

PERSPECTIVES

Carl Jacob

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This is an Internet Edition. To assist the reader in locating topics of interest, the sequential Table of Contents has been expanded to include more detail.

This book is dedicated to Toni.

Preface

This book consists of a collection of writings on a variety of subjects that might come under the heading of 'practical philosophy'. They were motivated by real issues and problems that arose in the lives of people I knew over the past few years. These prompted me to explore some of the topics at a more fundamental level, but in a way that I hoped remained tangible. Although they touch on areas as diverse as Psychology, Theology and Political Science, the articles are not intended to be comprehensive discussions of the topics in question, but rather experience-based points of view that readers may find valuable in extending and clarifying their own ideas. As no single literary form is ideal for every purpose, the style that follows will vary from a simple listing of important aspects to more subtle reasoned argument. The topics are not linked and may be read independently. Some of the material is likely to be challenging and controversial.

- The article on *Compatibility* examines the practical meaning of the concept and its implications for the viability of relationships.
- The second chapter looks at the essence of *Conflict* and the fundamental difference between conflict resolution and aggression control.
- *The Darker Side of Humanity* deals with an aspect of human nature which many would prefer to reject. Should it be feared and suppressed, or is there a more fruitful response?
- *God and the Problem of Evil*, addresses the question of what evil is, why it exists, and how it relates to the concept of a loving God. Can they be reconciled?
- The article on *Emotions* reconsiders the role of feelings from an elementary philosophical viewpoint. What should we do about them?
- The essay on *Freedom* addresses some of the important subtleties that lie beneath this apparently simple concept.
- *By Invitation* is about the issue of individual privacy in close relationships and the implications of unwelcome intrusion.
- The article on *Meaning* deals with the subject of purposeful living and the elusive 'meaning of life'. Why is there meaning for some people and not for others?
- A short article on *Motives* addresses the question of when is it appropriate to concern ourselves with another person's deeper agenda.
- *Power* is concerned with the fundamental difference between power and strength and some observations on the dynamics of power.
- *Security* explores the reasons for its pursuit and the factors that affect it in the context of feelings and realities. What are the economics of security?
- *Towards Well-being* is a collection of principles on an inspirational plane focusing on emotional and spiritual health.

I am indebted to those who spent many hours discussing these subjects with me and patiently offered their constructive criticism. I trust that readers will find some enlightening material in the pages that follow.

CEJ, 2004

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Chapter 1

COMPATIBILITY

I once attended a course on building successful relationships and improving marriages that was run by a prominent moral theologian. After several hours of formal input and follow-up group discussion, much of which contained informative and useful insights, I broached the subject of compatibility. To my astonishment, the entire concept was summarily dismissed as being of no importance whatsoever. In that climate, I felt it was pointless to pursue the matter further. That was not the only occasion where I had received a similar response but I remained convinced that a vital issue was being overlooked.

There is a story, set in the southern United States around the time of the civil war, of a young man who, in traditional fashion, had just asked the father of his sweetheart for her hand in marriage. The older man responded to the prospective son-in-law with a single question, "Do you like her?"

"I love her!", he answered without hesitation.

"I know you do, but that is not what I asked you. Do you *like* her?" The young man began to nod as the subtle difference started to sink in.

"Yes," his answer came more slowly, "I really do."

"Then you both have my blessing. You see, the beauty and the passion wears off in time, and it's so important to have someone you enjoy being with in ordinary daily life. That's how my wife and I have been happy together all these years."

What Is Compatibility?

The importance of love is long established, but love is not the basis of compatibility. Love has a role in creating some of that compatibility and sustaining the relationship through periods of hardship, but they are very different things. The essence of compatibility is contained in a proper understanding of 'liking'. ***What happens when we are compatible with a partner is that they are the cause of positive, pleasant feelings about them, about ourselves and the connection between us. We like them.*** By contrast, when we are incompatible, the dominant feelings tend to be negative.

This is the simple truth, but the reality is that few partnerships are perfect. Even in the best of relationships there will probably be several things we don't like in the other person. There will also be a few attractive features in the most destructive of liaisons. We therefore need to take a more comprehensive and practical view.

Before preceding any further it is necessary to point out that liking and compatibility have no unqualified universal meaning. They are specific to the particular type of relationship envisaged. For example, I might like a person as a colleague but not as a marriage partner; as a friend but not as a crew member. In fact, we can be as specific as we want in defining the relationship

and assessing the compatibility within that framework. We can also add the dimensions of distance, intensity and frequency of contact. For example, a wife who had a wonderful relationship with her husband before he retired may find it difficult to have him at home all the time. At times people may find themselves unable to get along in a relationship with traditionally defined roles and ways of doing things, and yet may thrive on a radical change of responsibilities and pattern of interaction.

Let us first make a (non-exhaustive) list of some relevant feelings that may be connected with a person or a relationship:

Positive, pleasant feelings: Relaxation, contentment, respect, enthusiasm, energy, excitement, freedom, admiration...

Negative, unpleasant feelings: Anxiety, exhaustion, up-tightness, fear, disgust, irritation, frustration, disappointment, shame, dissatisfaction, annoyance, embarrassment, desperation, hopelessness...

For better or worse, it is the *feelings* that we need to be able to live with, hence they form the background for much of the discussion. What follows are a few observations based on general experience.

Over the centuries, people have attempted to come up with formulas - astrological, psychological, theological or totally illogical - to predict whether a relationship will be successful. They might be based on similarity of interests, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values, socio-economic class, professional status, intellectual ability, personality traits or age differences to mention a few. We are told that partners should be different but not too different, similar but not too similar and that their zodiac signs should ideally be about three months apart.

When a relationship fails, it is easy to find a scapegoat by referring to a rule that was broken. All that can be said for any of the 'rules of thumb', however, is that they might increase the odds in your favour if you obey them. Violating them will not condemn you any more than compliance will guarantee eternal bliss. Many of them are based on sound reasoning and long experience and it is wise to take them into consideration, but there are no guarantees: The final responsibility for finding compatibility remains ours alone.

Basic Guidelines

To be able to recognise compatibility, we first need to have developed a level of *maturity*. We need to know what we want, what we are sensitive to, what we like and dislike and what brings out the best and the worst in us. In other words, we need to know ourselves sufficiently well. There are things we enjoy, things we can tolerate and things we cannot stand. We will always be learning, developing and changing, but as mature people we will be changing more slowly and have a much better idea of our own preferences and capacity.

We need to ***experience our prospective partner in a sufficiently wide range of situations***, particularly those that are important to us. These may involve being alone with them for extended periods, socialising with our peers, travelling, being around children, working on projects, and anything else we may wish.

As a general rule, there is hope for a good relationship if we ***like ninety per cent and dislike ten per cent*** but not the other way around. We do not have the resources endurance or stamina to live with unpleasant feelings when they are there most of the time. Even if we can, we cripple our lives.

If there is ***anything whatsoever, which either party cannot tolerate about the other***, then they are not compatible. If they are easily and willingly changed by the partner before the relationship proceeds any further, then it may have some future. If the behaviour is a compulsion, addiction or entrenched habit, forget it!

We need to be willing to remain alone or uncommitted rather than in an incompatible relationship. If we cannot do this, then we will inevitably suffer!

Compatibility is not only a question of finding the right person, but ***being the right person***. This means that we have to develop and grow in our ability to manage ourselves and relate to other people with justice, love, understanding and the same desirable characteristics we would like to see in others.

When a person is deeply in love or strongly attached to another it takes enormous self-discipline to look objectively at the realities of the relationship. Indeed one is naturally reluctant to do this for fear of shattering the romance. However, when relationships fail (painfully sooner or disastrously later), it is because of the realities.

Deeper Issues

Although 'liking' is the ultimate and final arbiter of compatibility, it is the result of observation in the past and present. It cannot always be depended on as a reliable indicator of future developments. Whilst there is no guaranteed insurance against becoming attached to the wrong person, some insight into a person's character can go a long way. In particular one needs to be wary of a few tested pathways to severe disappointment:

- There is the use of deception and manipulation, or even outright lying.
- There may be un-clarified expectations that are beyond the capacity of the partner to meet. Often people do not take the time to get to know each other well enough to bring these to the surface. Sometimes a person is unreasonably optimistic about his or her own personal resources. One partner may be living beyond their means, whether in terms of income, ability or endurance.
- There is an imbalance between interdependence and independence. One partner does not feel free to comfortably be themselves and do their own thing at least to some degree.

- One does not care enough about the other person to really listen, learn and make substantial changes.
- There is evidence of concealed over-sensitivity and lack of robustness. For example, one party may periodically 'push the other away' inexplicably, leaving them guessing as to what they did wrong. The deeper issues are always avoided and never clarified.

These points touch on some of the root causes of eventual disharmony. Their own natural consequences are not always direct and immediate, but none-the-less inevitable. Another reason they are dangerous is that they make it much harder for one or the other party to recognise an incompatibility early enough to withdraw from the relationship without hurt.

Our discussion has taken place mainly in the context of intimate personal relationships, but the concept is no less important in any form of working partnership and may be vital in situations where closer interaction is essential. It applies not only in marriage, but in the workplace, the military and in leisure pursuits. In a nutshell, compatibility is *the effortless basis of harmony and happy coexistence*. In order to be able to 'get on with our lives' or the 'mission' rather than waste valuable energy overcoming internal friction, one must learn to recognise incompatibility early enough.

The appropriate response to incompatibility is beyond the scope of this discussion, but it is sufficient to say that there are creative approaches, not only the obvious options of reluctant tolerance and resolving to go separate ways. Overall it helps if we are adaptable, willing to experiment towards extending our comfort zones, have a good sense of humour and don't needlessly exaggerate our feelings to ourselves or the other person. The ultimate destiny of the relationship will depend on the characters of the individuals in it, for in the face of on-going change, this enables a person not only to find compatibility but also to make some contribution to it.

CONFLICT

Consider a familiar scenario where two people wish to go out together, but one prefers a movie and the other a stage play. If both are on at the same time in different locations, either course of action can be taken, but logically they are mutually exclusive. Another situation that often arises is where a person would like to buy two items but is only able to afford one. Each purchase may be separately feasible, but they cannot be achieved simultaneously because of limited resources. The fact that certain possibilities are logically or economically irreconcilable is probably a necessary feature of the universe; otherwise existence could not have any character at all. It becomes a problem only when varying individual desires, aims and objectives enter the picture. That is when conflict can arise.

The Essence of Conflict

Conflict exists whenever there are two or more mutually exclusive possibilities and a will, or motive behind each. Our earlier examples illustrate conflict in that there are desires towards clearly incompatible possibilities. Several other exclusive possibilities may also exist, such as attending a dinner party in the first scenario, or buying yet another item with our limited funds in the second, but because there is no desire attached to them, they play no part in any conflict. The direction of the will, desire or motive is influenced by our differing knowledge, beliefs, experience, sensitivities, values, abilities, and state of being, including energy, health, moods, personality and character. Situations arise where not all wishes are simultaneously achievable and the resulting conflict lies at the heart of decision making or choice.

From this perspective, conflict can exist ***between people*** or ***within the same person***. There will be conflict *between* people when they have differing objectives that cannot be achieved at the same time or with the same limited resources. There will be conflict *within* a person when he must choose between alternatives, both of which he wants or both of which he wishes to avoid, and when he must 'take or leave' something in its entirety but has strongly ambivalent motives.

.For the sake of clarity, it helps to set aside some of the accepted connotations and colloquial usages of the term, and confine ourselves to the way we have defined it. It then becomes more obvious that -

- Differences and disagreements do not constitute conflict until people wilfully adhere to opposing sides.
- The typical like-dislike or 'love-hate' relationships we often have with people and objects are not conflicts in themselves, but a recognition that we can feel differently about various attributes of the same thing. It is possible to evolve very successful strategies to coexist in harmony.

