as patterns or signals represented in some physical form.
6. We don't yet know all of physics.
7. The identity of a person is the sum of their information content and processing – memories, emotions, knowledge, desires, prejudices, and attitudes.
8. Identity is an emergent property of a person's physical structure.
9. Information, and processes performed on it, can be copied from one kind of physical substrate to another.
10. Human beings are, in principle, duplicable.

Ethics

1. Any being capable of conceptualizing about future events, communicating their conceptions to me, and acting in accord with their expressed conceptions, is a person.
2. Wrong consists of harming another person unnecessarily.
3. Evil is the enjoyment of doing wrong.

⁷ At <http://www.davekrieger.net/Credo/>. There, you can find links that lead to more information about the author, including the following:

Dave Krieger grew up on a mud farm in northern Nebraska. This always puzzled his parents, because they planted corn. Soon after realizing where he was, Dave headed off to secure a B.A. in physics and mathematics from Drake University [in 1987] and an M.L.S. in Information Studies from UCLA (spending a year studying geophysics and space physics in between). Along the way, he served two years as the scientific technical advisor to Paramount Pictures' *Star Trek: The Next Generation*...

4. A contract is an agreement between persons, expressing their intentions and obligations contingent on future events.
5. A duty is an obligation, voluntarily accepted, to act or not act in a specified way.
6. Fraud is the willful acceptance of a duty or a contractual obligation with the intention of not fulfilling it.
7. A right is the expectation of freedom from interference in choosing how to act or not act.
8. Rights are created and maintained by being asserted and defended.
9. Rights are not inherent, “natural,” or “god-given”.
10. Rights are not granted or created by laws or political documents, although they may be recognized by such conventions.
11. Rights are negative in nature. The assertion of a positive “right” that creates some positive obligation in others without their consent is a disguised demand for subsidy, tribute, or ransom.
12. A person alone on a deserted island can assert the “right” to an education, to food, housing, or health care, but they will not be provided.
13. The universe is not a person. It does not recognize any obligations to us, nor do we owe it anything.
14. Ownership of something is the right to use, abuse, or destroy it.
15. I own my body and my mind.
16. I assert the right to nurture, feed, medicate, exercise, and develop my body and my mind as I will.
17. I assert the right to think as I will.
18. I assert the right to speak, write, and publish as I will.
19. I assert the right to conceal and keep private what I will.
20. I assert the right to read, hear, view, and enjoy what and how I will.
21. I assert the right to love how and whom I will.
22. I assert the right to live where and how I will.
23. I assert the right to end my existence when and how I will.
24. I own my time, my labor, and the products of my labor.
25. I assert the right to plan, build, create, invent, and program as I will.
26. I assert the right to destroy what I have created.
27. I assert the right to trade how and with whom I will.
28. I recognize these rights in any person who recognizes mine in turn.
29. I assert the right to arm and protect myself from interference with these rights.
30. Beings incapable of recognizing the rights of other beings are not persons.

Aesthetics

1. Statements that are scientifically meaningless can still hold emotional truth.
2. Uniformity is monotonous.
3. Smooth, hairless brown skin is the sexiest. [Which I guess is Krieger’s way of saying that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” – and that he has never dated a Chinese girl!]

As you can find at his website, Krieger includes statements about politics and economics, but I find them less perceptive than the above. As for the above, upon recalling the report (quoted earlier) about all the Mormon women on Prozac, a better prescription for them seems obvious:

Read Krieger's *Credo* twice a day, do that for a month, and then call me if you still have any problems!

I hope that you'll also consider still another view of "success", namely, the one seen by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children, to earn the approbation of honest critics; to appreciate beauty; to give of one's self, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived – that is to have succeeded.

There's also the following penetrating summary by the Dalai Lama:

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.

In contrast, your parents chose to indoctrinate you in a primitive scientific model of the universe that includes paying clerics of low intelligence and high self-esteem for clinging on to their decrepit "science". I encourage you to discard all the old religions (Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism) and join the new "religion": scientific humanism.

Humanism (or scientific humanism) is a new "religion" (in the sense of having the capability of binding people together), and indeed, it's the only "true" religion, although it has no "doctrinal truth" – only a method to try to asymptotically approach "the truth" (i.e., *via* the scientific method). Yet, Humanism is a powerful "religion". As Ingersoll wrote (once again, so brilliantly):

To love justice, to long for the right, to love mercy, to pity the suffering, to assist weak, to forget wrongs and remember benefits – to love the truth, to be sincere, to utter honest words, to love liberty, to wage relentless war against slavery in all its forms, to love wife and child and friend, to make a happy home, to love the beautiful in art, in nature, to cultivate the mind, to be familiar with the mighty thoughts that genius has expressed, the noble deeds of all the world, to cultivate courage and cheerfulness, to make others happy, to fill life with the splendor of generous acts, the

warmth of loving words, to discard error, to destroy prejudice, to receive new truths with gladness, to cultivate hope, to see the calm beyond the storm, the dawn beyond the night, to do the best that can be done and then to be resigned – this is the religion of reason, the creed of science. This satisfies the heart and brain.

So then, Dear, as a summary of this chapter – and really, as a summary of this whole book – what’s my message to you? Well, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (who was 6 years younger than Jefferson, who lived the same number of years, and who I’ve seen described as the most intelligent person who has ever lived) wrote:

Just trust yourself; then you will know how to live.

That’s also the essence of Zen. Yet, my experience has been that trusting myself hasn’t always been reliable: it’s led me to some pretty dumb mistakes! Therefore, Dear, I recommend that you dig up, and dig into, the most reliable data. In a word: **Evaluate!**

If you do evaluate the data, I suspect you’ll find that, in reality, there are some serious problems in this world. I hope you’ll contribute to solving some of them – and not add to them. What has added to them are all the speculations, delusions, and lies of all organized religions, distracting humanity from addressing and solving our real problems.

If you’ll think about it, Dear, I’m essentially certain that you’ll come to the realization that humans have made a god-awful mess of this wonderful “Space-Ship Earth”, not only because of all the delusions about various giant Jabberwocks in the sky and the resulting conflicts derived from those delusions, but there are far too many people consuming far too many resources, exceeding this Space Ship’s carrying capacity. Humans have been led by the ignorance of clerical fools into the depths of calamity. Please do what you consider appropriate to help solve such problems. As Bertrand Russell said:

One must care about a world one will never see.

Which then brings me to the obvious question for you: “**Whaddya wanna be when you grow up?**” But, Dear, before you try to answer that question, I strongly recommend that you decide what you already are: are you a child of God or are you a child of the universe?

If you decide that you're a child of God, then it follows that you'd be well advised to do what HE wants – if only you can figure out what that is: for all anyone knows, maybe you should tie some explosives around your waist and then blow up some bystanders, to get instant access to paradise.

Otherwise, if you choose to evaluate and if you decide that you're a child of the universe, that you're a unique way that the universe has of experiencing and contemplating itself (that you're the universe "I'ing"), then maybe you can get some idea of what you want to do with your astounding opportunity of living by reading a transcript of an interview with Richard Dawkins that you can find at many places on the web.⁸ As he said in that interview:

The world and the universe is an extremely beautiful place, and the more we understand about it the more beautiful does it appear. It is an immensely exciting experience to be born in the world, born in the universe, and look around you and realize that before you die you have the opportunity of understanding an immense amount about that world and about that universe and about life and about why we're here. We have the opportunity of understanding far, far more than any of our predecessors ever did. That is such an exciting possibility, it would be such a shame to blow it and end your life not having understood what there is to understand.

In my opinion, Dawkins conveyed much of value in this interview – and even more by his actions than by his words, by which I mean the following.

First, I don't mean to criticize the words that Dawkins used during this interview. He's obviously an extremely competent speaker, and from personal experience being interviewed on TV, I know how difficult it is to convey what one desires. In that regard, he certainly performed much better than I ever did!

What he conveyed in words can be summarized with his statement (quoted from elsewhere), "[I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world](#)", plus the ideas that we should try to understand more, and that, by claiming that they "know" what they don't, the clerics of the world are thereby a pack of childish liars. I totally agree.

⁸ For example, it's at www.geocities.com/Krishna_kunchith/misc/dawkins.html, www.positiveatheism.org/writ/dawkins1.htm, and www.atheistfoundation.org.au/dawkinsinterview.htm.