- Conflict does not necessarily involve negative emotions. Some people enjoy conflict and many aspects of our individual and collective pursuits appear to thrive on it to a large extent, such as science, entertainment and adventure.

Conflict is a major component of many 'problems' and forms the central theme of much of our entertainment drama. It is also endemic in the legal system and business behaviour.

Aggression

It is important to distinguish between conflict and any aggression that may be associated with it. **Aggression** arises when one 'will' acts forcefully against another in an attempt to establish its own preference. Naturally, aggression is more common *between* people, but it is not unknown for a person to act aggressively towards himself, such as threatening to punish himself for certain choices. Aggression can range from socially acceptable rivalry to unlimited warfare. It is not always undesirable, and may be necessary as a last resort to maintain order in society. Three interesting observations flow naturally from this distinction:

- War is the result of conflict, but the war itself is not the conflict.
- Peace is the absence of conflict, not the absence of war.
- Aggression may escalate; conflict generally does not.

Assertiveness differs from aggression more in appearance than in substance. The main contrast is that the force is consciously directed *towards* our own objective rather than *against* an opponent. Thus, on the surface, it has connotations of being strong, positive, constructive, and more consistent with civilised conduct. Nevertheless, it is still an attempt to make our own will prevail without resolving the underlying conflict. Many feuds had their origins in the 'assertive' behaviour of one party relentlessly pursuing its own interests while indifferent to the effect it was having on their neighbour. The irony is that a desperate victim may be driven to 'aggression' and then accused of starting the fight. In reality, assertiveness is merely a different point on the 'forceful behaviour' continuum, and much of our discussion related to aggression is equally applicable to that concept.

Active competition exists when two or more conflicting parties exercise forceful tactics. Contests, games and tournaments are also based on conflict; however, the process is controlled by rules that generally ensure a non-destructive outcome, although there are notable exceptions. Their purpose is usually entertainment and the demonstration of skill, ideally without the presence of vested interests, ulterior motives or negative feelings between the parties. Competition in business and politics tends to be taken more seriously, the stakes are generally higher, the 'game' tends to be more relentless and enduring, and the outcome may be more critical. Warfare is the most extreme form of competition involving aggression that is usually organised and often unrestrained on both sides.

Conflict Resolution versus Aggression Control:

In the 'cold war' between the West and the Soviet Block there was a conflict of social and economic ideologies, but mutual aggression was controlled largely through a balance of power that acted as a deterrent. The control of aggressive behaviour did not, however, reduce the underlying conflict. It is important to distinguish between these two essentially different concepts, and to do this, it is helpful to examine the factors that are related to the possibility of conflict and the fundamental strategies that may be employed in conflict resolution.

The **possibility of conflict** varies with

- The number of possible objectives that are mutually exclusive.
- The variety of preferences, or 'differences of will'.

Clearly, if only one possibility exists no conflict can arise, and the larger the number of possibilities the more 'rival camps' can be formed. Likewise, regardless of the possibilities, if all parties prefer the same one, no conflict will arise. To be effective, the process of conflict resolution must focus on the possibilities related to the situation or on the 'wills' associated with them. Some of the examples may be simple, but the principles they illustrate apply at all levels from the personal to the international.

Conflict resolution generally involves any of the following strategies –

- **Finding some way to establish both of the possibilities that initially appeared to be mutually exclusive.** If one party wants a small car because it is easier to park and the other wants a large one to carry luggage, the solution may be a small van.
- **Changing the will or motive behind one of the options by broadening, deepening or lengthening the vision.** We may consider a person who is considering legal action against another who caused him injury. He may have strong motives in both directions such as the prospect of vindication versus the emotional cost of the struggle. If he broadens his perspective, to consider the issue of social justice he may be persuaded to go ahead. On the other hand, a deeper look at the long-term effects of the fight on his health and family life may convince him that the pursuit is not worth the cost.
- **Investigating the deeper intentions of both parties.** Often people pursue an objective, not as an end in itself, but as a means to something else. On the surface, the objectives may be in conflict. However, if we investigate the real reasons why they are pursuing those objectives, we may find that these are compatible and that both intentions could be achieved through a more cooperative new strategy. This is a practical application of the win-win philosophy. This approach may also be useful when the conflict is within the same person. Between people it can be effective even if used only by one party. In each instance it involves a learning process through which alternative, non-conflict-causing *means* are found to accomplish the same desired ultimate *ends*.
- **Offering more attractive compensation or incentive to abandon an objective.** Family life is full of examples where parents bribe their children with something even more enticing than what they have their hearts set on at the time.

No single method will necessarily be successful in any particular case.

The possibility of aggression varies with the resources available to the aggressor. It is well known in military and diplomatic circles that one's defences must be based on a potential adversary's capabilities, not their stated intentions. The probability of aggressive behaviour is naturally limited by the possibility, but within those limits it will depend on the strength of the will or motive behind it.

The **probability of aggression** is influenced by

- The anticipated costs, benefits and likelihood of success.
- The existing balance of power and deterrence.
- The expected consequences of failure.
- The characters of the parties in conflict.
- The strength of the motives.
- The intensity of will.
- The perceived urgency in the situation.

Aggression control may consist of

- **Depriving the aggressive party of the means necessary to establish its preferred option.** In simple terms, this often means taking or destroying the resources they need to continue acting aggressively..
- **Introducing a deterrent, namely an internal conflict within the aggressor.** When we build up our own defence capabilities, the potential aggressor faces a conflict within himself, for he now has both a reason to attack and a reason not to attack.
- **Destroying the aggressor's will to establish his preferred option.** This includes the use of external threat and other 'demoralising' tactics.
- **Making one of the preferences impossible altogether.** Some types of aggressive behaviour can be stopped by removing certain possibilities completely. The behaviour of competitors can often be changed by introducing appropriate legislation to change the 'rules of the game'.
- **Appeasement or 'giving in'.** For example, a timid wife might comply with all of her bullying husband's wishes so as to avoid domestic violence.

It is clear that Conflict Resolution and Aggression Control are essentially different. Aggression is based on conflict, but conflict does not always result in aggression. Conflict resolution is more fundamental, generally leading to a more stable outcome. In fact, it could be argued that the ultimate form of aggression control is conflict resolution itself. However, aggressive behaviour is also a matter of character, and the resolution of a particular conflict will not guarantee permanent peace between parties where aggressive tendencies are habitual. Nevertheless, many policies aimed at conflict management are really no more than crude forms of aggression control. With or without the presence of aggression, the existence of conflict tends to be wasteful of resources. It may lead to other forms of counter-productive behaviour such as indecisiveness, passive resistance or withdrawal, and it tends to be conducive to low morale. Both effective conflict resolution processes *and* aggression control strategies are essential to a lasting peaceful coexistence.

Chapter 3

THE DARKER SIDE OF HUMANITY

It has long been recognised in law enforcement circles that every person is capable of doing anything if pushed hard enough by the circumstances. The only way we differ is the point at which we individually topple. We are all capable of destructive behaviour, of ugly thoughts, words and deeds and perverted imagination. This is not only the way it is, but the way it has to be. If we imagine that Jesus Christ did not find these elements within himself, we are mistaken, for he too was tempted. Had he not been capable of doing wrong, the 'temptation' would have been meaningless. What made him different were not the possibilities, but his vision and his choice. It is not what we are *able* to do - bad *or* good - that makes us what we are. It is what we *choose* to do, and the way we develop our ability to make that choice.

There is a 'negative' side to every human being, and it is an essential part of his nature. The ability to get angry and destroy can be necessary to enforce justice, and the ability to lie must accompany the recognition of truth. There cannot be respect without the possibility of contempt, love without the possibility of hate or indifference and generosity without the alternative of greed.

What create the 'dark' side of man are not the things that he is capable of, but the walls that he constructs around himself. They are walls built of fear, pride, vested interests and lack of forgiveness. The real danger does not come from what is hidden within, but from the impenetrable barrier that separates the outside from the inside. The problem is not what is in the dark, but the fact that it is dark in there and no light can penetrate. Impenetrable barriers prevent him from taking the long-term view, the broader perspective and the deeper insight. They hinder his sensitivity and compassion for people and things around him - even his own future and deeper self. They guide him into situations that he cannot manage without resorting to things he never believed he would do. They allow desperation to develop to the point of bringing out the worst from what lies beneath the thin veneer of civilisation.

Should we therefore tear down all the 'walls' and remove all the 'fences'? No. There cannot be true unity without personal freedom and this requires a degree of separateness. The answer is not the abandonment of individuality, the destruction of privacy and the crippling of personal power, but selective openness and building relationships based on discernment and earned trust. Perhaps it is a little like a good house with some permanent vents guarded by insect-screens, some windows that let in the light and allow us to look into the distance and a door or two that we can open and close at will. We should always be receptive to the voice of the Almighty at the deepest levels of our being, but other decisions about openness are a matter of compassionate awareness and responsible discretion, not uniform policy. Coming to terms with the darker side of ourselves does not require us to deny it, be afraid of it or make futile attempts to eliminate it, but to let the light of wisdom enter and give us the chance to love a bigger self. We then become its master, not its slave.

Chapter 4

GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

People throughout the ages have experienced great difficulty in reconciling the existence of an all-powerful and loving God, with the persistence of suffering and evil in the world. They find it incomprehensible how this God could even allow such things to exist. The philosophical literature in the area is extensive but inconclusive. It is not the intention of the author to review it here, but to tackle this difficult and controversial subject from another point of view.

What Is Evil?

There is, in fact, no universally agreed definition of evil, and the only consensus appears to lie in the negative connotations of the word. Interpretations along the lines of “anything displeasing to God”, may be theologically appealing, but of very limited use in the context of our discussion. As the problem arises from a human perspective, I have chosen an equally broad but human oriented view. First I shall define ***suffering*** simply as unpleasant experience anywhere on a continuum from the most mild and temporary individual annoyance to the most unimaginable permanent distress for the entire human race. For practical purposes, ***evil*** can then be thought of as anything that is causally associated with suffering or bad experiences. Thus evil and suffering are distinct concepts, but nonetheless strongly related, for without suffering, evil loses its power and meaning, and without evil, suffering is largely devoid of explanation. Suffering, however, is not necessarily evil in itself and the causal connection may not be immediate but more remote and often difficult to identify.

One must be careful with the interpretation of suffering, for much confusion can arise when some negative experiences are reinterpreted as good simply because they eventually lead to an even better outcome than would otherwise have been possible. This is not to deny that such situations frequently do occur, but in pursuing this line of reasoning, one could, with certain assumptions, argue away the existence of evil altogether. The possible benefits of suffering will not be considered in this discussion.

Some Basic Reasoning

It would be arrogant for any mere human being to claim to know the mind of God, however, it is basic theology in most major religions that there are some things that God is unable, or at least unwilling, to do. For example, he ‘cannot’ lie, deceive, contradict himself or create a system that is inherently inconsistent. If he were to do any of these, it would be very difficult to describe him as perfect.

Secondly, although good and evil, like beauty and ugliness, are meaningful concepts, they have no separate tangible existence in themselves apart from

the things they describe. Good and evil are **evaluations** or *perceived attributes* of something, not independent entities in their own right.

Thirdly, anything can only be regarded as evil or bad because **a sensitive being dislikes it** and may suffer because of it. If there were no such being, human or otherwise, the way things are would be neither good nor bad, but simply 'the way they are'.

The Real Questions

The issue, therefore, is not 'Why does God allow evil and suffering to exist?' but why does he allow **situations we dislike** to exist or allow us **to be sensitive** to them with such intensity? We will begin by addressing the matter of 'sensitivity', which makes suffering possible in the first place.

The Nature of Sensitivity

It is clear that without sensitivity, life and the universe would be meaningless to us and happiness would be impossible. It is also reasonable to assume that if we originated from a loving Creator, then our capacity to be sensitive was intended for happiness rather than suffering. However, valid as such assertions may be, they tend to overlook the more comprehensive nature and role of sensitivity.

Some elementary reasoning would probably convince most of us that **sensitivity in both directions is necessary and desirable**. If we imagine ourselves accidentally touching a hot stove, we easily appreciate the value of pain in motivating us to withdraw our hands as quickly as possible. The *ability* to suffer is clearly essential to self-preservation, and historically, people who had no such sensitivity generally did not live very long.

Furthermore, we observe that our sensitivity is not a simple uniform unchanging attribute. While some of it is innate, a major part is learned. As we grow, it progressively expands to encompass interests beyond our narrow and limited selves. It is strongly influenced by our upbringing, especially our embedded values and beliefs, and it can be heightened or dulled by abuse and natural processes. As a result, **sensitivity is highly variable across humanity**, and this has considerable advantages: Society as a whole thrives on a combination of similarities and differences as fruitful cooperation between people nearly always involves both. Similarities allow empathy and enable interests to be shared, while differences encourage specialisation, variety and cultural richness, which in turn, generally benefit the individual. On the other hand, the variable nature of sensitivity also has immediate implications for suffering and the perception of evil: The same external reality is likely to affect people differently, and it becomes clear that even where general agreement may exist, there is no way that one person's pleasure or anguish can be compared with another's. In this respect, the human view of evil as a causal agent must necessarily be subjective and relative.

Unwelcome Experiences

Given our sensitivities, why should things we dislike be allowed to happen to us? It seems that a major part of the answer lies in **freedom** and its implications. If God wanted a universe functioning entirely by rigid laws and inhabited by beings that could only behave as they were programmed, then all contact with the unwelcome could probably have been prevented. However, one wonders just how ideal such a situation would really be. For example, those of us who have experienced being loved and value it, cherish the freedom of the lover. After all, being in the arms of a partner who has no choice is just not the same! The presence of freedom clearly brings expanded possibilities and potential benefits - but only at a price. In the case of the lovers, rejection must also be permitted otherwise freedom is meaningless.

We shall now consider the consequences of freedom more deeply, with special attention to the natural requirement of 'system coherence' and the inseparable benefits and costs of diversity. We then focus on the important relationship between freedom, motivation and the necessity of evil, and our discussion culminates in what may be called the creator's dilemma. The remainder of the article is concerned with the relative responsibilities of humanity and God, and addresses a few classic questions.

Freedom and Consistency

What human beings seem to idealise is unlimited pleasure without anything they dislike. They want right without wrong, and compatibility without incompatibility. They desire power and choice but no responsibility. They want the delight of surprise and learning without the drawbacks of ignorance. It should always be possible to succeed but never to fail. They value being freely accepted but rejection should not exist. Voluntary love is treasured, but indifference should be banned. Above all, God should let *us* have freedom but stop *others* exercising it when we don't like what they are doing. If such a world could have a physical parallel, there would be 'up' but no 'down' and objects would have a front without a back.

Any working entity must be balanced and consistent to be viable, and certain necessary principles must be adhered to. One example is our exchange economy. No system that incorporates the useful freedom to borrow and lend, can function without the 'obligation to repay'. Handled wisely, this freedom can improve the position of the individual and society. However, when it is abused, it is likely to result in extreme hardship. It cannot be any other way, for a system that automatically cancels every debt as soon as the money is borrowed, is clearly an absurdity. Likewise, the benefits of making life more predictable through contracts and laws cannot exist without enforcement that can be brought to bear *whether we like it or not!*

To understand why things must work as a coherent system, the material realities are neither intrinsically good or bad in themselves, nor are they aware of how we feel about them. They are merely coherent packages of possibilities brought into tangible being by the laws of the universe and the

limited intervention of sensitive beings. It is we who make the value judgements and have the freedom to choose which cohesive package we make a reality. However, we cannot pull such packages apart, discard the aspects we dislike, and expect the remainder to be viable. Neither can we assemble any random collection of items into a working unit just because we happen to like all of them. Absolute freedom is impossible. The universe itself can only exist because there are some fixed and dependable laws that do not change according to our varied, and often whimsical, individual preferences. Thus, we have the freedom to walk off a cliff, but we cannot expect the law of gravity to make an exception because we don't wish to be injured. It comes as a package: we can take it as it is, or leave it and look for another we like better.

While the ability to experience suffering appears to be a necessary feature of our sensitivity, the actual occurrence of most undesirable experiences does not have to be inevitable. However, if we value our freedom, avoiding them must remain largely our own responsibility. We must be *able* to taste decayed food, but there is no reason why it need enter the mouth in the first place as long as proper precautions are taken. God does not want human beings to be unhappy any more than a moneylender wishes the borrower to end up in poverty, but it is we who must choose wisely. In other words, according to the way we use our freedom within any coherent system, we can bring good experiences or suffering onto ourselves.

Diversity and Conflict

There is another perspective that focuses on the benefits and costs of human freedom itself. It appears to be a universal principle, that any restriction to prevent something undesirable will also preclude many possibilities that are good. Freedom generates diversity, and it is indisputable that variety and difference expand possibilities in ways that uniformity can never do. The existence of free and sensitive human beings who can differ in their aptitudes, preferences, pathways of learning and even reactions to the same material realities, enable vast avenues to be explored that would otherwise be closed. Their ability to cooperate voluntarily opens extensive opportunities for development and good experiences. However, the necessary common environment that enables this also opens the possibility of conflict. Where it is not feasible to separate those who have incompatible sensitivities and values, their attempts to make their own preferences prevail may result in escalating appeals to force ending in violence, reluctant submission or on-going persecution. So once again, we cannot have the benefits of freedom and eliminate all possibility of evil and suffering at the same time.

Paradoxically, most conflicts arise out of the natural pursuit of our own good, rather than any maliciousness towards others. The central problem lies neither in the individual differences, nor in the common environment, but in the size of the 'self' we consider in our pursuit of happiness, and the poverty of options we investigate. As human beings, we live with endemic ignorance, laziness, impatience and other limitations. Most of us are content with a narrowly educated awareness and operate most comfortably at an 'obvious' superficial level with a short-term perspective. An extreme microcosm is the

scene of domestic violence: One party may be painfully sensitive to certain types of behaviour in their partner, and react with instant physical force. The 'self' they are concerned about is limited to what is in their own sphere of immediate interests, and even within that context, there is no consideration of other possibly more effective and mutually beneficial ways of accomplishing the same objectives. Neither is the victim always powerless, for often the problem could be diminished considerably or avoided altogether if they modify their own behaviour and seek the good of a greater self that includes their partner.

One of the greatest challenges facing humanity from the local to the global level has always been to coexist happily, and solutions have tended to be limited and impermanent. If individual and collective development is to proceed with less conflict-based suffering, the answers are not likely to lie in the multiplication of laws and restrictions imposed from above, but rather in the disciplined exploration of options which consider the good of an expanded 'self'. First, we must be prepared to look beyond our instinctive, obvious, habitual courses of action and question some of the conveniently biased popular philosophies that support them. We will return to this later in our discussion of responsibility.

Freedom and the Necessity of Evil

Historically speaking, if the account of the Scriptures is accepted, it appears that the experience of suffering is something which humanity brought onto itself by asserting its freedom before it was ready to exercise it with sufficient knowledge and wisdom. This has often been reflected in the behaviour of people who get themselves into situations they cannot handle and suffer dire consequences. In the course of exercising freedom prematurely, the human species evidently also did fundamental damage to itself whereby it became a prisoner of natural processes. Our interdependent and procreative nature, while opening boundless opportunities for good experiences, is such that decisions made by one person can affect other people, including a chain of off-springs. Thus we inherit the outcomes prescribed by a consistently operating universe.

This, however, seeks to account for the presence of evil by looking into the past. It does not explain why the possibility of experiencing suffering is a necessary feature of our existence from a future perspective. One view is that if human beings are to be more like God who loves and voluntarily does good to other sensitive beings, then we could never 'do good' freely if no possibilities but good ones existed. When people are free, some will choose to 'do evil' (cause suffering), and to a degree, God must let it happen.

Another consideration is that unconditional happiness may destroy human motivation, make freedom pointless and ultimately be inconsistent with our intended destiny and role in the universe. The issue of motivation is important in both the individual and the social context. Promises of benefit or suffering can be used to support or deter different types of conduct without removing freedom and its advantages. Thus God uses these promises for our own good and so that we can fulfil our role in his plan. Government

employs them to maintain social order and avoid anarchy, and they are an essential means of maintaining discipline in management, the military and the family. Nevertheless, again the costs cannot be avoided, for as much as they can encourage heroic behaviour and outstanding achievement, they can also be used to induce unimaginable crimes.

There is a further interesting line of reasoning that may help to explain the phenomenon of evil. Where freedom exists, motivation, decision-making and rational choice all depend on the emergence of preferences, which can only come from a perception of some options being relatively better or worse than others according to our individual sensitivities. Once the 'better' has been identified, the alternative automatically becomes 'worse', and if it is much better, then the contrast can only be much worse. When we get attached to one of our preferences, strong feelings can develop to the point where the alternative is seen as a calamity. This is illustrated in the classic fictional tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. Neither of them was suicidal before they met and experienced a far greater happiness than anything they had before. It was only then that the thought of being without each other became unbearable. Evil, for Juliet, became anything that could take away Romeo. The argument is that preferences and the existence of evil are mutually dependent, and attachment to very strong preferences generates its own threat of suffering. Here we encounter the Buddhist teaching that 'who ceases to crave, ceases to suffer'. However, this comfort may come only at the price of surrendering the strong passion that has also led to some of humanity's greatest achievements.

At this point we remind ourselves that in the context of our original problem, we are dealing with human suffering and the human perception of evil. They cannot be separated from individual sensitivity, preference, love, motivation, and the costs and benefits of freedom and diversity. In the background lies the basic agenda of God which gives meaning to the existence of humanity, the universe and everything in it, namely the positive pursuit of good.

Is this God's Dilemma?

So what can God do to make suffering and evil impossible, or at least more limited? Restraining our freedom reduces diversity and adversely affects the meaning and value of love. Reducing our sensitivity curtails motivation and limits the value of freedom. Restricting the range of achievable possibilities is also pointless unless all people dislike the same things and the advantages of human variety are given up. Every which way, the price is always paid in the possible good that is forgone.

Evil People

A sensitive and caring person may find it hard to imagine how any fellow human being could be capable of callous violence and brutality. It is natural to regard these perpetrators of suffering as evil people. Without entering a discussion on whether we have the right to judge another individual, as distinct from his actions, a person who harms a large number of people would

generally be seen as more evil than the one who harms only a few. However, this argument may be difficult to defend in many cases, for the character which allows a person to commit premeditated atrocities may be the same regardless of the number. Thus with crimes such as mass murder, although the collective suffering may be multiplied, the nature of the perpetrator has no simple relationship to the scale of the outcome. Another reason why it is difficult to measure the intrinsic evilness of an individual is that he may have had fewer victims, not because he was of better character, but merely because he had less power or opportunity. It may be rather like incompetence: The same fool in a more powerful position or a more sensitive situation can do a lot more damage.