But more of importance should be said. I agree with Dawkins that each of us should try to understand more about this universe and our place within it (and our part of it!), and that if we do try, it can be wonderfully rewarding. Yet, while indulging in that “high” (similar to the “high” associated with most addictions!), it’s wise to keep in touch with reality. And the reality is that, just as all other life forms have experienced on Earth during the past billion-or-so years, we humans are facing some major problems that must be solved if “intelligent life” is to continue to evolve. For humans, certainly it can be extremely valuable to gain additional understanding, but if such understanding is to help humans evolve, then not only must the ideas be communicated, they must be used to solve practical problems. That’s what I meant by one of the “constraints” I listed in earlier chapters: **Constrain science and its applications with values.**

A stark illustration of what I’m trying to describe is what I would label as the ‘debauchery’ (“**unrestrained self-indulgent behavior**”) associated with multi-thousand years worth of increased medical knowledge. I expect that, a thousand-or-so years from now, humans will just roll their heads in disbelief that people could have been so selfish. Thus (as you can find on the internet), in most of the “advanced” industrial countries of the world, total expenditures for medical care is approximately 10% of GDP; in the U.S. during 2003 it was approximately 14% of our GDP (i.e., more than a trillion dollars!) – and it’s getting worse as our population “ages”. Meanwhile, the vast majority of such expenditures (probably at least 90%) is not invested in helping to solve problems (including the problem of providing adequate health care to children) but to placate the self-indulgence of non-thinking humans, seeking to prolong their lives past their productive years.

A contrast that comes to mind is from a movie I once saw (title totally forgotten) that dealt with a “primitive” Eskimo family: when the family was struggling for survival and the old grandmother felt that she could no longer contribute (by looking after her grandchildren and by softening polar-bear hides with her teeth), she wandered away from the family, basically inviting a polar bear to eat her body, which she realized would subsequently become food for her family (an illustration of “the web of life”). What astounding clarity of thought! What astounding courage! For contrast, think of all the old Christians (and similarly, Mormons) in this country, who demand medical attention (placing it as the prime condition on their voting for politicians), so that they can delay their claimed eagerness to join their god in paradise! What hypocrites! What liars!

* Go to other chapters *via*

But anyway, the point that I'm trying to get to is what's summarized well in the vernacular: “**Get real!**” In reality, humanity has major problems that need to be solved. As I've mentioned before, one of these problems isn't an individual's death; that's a solution! For all species, all individuals die and all except their good ideas disintegrate, to permit their species to evolve. Consistently, with his actions rather than his words, Dawkins demonstrated that he was working to solve one of humanity's major problems, namely, trying to eliminate the ignorance of so many people (enveloped in the fog of religious lies and who don't seek to dispel that fog by exploring science).

But, Dear, relative to the question of what you might want to be “when you're older” (!), I don't necessarily encourage you to become a scientist – although certainly I'd be pleased if you decided to become one (assuming that I'm still around to be “pleased”). More generally, though, what I hope you'll do is evaluate what problems need to be solved and then, try to see how you might be able to contribute to their solution.

When evaluating the problems facing humanity, please consider the possibility that there have been (and continue to be) three great phases of human development, three great changes in humanity: 1) developing understanding of and gaining associated control over nature, 2) debunking (defrocking, dethroning...) those who claimed or continue to claim to speak for the gods, and 3) realizing that it's difficult to understand and gain associated control over nature (including humanity). In that regard, witness the difficulties of getting people to abandon their silly ideas about gods, the difficulties of achieving human rights, continued racism and bigotry, hostilities, wars, resource depletion, famine, climate change, etc.

I'd then suggest that you consider (regardless of whether you agree with what I just finished writing) how you might contribute to continued human development. Feynman said it well:

We are at the very beginning of time for the human race. It is not unreasonable that we grapple with problems. But there are tens of thousands of years in the future. Our responsibility is to do what we can, learn what we can, improve the solutions, and pass them on.

If you agree with Feynman, then first, reacting to his statement “**our responsibility is to do what we can**”, you might ask yourself: “**So, what can I do?**”

Well, Dear, knowing you (at least to some extent), my response to that question is: “**Even the sky isn’t the limit!**” Therefore, I’d suggest that the question you should ask yourself is: “**What do I want to do?**”

To that question, I hope you wouldn’t answer:

Well, what I’d really like to do is to continue to live in what you call my “fantasy land”? I’ll marry someone who’s living the same dream, we’ll have a bunch of kids, father will be boss, mother and children will obey, and we’ll all live happily ever after – even for eternity.