Traditionally, good and evil are strongly associated with the concept of intention. An action is seen as good when the intent is good and vice-versa. The merits of this view are strong in the sense that it is relevant to assessing our own motives before decisions are made, and investigating the characters of other people as causal agents. Nevertheless, the principle also has major weaknesses. Firstly, it does not consider the relativity of good 'for whom'. A person can unintentionally, but knowingly, causes a lot of suffering to others beyond his sphere of interest through the deliberate pursuit of good for himself and his own 'side'. Secondly, it is devoid of responsibility. 'Intention', by itself, stops short of the obligation to follow up *all* the effects of one's behaviour, and to be fully accountable for any damage done through the use of power. While reckless drivers do not deliberately set out to harm anyone, even common law recognises negligence as culpable. Intentions may be useful in distinguishing *wickedness* where a person ruthlessly pursues his own aims or deliberately harms others, from human *weakness* which we all possess; however, both contribute to suffering in the world, not only the former.

Why doesn't God stop 'evil people' *before* they cause suffering? Why does he allow them to do things that are clearly contrary to his own commandments? Why did he make us capable of deliberately hurting others? To a large extent these questions have already been addressed in our discussion on freedom.

It is possible that God does intervene where he finds it necessary, but such questions still place the responsibility squarely on his shoulders. Perhaps it is God who is wondering how far he has to let evil and suffering go before humanity heeds his advice and takes the appropriate responsibility.

Responsibility

While suffering is very real to each sensitive being, it is an entirely personal experience. Thus, 'what is evil' cannot be determined autocratically or democratically, but remains an individual judgement by each person in relation to his sensitivities. People differ and preference is clearly neither uniform throughout society nor even rigid within the individual, so any consensus is likely to be limited and transient. On the other hand, it is also clear that a workable, just and peaceful society can only exist if people are held accountable for any suffering they cause. If a person wants to exercise

freedom, which is power and control, then he must carry the responsibility, and indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any justice without such a principle. Law attempts to define responsibility and enforce it, and undeniably this is a great step forward from anarchy, but the ability of law to control evil is ultimately very limited as history has shown.

The management of evil can only begin to make serious progress when the principle of responsibility is elevated from the legal to the moral plane. Here, the apparently obvious hides some important subtle implications. Let us return to the analogy of the stove. While there is no evil in the sensitivity of the hand, nor in the burning element, suffering does result from any prolonged contact between the two. Thus, although we cannot be answerable for sensitivities in ourselves or in others, and there might be nothing intrinsically evil in either party, the freedom we possess implies that we are responsible, not only for our explicit behaviour, but for the way we voluntarily place ourselves in relation to others. We have no licence to enter a close relationship by choice without due regard for *the other person's* preferences as well as our own. Hence we need to move towards an awareness of mutual good suggested in principles such as, 'love your neighbour as yourself', and beyond a merely legalistic interpretation of rights and obligations. Among the implications are, that wherever possible, relationships should be kept at the kind of 'distance' where extreme disharmony is avoided, at least until changes can be made that allow responsible coexistence at a more intimate level. In other words, we must learn to adapt, or avoid locking ourselves into relationships until we know we can get along.

As pointed out earlier, although intentions, by themselves, are not adequate as a final arbiter of good and evil, they are a necessary and useful starting point in decision making. To be of any practical moral value, they must be supported by a more comprehensive view that tries to be as far reaching as all of the consequences, otherwise the decision is irresponsible. Furthermore, whenever the intended benefit of some people overrides the well-being of the rest of the community, the short term good is pursued at the expense of the longer term, or more superficial considerations are placed ahead of deeper ones, the action is likely to be more evil than good. Altogether, the outlook must be inclusive rather than conveniently limited.

The dynamics of evil is a vast subject that is beyond the scope of our discussion, but a few of its features may provide some useful insight. Although the long-term, broader and deeper consequences of an action are generally of greater importance, we are naturally more sensitive to any immediate superficial consequences to ourselves. Hence these tend to have a much more powerful motivating effect. Secondly, it is perhaps ironic that evil doers always require connection with some good to carry on their activities. This is self-evident, for any action that serves nobody's interests in any way would be irrational. However, the association with good also serves to disguise the evil and encourage compromise and dependence. A typical example is the sponsorship of sport and education by companies that profit on their customers' addiction to harmful substances. The strategic use of lies and deception combine with ignorance, wishful thinking and convenient rationalisation, to render people more vulnerable to seduction and corruption.

In the extreme, it can lead to mass perversion and organised crime where the participants become more and more entangled in the promotion of evil, and every way out threatens to involve intolerable suffering to themselves.

Although human weakness, wickedness and irresponsibility are major contributing factors to suffering in the world, the roots of evil often lie deeper in the unquestioned values, assumptions, beliefs and principles by which people live and society is organised. A classic illustration is the notion of superiority based on race or religion, which has led to countless persecutions throughout history. Even potentially useful principles, when applied without discernment, can be as harmful as those that are patently false. For example, our emphasis on competitiveness, winning and 'success', with an artificially generated scarcity of rewards, can result in as much destructive behaviour against people as it contributes to the 'pursuit of excellence'. Ideas, unlike actions, live beyond the reach of legislation and enforcement, yet they can instigate very far reaching outcomes for better or worse at any level from the individual to the global. One is reminded that every major political or religious movement started this way leaving its imprint on society, and individually, much of our own personal destinies are shaped by the tenets we hold. Without addressing the problem at this fundamental level, in ourselves first, and in our fellow human beings through example and education, we have little prospect of making a better world.

A more extensive treatment of the subject of responsibility is beyond the scope of this discussion, but one further issue will be addressed. How far should we go in taking action against what we personally perceive as evil? Evidently, we were not meant to destroy the evil-doers themselves, except perhaps as a last resort in self-defence. The objective is to change an evil situation into a good one for all parties concerned: Not to kill the enemy, but to convert him into a friend. The indications are that when we actively seek the good of a larger 'self' that includes all who are affected by our behaviour the presence of evil will probably decline of its own accord, even though the *possibility* must always continue to exist.

Events beyond Human Control

As much as our responsibility goes further than commonly assumed, some things we regard as evil remain outside our individual or collective control. At this time, the list still includes most natural disasters, famines, epidemics, ageing and illnesses that are not known to be life-style related. Intrinsicly, these things are merely natural phenomena, and the evil lies not in their existence, but in our exposure to them. The Scriptures suggest that a 'paradise' was originally set up by God to protect us from such hazards, but our earliest ancestors made choices that were not compatible with such an environment. Nevertheless, with the progress of science, it appears that our helplessness in the face of 'inevitable' or 'cataclysmic' events may be declining, and perhaps we are destined to be able to avoid most of them completely sometime in the future.

On the surface it may appear that natural phenomena are the predominant causes of suffering in the world, but with the exception of unavoidable illness

and aging, their role is often exaggerated. In earthquakes, people rarely die from the shaking of the ground but from the collapse of inferior building construction. The Aids epidemic in Africa was not spread by the forces of nature but by irresponsible sexual behaviour. The emerging evidence also strongly suggests that complacency and environmental mismanagement lie at the heart of much of the suffering associated with natural occurrences. Even where these events might precipitate the crisis, human failings such as corruption, selfishness and negligence are often the major contributors to the undesirable consequences.

By comparison, the greater part of suffering originates *directly* from human behaviour and the kind of society we have created. Wars and genocide are directed by *people*. Violent crime is mostly the product of individual character and social circumstances. Oppression and poverty are more the outcomes of greed and the abuse of power. Suicides from mental anguish, loneliness, shame and despair are predominantly a feature of an apparently orderly environment. Deaths and injuries from road traumas and other accidents number millions annually, and relatively few of these are specifically caused by natural incidents. Thus human behaviour and the highly varied individual problems in society lead to far more suffering in total than nearly all the prominent natural events that reach the news. Considering "God's dilemma", preventing natural disasters may well be the easiest part of the task. However, it would only make a dent in terms of total suffering.

Confidence, Hope and Compassion

Whichever ways we rationalise the existence of evil and suffering, circumstances continue to arise where we are held captive of situations that we find offensive. Eventually we might alter our perceptions and sensitivities, negotiate some relief or possibly solve the problem with a creative approach: Survival situations have shown how remarkably adaptable people can be. Failing that, we finally do withdraw from extreme distress, either to insanity or death and perhaps a hope in God's promises.

If such a God exists, then justice requires that no person should suffer permanently as a result of a process he did not initiate, and that he should be fairly compensated or rewarded. This also suggests that there is hope and that finally good will prevail. However, it takes a lot more skill to fix things than to ruin them, and according to the Scriptures, it is beyond the capacity of human beings to 'save themselves' entirely by their own efforts. We are told that ultimately only God can 'deliver us from evil'. To make this possible, we must freely and willingly let him work within us. Like being in need of major surgery, it requires deep trust and cooperation. This is largely what the story of the 'redemption' is about. We are told that the Son of God willingly suffered death by crucifixion, in order to save humanity, and it is here that our ultimate hopes lie. Thus, despite the abundance of suffering, there is also much evidence to suggest that God is far from indifferent to the human encounter with evil. We are assured that it can be overcome, that nothing is allowed to happen to us without God's consent, and no person can be permanently harmed except by his own doing when he fails to use power in a loving way.

There is much that individual people can do to reduce the suffering that already exists, but first it is necessary to tune in to the needs of others with sufficient concern. This is the essence of compassion. It is natural for sensitive beings to try to avoid contact with the unpleasant or try to ignore it, and when we perceive the suffering of others, we often shut it out because we find it too awful to contemplate or too distant to be of immediate relevance to us. At the other extreme, some mistakenly believe that out of compassion they have to suffer in the imagination. However, the real purpose of compassion is to galvanise us to do what we can to help alleviate their condition, not to be uselessly debilitated on their behalf and appear to care without lifting a finger. The proof of compassion lies in the action rather than the feeling. When there is really nothing that can be done, we might still have confidence in the ultimate justice of a loving God.

Is this the Ultimate Paradox?

If God created all things, did God create evil? In the light of our earlier discussion, I believe this may be more a 'play on words' than a real question. Nevertheless it has been a controversial issue for many theologians.

First an important point needs to be clarified. Good and evil are not *created* in their own right. They are 'evaluations' which cannot exist apart from the possibilities they describe. It is we who have made abstractions out of them and given them an imaginary life of their own. One is reminded of the biblical story where 'God created [the universe] and saw that it was good.' He did not create 'good', but used his discernment to evaluate what he had created. There is a further argument to support this view. If we believe that God is good, which is upheld by the Scriptures, then it becomes nonsense to say that he *created* 'good', for it would imply that prior to that he was *not* good. The same reasoning must apply to the abstract quality of 'evil'. A more reasonable interpretation of the question, therefore, is whether God is the origin of evil possibilities, and whether God is the creator of evil phenomena in the world as we know it.

Perhaps a fruitful perspective may lie in the distinction between reality and possibility. It may be reasonable to say that God is the origin of all that is possible, however, it is arguable that the possibilities in themselves are not creations as such, but part of his eternal knowledge. As a sensitive being, he can evaluate each of them, which is consistent with the biblical implication that God 'knows both good and evil'. There is, nevertheless, a vast difference between knowing a possibility and making it a reality. In line with the teaching that God is love, it can be argued that he never initiates anything that leads to inevitable involuntary suffering. However, in creating other 'free and sensitive' beings in his own image, he had to give them a measure of power and access to a *range of possibilities*, otherwise freedom is meaningless and the potential for good experiences would be severely limited. There is nothing inherently immoral in *knowing* how evil could be done, and indeed it is probably essential. If love requires freedom, and both of these are necessary for the greatest good to be achievable, then not only do we need to know what we *may* do, but also what *must be avoided*. In other words, effective discernment

also requires us to be aware of what causes harm, and this is true in almost every professional field. The unavoidable price is the human power to do evil by choice. Thus God is not responsible for evil in the world, except to the extent that his pursuit of the ultimate good involves a necessary risk that we might reject his guidance and set in motion an undesirable chain of consequences.

The Role of Temptation and ‘the Devil’

Until now, any reference to Satan has been deliberately avoided so as not to cloud the issue of human responsibility. Some religious traditions attribute the origin and existence of evil to Satan, or the Devil. However, this view is fraught with problems such as the implication that some spiritual being (created by God) could invent a possibility that was unknown to God. This, of course, is absurd. It is more likely that Satan and his followers, like us, were exposed to a variety of possibilities and made a choice. Nevertheless, the biblical story that Satan’s temptation originally misled mankind is not being disputed.

In the context of our discussion, a temptation is essentially an attractive opportunity that ought to be resisted because it could lead to involuntary suffering, perhaps at a deeper level and possibly for other people. To be a genuine temptation the opportunity must have perceived advantages, especially when the risks are denied, disputed or minimised. It is accompanied by a misleading form of persuasion which could originate from anywhere including spiritual sources such as the Devil, our own desires or other people with sinister vested interests. Any evil-doing logically assumes the presence of some kind of temptation, but regardless of the source of persuasion, no person can divest himself of the responsibility for his actions. ‘Temptations by the Devil’ may be a partial explanation for the presence of evil in the world, but never an acceptable excuse.

Conclusion

Whatever explanations we offer the existence of suffering and evil still remain among the great mysteries of life. Perhaps it is no more puzzling than why we should be able to feel *good*, or indeed, be conscious at all. Nevertheless, the greater the evil as we perceive it, the more we are inclined to wonder at its meaning and question the existence of a loving God who would allow such things. However, it is equally reasonable to suggest that if there is such a God, he is a sensitive being who is not only acutely aware of each individual person’s suffering, but is also likely to have much farther, broader and deeper vision than any of us who may be inclined to jump to conclusions.

Chapter 5

EMOTIONS

Emotions are a form of 'feedback' to the person who is feeling them. They provide him with information. They are either pleasant or unpleasant aspects of their 'state of consciousness' at the time. They are also significant motivating forces.

Phases

From an elementary viewpoint, the life-cycle of a particular emotion could typically be described in the following way: In the first phase, an external situation arises about which we receive information. This is interpreted through our Values, Reasoning, Learning, Experience, Belief system, Sub-conscious 'conditioning', and innate factors that collectively make up our 'internal situation'. The outcome is an emotion or feeling. In the second phase, the emotion may lead to action. In the third phase, the action usually results in an altered situation, and thus the cycle may continue.

In the first phase, the connection is always automatic as it must be, however it may be changed by working on any of those internal factors which can be modified. For example, if we value something less our feelings will not be so intense when it is threatened. If we learn more and increase our ability to handle certain situations, they may not evoke the same emotions. Faulty or simplistic reasoning can also influence our perception of the situation at hand. The feelings are the result of our *perception* of the situation in relation to our values, rather than the objective situation itself.

In the second phase, the connection with action may be automatic but it does not have to remain so. In cases of domestic violence it usually is, while in skilled international diplomacy it never is. It is interesting that the more one has been trained to take the longer, broader and deeper view, the less automatic this connection tends to become.

Emotions and Health

Feelings or emotions are very strongly connected with a person's total well-being which includes the Mental, Emotional, Spiritual and the Physical aspects of life. The connections are easily demonstrated:

- a) Ask someone who is 'madly in love' to concentrate on his studies.
- b) Try having a satisfying sexual relationship when you are disgusted with yourself.
- c) See the meaning in your life when you have just suffered a gross injustice. It is much more difficult.
- d) Ask any medically trained professional whether he can predict the likely physical condition of a person who is always angry, disappointed, jealous, suspicious or 'pissed off'.

There is no doubt, therefore, that some emotions can be harmful if they persist for any extended period. These particular emotions are usually labelled as 'negative'. Rather than get bogged down in the definition and meaning of 'negativity', I prefer to take a pragmatic view based on the long term effects of certain emotions on people's total health. Collective human experience has progressively revealed most of the emotions that tend to be debilitating, growth-inhibiting and conducive to longer-term unhappiness. A gross mistake, however, is made if one draws the conclusion that these emotions are useless. It is like labelling a wrecking bar as 'useless' because its only application appears to be destructive. To quote from the Scriptures, "there is a time to build and a time to tear down; a time for war and a time for peace..... and a time to every purpose."

The so-called 'negative' emotions are like sirens sounding a warning that something needs to be changed, either externally or internally. Either way, what we need to do is to work towards diminishing the feelings by rectifying whatever triggered them off, and not simply by disconnecting the alarm!

As in most other aspects of human behaviour, perversion is also possible. We may have vested interests in maintaining any aspect of our lifestyle that could eventually do us harm. Feelings of hatred, envy, anger, fear and so on, are powerful motivating forces that can energise and provide a sense of purpose in the short term and may seem more attractive than a vacuum or the less familiar 'harder' way, and they have been used by skilled manipulators and blind followers since ancient times. Their effects can, however, be insidious and unnoticed until it is too late, and often the person is ignorant of the connection long after the damage has been done.

Rectifying the Situation

The problem of undesirable feelings can be confronted by internal or external strategies:

Internally:

- Re-examining our values.
- Examining the validity of our beliefs and superstitions.
- Developing more critical reasoning. Disciplining ourselves not to jump to conclusions.
- Expanding our knowledge in the relevant field through education. Expanding our repertoire of responses to a range of scenarios.
- Broadening our experience with similar types of situations with a view to increasing our confidence in handling them.
- Understanding the innate and subconscious factors at work; this may require more professional assistance.

Externally:

Assuming that internal changes are impossible, inappropriate or inadequate, such as when there are real and reasonable grounds for fear, it may be

necessary to take external action. When there is a fire in the building or a robbery is taking place, it is certainly not the time to delve into the subconscious or undertake further courses. Here, for example, the fear may be alleviated by escaping from the situation. If time and circumstances permit, a more thorough and methodical approach can be taken. This includes-

- Verifying the accuracy of the external information.
- Questioning our assumptions about the situation if any conjecture on our part is involved.
- Attempting to change the situation by more gentle means, for example, persuasion, manipulation or bargaining.
- Attempting to change the situation by stronger force.
- Withdrawing.
- Weathering the situation and waiting for it to change by itself. This requires a conscious decision to accept and tolerate rather than resist.
- Focusing on damage control.

The list is by no means exhaustive and a number of these tactics may not be possible or successful in particular cases. However it is extremely unlikely that some healthy combination of internal and external approaches cannot be found that will remove the undesirable emotion.

Some situations could induce strong unpleasant emotions and contribute to our growth at the same time. For example, having to fly terrifies some people but it also allows them to expand their horizons. Here the behaviour is not perverted for the person does not have a vested interest in maintaining the fear. What distinguishes these cases is that the person consciously accepts the unpleasant feeling as the price of having the other benefits he is seeking, and it becomes a rational trade-off.

‘Good’ Feelings

It is not often recognised that ‘good’ or ‘positive’ feelings may also warrant more critical investigation in the same ways internally and externally. In themselves they are unlikely to injure our health, but the decisions and actions they appear to reinforce might not be justified and could be harmful. Cigarette smoke in the lung may lead to a pleasantly relaxed feeling, but we know what it causes in the long term. A girl may feel loved after receiving a friendship ring from a boy she is interested in, but this feeling is no less influenced by of her values, beliefs and reasoning processes than any other emotion. If it is not based on ‘truth’, including knowledge of its significance in *his* cultural context, then her feelings may be giving her inaccurate information that could lead her to making a fool of herself or getting hurt.

Expression and Communication

We are often encouraged by mental health professionals to express our feelings, and in as much as this highlights the harmfulness of repressing or denying them, it contains sound advice. Clearly, however, not every way of showing our emotions is socially acceptable. Likewise they advise us to

communicate or 'share' our feelings with parties who have a stake in them, especially those who are close to us. This too can be beneficial, but as a policy, it is not necessarily appropriate in all circumstances, and even when it is, the timing needs to be considered. In both cases, we must remember that the feelings are speaking principally to **us** and in deciding to express or communicate them we have to weigh up the overall costs and benefits of doing so. It has long been recognised that controlling the expression of one's feelings is vital in positions of command, negotiation, games that involve tactical advantage and potentially volatile situations that can escalate out of control. The important thing is that we must never deceive **ourselves**. In this context, it is also important to distinguish between reservation and the intentional deception of other people. The latter is a serious moral issue that must be resolved by each individual in his conscience, but to go so far as to equate reservation with lying is seldom justified. We are in no way obliged to make a public open book of ourselves and we are well within our moral rights to reveal what we wish to those we trust. Even Christ was often selective in this respect and advised similar prudence. Spontaneity, whatever its benefits, is not equivalent to wisdom.

Chapter 6

FREEDOM

Freedom may be **defined as the lack of externally imposed restraints on the will**. These restraints may be imposed by other people, social systems or the laws of nature. Freedom is not simply present or absent but a question of degree and it is essentially meaningless unless it is qualified by 'to, from and for whom', thus freedom is **relative** rather than absolute. However, the total amount of freedom in a more **general** sense is also meaningful.

Types of Freedom

Positive freedom or 'freedom to' focuses on **objectives** which a person wishes to achieve or preserve. **Negative freedom** or 'freedom from' focuses on **obstacles** (to objectives) which a person wishes to avoid. In both contexts, freedom exists to the extent that the will is not frustrated or restrained with respect to objectives. Whilst distinct in terms of their perspectives, positive and negative freedom is inseparable, for every positive freedom *to* achieve objectives eventually implies the freedom *from* insurmountable obstacles and every negative freedom 'from' presupposes a reason that entails some objective.

Relativity

Freedom is both relative and general. It is relative to each specific objective, as the will may be less restrained with respect to one objective than to another. For example, a paraplegic may be freer to speak than to move. Freedom is 'general' in that it increases with the total number of objectives that are simultaneously or alternatively attainable.

- Freedom is related to the number of possibilities available in any decision situation. If there are fewer than two options, no freedom exists and there is no decision to be made.
- An increase in freedom in one direction may necessitate a reduction in freedom in other directions. Opening one set of possibilities may mean closing others.
- Freedom is inversely related to the amount of **conflict** (incompatibility) in the set of objectives being pursued.

Freedom and Power

Positive freedom necessitates the possession of power (abilities, resources, and information/knowledge). Where no power exists, no such freedom can in fact be exercised regardless of the number of options and the availability of unlimited legal or moral sanction.

Negative freedom concerns obstacles (to objectives) that may or may not be related to the power exercised by *other* people. For example, freedom from pain is the absence of one obstacle to the objective of comfort. As such, it is a negative freedom that is not necessarily connected with someone else's use of power. However, freedom from the threat of arbitrary arrest implies limits to the powers of police. When goods are 'free of charge', the term 'free' have a specialised commercial definition and like many scientific and mathematical usages have no connection with personal freedom.

Our freedom is related to the power of other people to control (install, enforce, remove) obstacles to our objectives. In most cases, our freedom is increased when they use their power benevolently and reduced when they use it malevolently. Restraint and negligence in their use of power likewise can affect our freedom. **Threat** reduces freedom in that another person uses his power to introduce a conditional obstacle to one of our objectives. The result is a conflict where two objectives are now seen as incompatible where previously they were not, and thus the total potential for achievement has been reduced.