Certainly I agree that production of babies is rather impressive, but then please think about it for a moment: that’s not a production of the mind but of the molecule; even plants and animals do that; it’s not production it’s reproduction! That is, Dear, maybe you could be “happy” living in your fantasy land, pretending that your making progress toward your imaginary goal of paradise, but in reality, you and your mate would be living like animals, just breeding.

Meanwhile, the last thing that this poor old world needs is more babies: think of the poor children in the slums of Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Los Angeles, Shanghai, Rangoon, Calcutta, Islamabad, Baghdad, Rome, Paris, Dublin, Montreal, New York, and where you now live. The law of supply and demand is that the value of anything decreases with increasing supply. Then, compare the value of bringing another child into this overcrowded world with the value of your trying to eliminate a little of the enormous amount of ignorance, e.g., as preached by all the parasitic, power-mongering, lame-brain clerics of the world. Consequently, Dear, if your choices were as suggested above, then you should expect that many people would be very disappointed in you and some would be quite angry at you.

But I’ll assume you’ve rejected the ignorance in which you’ve been indoctrinated since you were a baby and even that you’ve found a few of the ideas that I’ve been promoting in this book to be useful. Then what might you decide that you want to do with your life?

Well, before addressing that question, let me briefly review a little of what I’ve been promoting.

- I've tried to show you that all people choose essentially all their values (save, perhaps, aesthetic values) either without independent thought (e.g., under duress, by thinking that they'd better do whatever their clerics demand) or by relating their values to their dual survival goals (of themselves and their families, whatever they decide to be the extent of their families).
- I've also tried to show you that major mistakes made by the vast majority of people are either, not to think about the origins of their values (when they should), or to assume that the extent of their families includes only members of their immediate family, tribe, race, or nation.
- And I've tried to encourage you to avoid such mistakes both by thinking about the origins of your values (when thought is appropriate) and by recognizing that the only worldview that's consistent with a vast quantity of data is that this universe is natural (leaving nothing to be "supernatural") and that the only self-consistent model of your place within this universe requires that you recognize that your extended family includes all life – even including life on other planets, should it exist.

If you do adopt this worldview, then you'll become a Humanist (or even a 'universalist' or 'citizen of the cosmos', the literal meaning of the noun 'cosmopolite' or the adjective 'cosmopolitan').

Now, you might be thinking:

Fine, I'm a thinker, I'm free to make my own decisions, I've evaluated the different models, I accept the Humanists' model of the universe and my place within in, but exactly what is it that I'm supposed to do?

My response would be:

Sorry, Dear, but I can't help you. The choice is yours, and yours alone.

Nonetheless, if you wouldn't mind a few whispers in your ears (just in case you might hear something that may seem sensible to you), then...

But I should add a caveat. Even if you should adopt the humanist concept that life possesses the only known purpose in this universe (i.e., that you're another case of the universe "I'ing"), it doesn't follow that your value-choices will be simple! When trying to reach decisions, you'll find that many options promote your dual survival goals, to varying degrees and for various recognized extents of your extended family.

For example, you may wonder if you should become an M.D. (to try to improve human health and make quite a bit of money in the process), or you may wonder if you should get your Ph.D. in, say, Artificial Intelligence (to try to “teach” machines to do more “drudge work” and, besides, make a reasonable amount of money in the process), or you may wonder if you should get a degree in journalism (to try to ensure that the public knows “the truth”), or you may wonder about becoming an entertainer (to try to make life a little more pleasant for “ordinary people”), or... and so on. The values for all such choices can rest on a firm basis (pursuit of your dual survival goals, with the extent of your extended family including all humanity, and maybe even pursuit of your aesthetic values, such as what you consider to be ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’).

Consequently, you’ll need to base your decision on other factors, such as your competence and interests, competition and opportunities, and so on, out to and possibly including if a flipped coin comes up heads or tails – and if you’ll go for two-out-of-three, or three-out-of-five, or however long it takes to “come out right”! In such cases, Dear, about the only recommendation that I’ve found to be useful is to **try to keep your options open**, especially when you’re young – in case, later, you want to change your mind.