Freedom and Suffering

If **suffering** lies in the frustration of the will, a major part of the **feeling** of freedom lies in the absence of suffering. It follows that the feeling of freedom and the intensity of suffering can be altered by controlling the will. The Buddhists achieve this through avoiding craving [attachment to objectives]. Other religions teach patience [limiting the will or sense of urgency to remove obstacles and achieve objectives]. In this way, the person who is imprisoned or handicapped can potentially have as great a sense of freedom as anyone else. It is also true that factors that form obstacles to one objective may open up possibilities that might otherwise be closed, so they do not necessarily reduce the total amount of freedom present. For example, the handicapped person might avoid being drafted for military service, retaining more control over his own life. Beethoven composed his greatest symphonies when he was totally deaf because his loss of hearing also 'freed' him of the distractions of external sounds.

Feeling and Reality

Although a strong relationship exists, the **feeling** of freedom is distinct from the **reality** of freedom. The person who has no desires can have a feeling of complete freedom without having any power, but he is in reality less free than the person who has some power and a feeling of frustration.

Truth

A biblical quotation states that 'The **truth** will make you free'. Falsity, error, deception, inconsistency, contradiction and ignorance may have power and potential in a limited sphere, but nothing lasting or dependable can be built on them. Their possibilities are shallow, narrow and short term and tend to

destroy themselves or be destroyed when extensively tested. Truth tends to be more subtle, but more comprehensive and opens up vastly greater possibilities. There will always be fewer truths than possible falsities in much the same way as there will generally be fewer correct answers than possible 'wrong' ones, but they open up infinitely more avenues for further development.

Fear

Freedom is related to **fear**. Fear is generally focused on real or imagined obstacles to objectives. Fear increases with the perceived possibility of the obstacles occurring and is reduced by confidence that we will have the power to overcome them. This fear is enhanced or diminished by how much we are attached to the objective in question. Fear can have several crippling effects, one of which comes about as a result of devoting too much of our limited power to insuring against *some* anticipated possibilities leaving little power to achieve anything else, sometimes even the focal objective itself. For example, a person could spend so much on safety equipment for an adventure holiday that he can no longer afford the fare!

Need and Strength

Your perceived **need** is another person's power to the extent that he is able to satisfy that need and you are not. In this way, the magnitude and variety of your needs (fixed objectives, requirements) reduces your freedom. This is also evident from another perspective: The extent to which your fixed commitments consume your limited resources (power) directly affects the flexibility you retain.

Strength and power are connected, but distinct. Power is the ability to achieve or avoid and tends to be outwardly oriented. Strength, on the other hand, is the ability to preserve and tends to be inwardly oriented. Your freedom increases with your strength because it reduces the ability of external forces to affect you. A stronger person is and feels more 'secure' and therefore needs less power to control the behaviour of others because he is less affected by their actions. He therefore also has more surplus power to direct towards objectives other than self-preservation.

Between people, their powers and strengths can combine to increase or reduce freedom depending on whether the relationship between them is cooperative or competitive.

The Existence of Freedom

There is an on-going philosophical debate regarding whether real freedom actually exists at all. Some argue that it is an illusion and that actions are pre-destined or pre-determined by genetic factors or social conditioning. While these have been shown to alter the probability of certain choices being made, they are not sufficient to offer a complete explanation. The existence or

absence of fundamental freedom as yet remains unresolved. What is becoming increasingly clear; however, is the difference between the freedom of choosing between known available options and the ability to create ones own options with true originality. Rational choice can only be made with reference to values, objectives and criteria. To this extent, it could be argued that the choice itself has been pre-determined. However, this only shifts the question of freedom to the next level but does not resolve the problem. Here education, experience and a host of other factors play their part, but cannot predict the adoption of values (etc.) with certainty. Once again, while attempts are made to penetrate deeper and deeper, there are only theories and arguments but little solid evidence.

The ability to create original options may be regarded as a higher level of freedom than choosing from what is offered. Nevertheless, the same types of problems tend to arise. If the created option is rational, then one might argue that it was essentially predetermined. One could hypothetically try to work back through a long chain of causation hoping to find the point at which true freedom existed, only to have to explain an 'original cause'. Alternatively, one could reject the idea of causation and attribute the creation of the option to pure chance or some kinds of random processes along the lines of evolution. Can we then suggest that the person is actually the free creator of the idea or the slave of some natural process? Either way, we are stuck again.

Whether the existence of freedom can ever be proven or is destined forever to remain an article of faith, the concept is intellectually and emotionally attractive and socially both useful and expedient. Without the concept of freedom, the principles of democracy would lose most of their credibility and without the assumption of freedom the notion of responsibility becomes severely weakened if not crippled, and the entire legal system threatens to break down. Initiative, creativity, voluntary cooperation and a sense of responsibility are among the idealistic cornerstones of much of civilisation. All of these hinge on the concept of freedom.

If one assumes that true freedom does exist, a reasonable question to ask is how much freedom is possible, where and of what kind? Other than to assert that total freedom cannot exist in the universe or in any part of it, there is no fixed answer. However, the issue will be given further consideration later.

Personal Freedom in Society

Many people are critical of the explosive growth of **legislation**, even in ostensibly democratic countries, and its perceived encroachment on seemingly every aspect of daily life. Part of this is the necessary outcome of technological progress, which continually opens up further possibilities. Before the advent of automobiles there was little need for a comprehensive traffic code, and since every new device brings new possibilities, both beneficial and harmful, some additional form of guidance and control usually becomes necessary. Such regulation, when considered in the light of the new options that have become available, does not necessarily constitute an overall decrease in freedom.

So where has freedom really suffered? Every objective requires the input of a combination of **personal resources**. Among these are time, energy, attention, enthusiasm, health and partner cooperation. None of them are perfect substitutes for one another, and no human being, regardless of his material wealth or intellect has an unlimited supply of all of them. For the average person, they are all more or less limited. The severest controlling factor in any pursuit is the scarcest necessary resource. Personal freedom suffers more through the progressive confiscation and subtle drainage of these personal resources than from any increase in police powers or external threat. An expanding supply of available options can never compensate. The outcome is a little like trying to plan a holiday with more destinations on offer than ever before, but less fuel in the tank to go anywhere.

It is true that some of this is due to personal mismanagement and **self-enslavement** through greed, gullibility and fear. Skilful marketing makes us feel we need far more than we can ever use: We are told what to want and we end up with little left over for anything else, sometimes a lot of debts and often a feeling of deprivation. We have become less care-free and more risk averse with the hype on safety, security and protection, all of which not only reduce the range of acceptable options but the resources available to pursue them.

The **'system'** makes its own contribution to our individual depletion. The growing trend towards unreasonable litigation forces us to take ever more extensive measures to 'cover our arses'. The increasing imposition of complicated auditing, compliance and accountability processes, whilst hard to criticise, can only be implemented by diverting scarce resources from other objectives, and beyond a point becomes highly counter-productive altogether. Information overload and the lack of assistance with evaluation only leaves us more burdened and confused. Emphasis on economic rationalism, globalisation, competitiveness and 'efficiency' often lead to longer working hours, so we might earn more but almost invariably have less time to do other things we want. The accelerating pace of change, increased crime and social unrest contribute to a growing sense of impermanence and insecurity. In as much as all important decisions usually involve some assumptions about the future, confident planning becomes more difficult despite a greater number of options being available. Where a person has 'had enough' and wishes to opt out of the hassles of modern life, he finds that the system has been 'sewn up' and there is no such place as 'elsewhere'.

The **issue of equality** in freedom also has a prominent place in modern social thought. For better or worse, it is an observable fact that personal freedom is not uniformly distributed either in quantity or kind. This is hardly surprising, for human abilities vary widely and natural resources are not evenly spread. In every form of society, including the democratic, the greatest power and freedom has always belonged to those who are able to organise themselves to defend their interests and control the resources. Any deviation from this must be consciously designed and artificially maintained. While equality of freedom is promoted 'in general terms', complete uniformity is neither possible nor likely to be desirable. In any case, the very heterogeneous nature of the concept makes the total amount of freedom possessed by an individual extremely difficult to quantify.

Optimum Freedom

As pointed out earlier, unrestricted freedom cannot exist. In any case, it is evident that stability and predictability are also necessary and desirable. Paradoxically, it is the limitation of freedom in nature (it must obey certain physical laws) that gives us the freedom to build. Inanimate objects do not move about totally randomly; iron, wood and plastic do not spontaneously disintegrate without warning and our bodies retain their shapes at least in the short term. The greater part of science is devoted to discovering predictable patterns for the purpose of extending our power, and the extent of our freedom when working with an understanding of the 'laws' of nature is vastly increased precisely because they do exist. Law in society has a similar purpose, and while the optimum amount and distribution of freedom is debatable, it is clear that the ideal does not lie at either extreme.

From the perspective of happiness, perhaps there is some *ideal* amount of freedom for each individual. Too much freedom can lead to chronic indecision and inaction if the person 'does not know what he wants' at a higher level and has no basis on which to make a choice. This is particularly noticeable with children and retired people who are mostly known to thrive on a good measure of imposed structure in their lives.

The need to optimise where freedom is concerned is evident also in the amount of 'freedom trading' that people do. For example, in becoming an employee, one surrenders the free use of part of one's time in exchange for an income, which provides freedom of another kind.

In relationships, the desirable extent of freedom usually needs to be determined at the interpersonal level. Agreements between people (contracts) and promises are the voluntary surrender of some freedom in exchange for other mutual benefits, and in all personal relationships the optimum balance between *interdependence* (which requires degrees of predictability) and *independence* (freedom) must be worked out between the parties involved. Again, experience shows that neither extreme is workable.

At the individual level, the wise person will place *voluntary restraints* on his own behaviour so as to maximise some long term good and avoid the prospect of his freedom being extensively curtailed. In short, he tries to keep out of jail and hospital except for visiting purposes. The reality is that he is *always* free to pursue *any* objective within the limits of his power and his willingness to accept the consequences. At the same time, he is *never* free from the necessary consequences of doing so. In this way he must strike a balance between his 'freedoms to' and 'freedoms from'.

Why Have Freedom?

Without *meaning* and purpose in one's life, freedom has little ability to contribute to happiness. A person must first *have* objectives before freedom has any value, unless all he wants is to experience the feeling of being

unburdened. The pleasure in that lasts only until the pain of directionless emptiness sets in. Freedom is a useful means but a useless end.

Without meaning, knowledge, wisdom and character - particularly a sense of responsibility, freedom is extremely destructive. It is never an ideal that can stand alone.

Morality

Freedom in the use of power implies proportional **moral responsibility** for all the effects and side effects of its use or failure to use it. By the same token, whatever laws and commandments may be imposed on a person from above, his moral accountability can never extend beyond the limits of his freedom.

Some Observations on Slavery, and Conclusion

Perhaps slavery is seen as the most extreme opposite to freedom. In terms of social progress, we are tempted to praise ourselves for the abolition of terrible evils such as forced child labour and the slave trade, and countries endlessly celebrate the overthrow of tyrannical governments. It is undeniable that in many ways the world is different now because of these changes. However, slavery is just as 'alive and well' today. It has merely altered its form. The ball and chain of iron may have been removed. Other forms of tyranny such as oppressive legislation, inadequate opportunity, extremes of wealth and poverty induced by economic systems geared towards the organised exploitation of one group by another and martial law in various countries still remain. New forms continue to be invented. Fewer people are being manipulated by perverted religion and many more by an equally perverted marketing machine, so the slavery of induced guilt feelings has made way for the slavery of addicted self-indulgence, orchestrated fashion and peer pressure. We find ourselves victims of the 'paper chase' and the proliferation of bureaucratic hurdles. We become trapped in the increasingly hectic pace of modern life and the endless juggling of over-commitment. People are no longer legally bought and sold. They sell themselves out of greed and desperation.