Therefore, Dear, when you wrestle with the question of what you want to be, consider the following:

- If you want to do anything else (taking advantage of your astounding luck of being alive), then it’ll be necessary for you to survive.
- If you want to be happy (gaining signals that you’re successfully surviving), then you’ll need to experience and overcome obstacles.
- If you want to know what obstacles you should try to overcome (so you’ll be as happy as possible), I hope you’ll consider adopting the goal of all life (to help life continue) and the goal of all intelligent life (to help intelligence continue).

I hope you’ll try to find a career not only in which you’ll be able to earn a decent living but also in which you can make what you consider to be important contributions to humanity.

In the process, you’ll probably encounter many cases of conflicting goals. In such cases, you might want to try what I do whenever I find myself caught in a “double bind”.

If your initial reaction is similar to mine, then first, take some aspirin to relieve your headache! Then, find a quiet spot where you can convene your Board of Governors and require them to: recognize the conflicting goals, evaluate the cause of the conflict, set your goals in priority, and then adopt the single goal of higher priority. Thereby, you'll be able to rely on the "beauty" of the human system that (as I mentioned earlier) so astounds me: except for those "human systems" confused by various religious and philosophical errors, we have amazingly few conflicting goals, just goals of different priority!

Now, I admit that, even if we eliminate religious and philosophical errors, we can still find ourselves trying to pursue conflicting goals. Usually, though, these conflicts result from some fundamental limitation, classically illustrated with the familiar line: "You can't have your cake and eat it too." As examples, you can't get good grades in college if you don't study, you can't save money if you don't constrain your spending, and you won't be pleased with your life if you don't promote your values. But it's a truly beautiful feature of the human system that such conflicts can be resolved by setting our goals in priority.

As to what goals you might chose, of course that should depend on your talents, but since these are great and varied, your choices are large:

- You could become an aerospace engineer to then work on some of the many problems associated with humans venturing into space,
- You could become an environmental scientist to then work on some of the many problems of keeping this Earth habitable for humans,
- You could become an entertainer or writer and find a way to educate more humans to become Humanists,
- You could become a new type of educator and then develop ways (maybe using the internet) to lead some children from the slums of the West or from backward regions throughout the world (from Africa to Indonesia) to become the world's next Albert Einstein, Emma Noether, or similar in other fields – realizing how amazingly dependent the rest of humanity has been on the accomplishments of just a very few brilliant people.

Yet, Dear, maybe I should immediately add that I don't necessarily encourage you to pursue a career to help others *directly*.

That is, most human advances have been accomplished by people who first overcame personal challenges of becoming writers, doctors, scientists, and similar, and in turn, many of their accomplishments depended and still depend on advances in methods of traveling, communications, computations, etc. [because of technological advances such as in communications (e.g., TV, telephones, and the internet), mechanization, health care, farming, water purification, etc., up to an including space travel]. As Margaret Mead said:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

And in contrast (as I wrote in an earlier chapter), I hope, Dear, that you'll let those serve soup whose capabilities are challenged by serving soup! I would similarly recommend that you don't join the Peace Core (or similar) unless you discern that, thereby, you could make your greatest contribution to humanity. I'm sure that it would be rewarding to help some small group of people in a backward country to burn wood to generate electricity, but you could contribute a billion times more if you could show the world how to burn the ocean's deuterium in a safe, fusion reactor. That is, Dear, first, at universities, try to determine what you're capable of doing.

At university, when you're studying hard – and I know from experience that it can be a real pain – consider what Einstein said:

Never regard your study as a duty, but as the enviable opportunity to learn to know the liberating influence of beauty in the realm of the spirit for your own personal joy and to the profit of the community to which your later work belongs.

And I know that it's hard to maintain that spirit. But if your spirit falters, then try to absorb some wisdom from Zen:

The Master in the art of living [such as your grandmother!] makes little distinction between work and play, labor and leisure, mind and body, education and recreation, love and religion. He or she hardly knows which is which. The Master simply pursues a vision of excellence in every activity, leaving others to decide whether its work or play. The Master is always doing both.

And if all that seems too much, or too far in the future, or too esoteric, then let me get to the most important thing that you could do: study harder and do well on your next exam. As the Dalai Lama said in his 1998 *Book of Daily Meditations*:

If you want to change the world first try to improve and bring about change within yourself. That will help change your family. From there it just gets bigger and bigger. Everything we do has some effect, some impact.

And if you do well on the next exam, then the rest will take care of itself – provided, of course, you take care of your health, eating good food and getting sufficient exercise.