Are we more or less free than people ever were? Perhaps the more important question is not 'how can we be free?' but 'how free can we be?'

Chapter 7

BY INVITATION

Human beings were never meant to live in isolation. They all have a desire for some degree of involvement in the lives of others, and for many, getting to know another person intimately is one of the finest joys of living. Within most people there is a craving for a sense of belonging – to be on the inside of someone else's world rather than forever on the outside looking in. Often people enter a committed relationship in the hope that it will satisfy this yearning. They anticipate that everything will be shared including relatives, friends and even personal thoughts and that they will be totally included. The relationship seems to promise guaranteed access to something they need, and they are surprised and taken aback by unexpected resistance and reservations.

To understand this problem, we must suspend any preconceived ideas about 'marriage', 'relationship' or 'partnership', and view the situation as nothing more than individual **people** who are just being, doing and feeling.

Privacy

Most of us feel much more comfortable, less inhibited, more free and less burdened doing some things without certain people present or indeed anyone else involved at all. We must have our '**space as a person**' into which other people enter only by invitation. There are times when we don't want to be advised, criticised or even observed or feel a need to adjust our behaviour to the presence of another. We would like that to be accepted and respected and we are not accountable for why we *feel* this way.

When we welcome another person into that domain, it is because we anticipate their presence to be good for us. The person will be gentle and non-judgemental. They will not even be constructively critical unless we ask them and they will respect us regardless of what they learn. Otherwise we will keep them at a distance that is safe and comfortable, often for their sake as well as ours.

The Deeper Issues

'Distance' is more than a physical dimension; it includes time together and the circumstances of contact. Even more important is the degree of interdependence that is allowed and the extent to which thoughts, feelings and personal information are revealed.

Among the central issues motivating distance are power, strength and comfort. Knowledge is a form of power, and it is not unnatural to resist handing it to another person who has not earned our trust. The greater the 'distance', the less the power another has over you, that is, the ability to

threaten, coerce, manipulate, force and intentionally influence what is known to be important to you.

Strength and comfort are the other side of the equation. Strength is not power, but the ability to maintain one's integrity or sanity despite the forces to the contrary. The stronger we are in a particular way, the easier it is for us to expose that area of our lives. Weakness, in this context, is limited robustness rather than lack of power; it is the ability to get hurt. It is often the unavoidable price of sensitivity, which is vital for any level of effective functioning. In short, the need for these areas to be protected is why animals have skins, humans wear helmets (and psychological masks), computers have casings and houses have walls: The insides ought not to be unduly disturbed by external forces. Entry is restricted and necessarily selective. Wisdom does not allow a sledgehammer wielding moron into a watch factory! The more sensitive, delicate and vulnerable the area, the more good sense suggests erring on the side of caution as far as access is concerned.

Openness

This is not a debate on the relative advantages of being open or closed. It recognises a person's need to be *both*. It is an assertion of his freedom to choose who enters his private domain and how far. There is a point beyond which no institution, tradition or relationship, including marriage, grants automatic entry, and that point is determined by the individual. If their partner has conflicting expectations in this respect, then the relationship was not sufficiently clarified in terms of accountability before the arrangement was entered into. The question of whether another person's 'boundaries of privacy' are justified, reasonable or even feasible within our perception of the relationship is best avoided by taking a pragmatic approach. Open conflict in this area is a war that is already lost.

There is another side to the willingness to allow others their privacy. To extend this 'freedom' we must have our own independent strength. There must be a quiet confidence in our own resilience. We also need to be able to trust the other person's character. If we cannot do this, we are either dealing with the wrong person or we are unsuited to them.

Circumstances will often limit the amount of physical privacy that is possible. Here it becomes even more vital to respect the other forms of 'space', and to *be* the kind of person who is welcome.

We should not delude ourselves with myths like, 'an honest person has nothing to hide,' or 'married couples must be totally open with each other in everything.' A wise guru once remarked that to be truly close we must maintain a little distance. No relationship is a licence to intrude beyond the accepted ground. Perhaps that will be extended as a deeper trust is earned but we should strongly resist the temptation to force our way in if we don't want to be shut out even more. As people, we have a natural desire to be intimate and included, but we must be perceived by the other person to be safe and worthy to enter what they regard as their private world. Entry is by invitation only.

Chapter 8

MEANING

Philosophers have been contemplating the purpose of human existence and the meaning of life probably since before the dawn of recorded history. The topic is not new; its importance is profound and its implications touch the core of personal motivation. The following discussion reconsiders the subject from what may be a more tangible perspective. It begins with an examination of the concept of 'meaning' and its relativity. We then place this into the context of the individual person's life and his most basic desires. From there we move to the realities of day to day living and the problem of finding the right vocation where the importance of honesty is highlighted. Finally, the subject of ultimate meaning and the paradox of freedom are considered.

The Concept of Meaning

Nothing has 'meaning' in isolation. Whether it is an event, an object, an experience, a feeling or a human life, its **meaning can only be found in its relevance**. The further its relevance extends, the more meaningful it can be. Some examples may clarify this: A 'symptom' in itself is superficial. Its meaning lies at a *deeper* level where it may indicate an underlying medical condition. The significance of an earthquake lies in its *broader* relevance to what may be destructively affected, and in its implications for *future* human behaviour.

Meaning is relative. There is no such thing as unqualified relevance, only relevance *to something for someone*. From an employer's point of view, the meaning or purpose of our presence lies in the contribution we can make to his objectives. To a low income earner, the meaning of a fall in the price of necessities lies in its relevance to his survival. A rise in interest rates will have one meaning to a person repaying a housing loan and another to the speculator on the stock-market.

These principles apply equally to a person's daily life. To have meaning, it needs to be relevant to the future he desires; benefit other people or things that he cares about beyond his immediate self, and do more for him than produce superficial sensations. A sense of meaning in our lives is clearly important to our happiness. But paradoxically, it is the relevance of our activities to our own and other peoples' extended happiness that makes them meaningful!

Feelings, Motives and Practical Realities

In daily life, we tend to be less analytical and simply pursue our values. However, as we begin to seek a greater depth of happiness, the quest for meaning may start to emerge as a conscious desire to feel that we are doing something 'worthwhile' that brings a sense of **internal satisfaction**. Often it

is associated with 'being needed' or 'contributing' something that is regarded as good and reinforces our feeling of **self-worth and self-respect**. Some obtain this from seeing their children mature; others undertake adventurous activities to challenge their self-reliance; many professional people seek the admiration of their peers and those with business ambitions have their own visions of what it means to be respected. While the objective is rarely of global significance, it always has **more in it than their immediate narrow superficial prosperity**.

So what specifically should a person be doing to make his life meaningful and feel that it is worthwhile? It becomes a question of 'work', not as in 'earning an income' but in terms of '**making some contribution**' to someone's greater happiness somewhere, even if only indirectly. A number of people are fortunate in developing an awareness of their mission at an early age; while for others the process may involve further learning and taking an interest *beyond* their existing boundaries of awareness.

The Importance of Self-knowledge and Realism

It is vital to get to know ourselves and our natural abilities, and this requires us to venture far enough to begin to appreciate our potential and our limits. Identifying our work has little to do with adopting a lofty heroic image of ourselves, for such thinking often ends in frustration, disillusionment and ruined health. The viable avenues open to us depend on several factors including our natural abilities and our learning. These can be expanded, but at any given time they have their practical boundaries. Although countless biographies have been written showing what can be accomplished despite severe handicaps, everything must still be done within the limits of the available time, energy and resources. The difference must always be kept in mind. The right work will be nourishing in that we enjoy doing it. It will not be boring or debilitating and we look forward to more of it. At times it can be tiring, beset with problems and border on the impossible, but these do not diminish our conviction in the value of what we are pursuing. To be meaningful, our work must above all be **effective** in making progress towards something that is valued. That cannot happen unless there is a **connection between idealism and realism**. It is not a case of one or the other. We *must* combine both.

Honesty

Meaning and motivation are also intimately connected. People working in certain fields may prefer to see themselves as operating from higher and nobler motives. However, often they are 'brought down to earth' when something reveals the more mundane rewards on which they unconsciously depend to sustain their enthusiasm, and their illusion of 'selflessness' disintegrates with considerable trauma. People who seek 'higher values' in the religious or humanitarian sense are perhaps more prone to this, particularly when they are not honest with themselves and have an inadequate understanding of human nature and attainable ideals. People who appear to be looking for deeper meaning with 'pure and selfless' motives

must accept that they are in fact never out of the picture, nor is it *possible* for them to be. Whatever our religious convictions, there is considerable practical wisdom in the ancient Scriptures which command us to 'love our neighbours *as ourselves*'. This represents the purest *attainable* motive to which we can aspire and anything 'even more noble' becomes self-defeating. A person can assess how deep or shallow his crucial values are, by asking himself whether he would continue to do the activity if there were no material rewards and no-one else knew who was doing it, but even if the answer is a truthful 'yes', at the deepest level he is still the recipient of some personal benefit that sustains his drive. It is vital to accept this reality, for it does not diminish meaning but is essential to it!

Ultimate Meaning

There is a saying that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and perhaps this applies most strongly to the subject of meaning. Sooner or later, most of our activities reach a point where they have fulfilled their purpose. The children have grown up; the business is profitable; the mountain has been climbed; the book has been published, and we may find ourselves searching once more. We drink, but we get thirsty again. We look for ***something permanently nourishing*** that will never leave us in a vacuum.

The ultimate meaning of existence is one of the deepest philosophical issues that is rational only at the most fundamental level in a universal and eternal context. Regarding the meaning of the universe, one must necessarily ask, 'to whom?' If we do not believe that some sensitive 'person' will continue to exist, then arguably the very essence of meaning is impossible. The same questions arise in relation to the meaning of our own existence. No human being has a proven answer, and the explanation becomes entirely a matter of faith. It is therefore appropriate to touch on the relationship between meaning and religion.

Every major religion offers an explanation of existence and human destiny, and generally pursues the common objective of seeking happiness. They differ only in the basic realities they assume and the methods they emphasise. The Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions attribute the origin and purpose of the universe to God and teach that ultimate human happiness is to be found only with 'Him'. They challenge believers to make it their primary mission to become the kinds of people God wants them to be, and help others do the same. Together with Buddhism and Hinduism, they seek to promote what is conducive to growth, harmony and good experiences by defining essential virtues and issuing strong warnings. For those who have religious inclinations, the following perspective may be useful, however, this view of meaning depends on belief in a personal God and the promise of eternal life, and such convictions cannot be forced on anyone.

It could be suggested that the reason why we were made is to learn to work with one another and our Maker to explore the possibilities of the universe, and enjoy the process of doing so. This is consistent with our on-going curiosity and instinct for happiness. In this, we are part of the 'means' and also part of the 'end'. As well as their personal relevance, the basic elements

of happiness, namely *development, unity and good experiences* have an external dimension that is social and universal. As much as they are essential to *our own* happiness, they are no less vital for every *other* person and equally important to the Creator of the universe. This extended individual consciousness is necessary if the whole is to work in harmony, and appears to be why humanity was given the greatest two commandments, to love God with everything we have, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Within their reasonable interpretation we have extensive freedom, and exploration was intended to be an exciting process of learning and creativity, with each step further expanding the opportunities.

Freedom

The search for meaning is unfortunately confounded by two inescapable realities. The first is the fact that we must live and operate largely in the darkness of our own ignorance. Individually and collectively we do not know enough about the universe of 'existence and possibility' to give us any tangible direction or clear future. The second is the paradox of freedom. If ultimate meaning lies in the future, as it must, and we want it made clear and tangible, then what control can we have over it? We cannot have a full measure of both freedom and externally defined meaning at the same time. We cannot hold on to our freedom without the responsibility for the creation of meaning falling back on us. The best we can do is to give up a little of the first for some help in the second.

We create meaning by ***making a commitment***. We exercise our freedom to *bind ourselves* to some chosen objective. We confront our ignorance, accept the risks and participate in *making* the future. How do we know that our efforts will not be ultimately futile? We don't. We may seek assurances and guidance, and in the process, trade off a little more of our freedom in the hope of achieving a comfortable balance. This is essentially what most religions do to varying degrees. Personal preferences can range from the one extreme of rejecting all external guidance, to a belief system that offers a dogmatic explanation for everything and usually involves some rigid prescription in every detail of life. The choice depends to some extent on how much freedom and responsibility the individual feels he or she can handle.

Conclusion

Meaning, like beauty, lies mostly in the eyes of the beholder. It is we who must see it or believe in it. In so far as it connects us with a 'future' towards which we want to make a contribution, we must also take some responsibility to create that meaning through making commitments. In other words, if we cherish the freedom to have a say in our destiny then it is up to us to determine our aspirations and *make our work relevant* accordingly.

If the quest for meaning is to be more than idle contemplation it has to be ***transformed into action***. Some have no difficulty in finding the 'right thing to do', while for others it may take the whole of their lives. The fact that a person seeks it honestly and does his best to live by the highest moral

standards he knows, ensures that his life has meaning as long as he believes that there is a place for him in the future and he appreciates the importance of doing his part towards becoming in character what his conscience directs him to be.

The meaning in our own lives is influenced by what we personally believe in, hope for and are sensitive to. It is these that help motivate us and give us the sense of purpose that we have. It also depends on our faith and confidence, for there is much that happens which we do not understand at the time. We should never leap to the conclusion that something is meaningless just because we cannot comprehend it. Frequently this applies to suffering and anything that one may regard as unwelcome. The young child who must undergo medical treatment and the soldier who endures abominable conditions in the trenches usually cannot see the deeper, broader and longer-term picture. Like them, we may often have to place our trust in someone who we assume knows more than us.

While meaning can be contagious as many have found in the company of inspiring people, it is not directly transferable from one person to another. ***Each must find or create his own.***

In the final analysis it comes down to this: If we don't believe in anything and care about little except our immediate selves then meaninglessness is inevitable, for ***the meaning in our lives is only ever as big as we choose to be.*** It will always be limited by what we *take* an interest in, how much we are prepared to *be* a friend and how far our love extends.

Chapter 9

MOTIVES

It can be argued that in most of our relationships with other people, their hidden motives ought not to concern us. It would seem that this attitude is economical in energy, pragmatic in forcing us to concentrate only on whether the result is good or bad for us, non-judgemental and avoids endless guesswork with a high probability of being wrong whatever conclusion we draw. The simple fact is that we cannot reliably penetrate another person's mind and even if they tell us their motives in plain language, they may be lying or unintentionally deluding themselves. So why do we often take an interest in the other person's private motives, and when is this interest reasonable?

One practical reason why this interest is natural is that an insight into a person's motivation helps to make their behaviour more predictable, and given that we assess the motives as honourable, it facilitates trust and brings with it all the benefits that greater openness can provide. Certain types of interaction necessitate a high degree of trust because of the risk and vulnerability involved and we want to assure ourselves that the person into whose power we place our interests is worthy of that confidence.

In possible long-term relationships, we have good reason to enquire into the other person's motives whenever they are relevant to our interests. If your motives for marrying your partner are dominated by financial security, then they have legitimate reason to be concerned about what you might be likely to do if they were out of work for an extended period. One must however, be careful not to unduly over-simplify the situation, for the attraction may be driven by love and sex *and* security, and provided we can guarantee the last of these, the entire package may be acceptable. Parallel examples could be drawn from the business environment, politics and international diplomacy.

The other person's motives for interacting with us carry implications regarding our own value to them. It makes a difference to us whether we are seen as an opportunity for financial profit or stimulating company. We have a preferred image of ourselves and we would like this to be affirmed, at least in those relationships that are important to us and we do not want to be 'used', especially in a way that suggests a personal value that is less or different from what we place on ourselves. Conversely, what we believe about ourselves tends to be strongly influenced by the way we are treated by those who are important to us, and the implied value the underlying motives place on us. It is important to be wanted for what we want to be wanted.(!!) In other words, we would like the other person to value us as we would like to value ourselves.

We can also be very sensitive to how we do *not* wish to attract interaction. When several motives are present and one of them is questionable, it may be perceived by us as contaminating the whole relationship. We cannot be sure that it is not the dominant motive, or perhaps we simply have an aversion to being seen in a certain way. In either case, if this involves a significant person in our lives it can lead to feelings of doubt, suspicion and disillusionment

about the relationship or even about ourselves. Whether these are justified or not is a different matter.

Where we suspect that pretence, ulterior motives and hidden agendas are relevant to us and likely to be involved, considerable risk may exist and guarded caution could be appropriate depending on how vulnerable we believe ourselves to be. The price of that, of course, is paid in forgoing the joys of intimacy. By contrast, if the motives are eminently transparent, the situation becomes much simpler.

Unproductive as it may be to conjecture the covert motives of every person we deal with, there is considerable benefit in the study of human motivation in general. It is important to understand one's own motives in depth and to appreciate the possible range of motivating factors behind people in different situations. To do otherwise would be to approach life with a very naive view of reality, and leave oneself open to ruthless exploitation. On the other hand, it is not necessary to suspect everyone of operating from motives that are unfavourable to us, for such a cynical view can cripple our relationships and in any case is not very often correct. The more healthy approach is to recognise our own ignorance in the beginning of any interaction and allow time to reveal the other person's character, giving them progressively more trust as they earn it. If circumstances incline or require us to trust a person we do not know, then we must be mature enough to consciously accept the risks and take the responsibility.

The foregoing discussion was concerned with the deeper motives that may lie beneath the surface. However, it is always prudent to have the other person clarify their practical expectations of us very early in any cooperative relationship regardless of whether it is personal, business or otherwise. Even where a role has been defined by tradition, it is not generally safe to assume that the other party is aware of all the customs or accepts them. Expectations ought to be clear and open at every stage and failure to make them so can jeopardise an otherwise potentially fruitful partnership. (This is especially important in 'business' dealings between people who are also otherwise intimately related, for much more is at stake.) In most cases the reasons for these expectations can be discussed openly and unnecessary secrecy tends to breed a disturbing counter-productive atmosphere.

Expectations can be seen as 'motives' of the most overt kind and are usually lawful, reasonable and superficial. An employer's foremost motive for hiring us is to have a job done effectively and that broadly defines his expectations. Beneath these there may be a long chain of deeper motives which may or may not be relevant to us. One must ask oneself how deep is it worth digging?

Chapter 10

POWER

What is Power?

Before any meaningful understanding of power can be developed, a clear distinction needs to be made between power and strength. The confusion of these concepts arises partly from their similar positive connotations as desirable qualities, and from the fact that the notion of 'weakness' is seen as the opposite of both. In other words, the terms 'powerful' and 'strong' tend to be used interchangeably, particularly in the business, political and military context where 'weakness' is regarded as a derogatory label.

We can define **strength** as the ability of a person or system to maintain its integrity in the face of onslaught by an enemy or the environment. In this respect, the concept may be associated with robustness, resilience, durability, stability, security, invulnerability and damage control. Strength is not defined by what the individual or system can do to others, but by what adversity it can take.

Power is very different. It is the ability of the individual or system to carry out its external intentions in its environment. It is measured by the effect it can have on others. In contrast to strength, it tends to be connected with force, pressure, dominance, manipulation, threat, influence and aggression, as well as benefit, assistance and service.

Some qualities are applicable in both areas depending on whether they are focused internally or externally. Stamina, assertiveness, competence and control are clearly valuable for both purposes.

The Dynamics of Power

Your need is another person's power. It puts the person who is able to satisfy it into the position of giving or withholding and being able to exact a price whereby they may require you to do something or refrain from doing it. The most obvious example is when you need money – it empowers your employer to control your work. This principle applies regardless of whether the context is commercial, personal, political, military or otherwise.

In any bargaining situation there is an exchange of wants or needs. The balance of power in such situations is fundamentally determined by the relative intensities of each party's needs, but is modified by each other's relatively competitive or monopoly positions and a large number of environmental factors such as custom, law and familiarity with the exchange game. The other person's power will be diminished if you can also satisfy your needs elsewhere or if your need appears less urgent than his.

Power is relative to objectives. No source of power is universally effective, but more or less limited to a range of objectives. This follows from the principle that anything can be made to happen if and only if the necessary conditions on which it depends can be created. To the extent that each objective requires different conditions, your power may or may not be able to create them. Your gun may persuade a beautiful woman to kiss you but it cannot make her love you, and there are things money can't buy or all wealthy people would be happy.

Power is complex. It may appear simple at the top of a chain of command, but the real power lies not only in the person who sets the objective or supplies the money but in his entire support system. It is usually necessary to bring together several different elements that mostly cannot substitute for one another. Among these are support, knowledge, information, leadership (which includes character, intelligence and wisdom) and a considerable variety of professional skills and material resources.

The Use of Power

All power can be used to do good or to do harm. It is impossible to have one without the other. The only way the likelihood of one application can be increased and the other reduced is through incentive, motivation and education. Power, of course, must be removed when the likelihood of doing harm becomes unacceptable, but then the potential good must also be forgone.

Power and Responsibility

An inseparable relationship exists between power and moral responsibility. No person can be held morally accountable for anything that he is powerless to do or prevent. Attempts are continually made to circumvent or pervert this principle with convenient abstractions and skilful manipulations of language. Among these are concepts such as 'collective guilt' and 'responsibility by association' which are often employed in attempts to justify highly questionable strategies in the pursuit of hidden agendas. Such 'concepts of expediency' are regularly used to defend terrorism and pre-meditated exploitation, the latter being well illustrated by Aesop's fable of 'The Wolf and the Lamb'.

The justice system becomes perverted when legal responsibility is separated from power. Obvious examples are cases where parents are held responsible for the misdeeds of their children in a society where parental authority is systematically undermined and deprived of effective community support. Conversely, government agencies and publicly owned services are often deemed 'not legally responsible' for any unwelcome event suffered by an individual regardless of the real cause.

Politics and Power

In theory, political power should be based on lawful authority; however, in practice this is not always necessary and is never sufficient. **The real basis of political power is support**, and without this, even legitimate decisions cannot be implemented. Politicians depend on support to get into positions of authority in the first instance, and then rely on the support of 'the system' to enforce their rule. Support cannot be demanded, but must be bought by a variety of means. Typically it will be acquired by delegating some of their authority, making vote-catching promises, exchanges of support, giving favours with 'sticky strands of obligation', making money payments and offering other forms of reward depending on the established customs. Constitutions and other established rules may set criteria, processes and boundaries to control the possession and use of power where society operates according to the 'rule of law', but even these institutions continue to operate only as long as there is sufficient support from those who possess more fundamental power in the form of real resources. That is forthcoming only as long as the establishment upholds their interests in turn. Certainly, idealism and high principles have a profound influence on how individuals use their power, but in the political arena they are still forced to trade for support.

Some Observations on Power

The items below attempt to capture and define some phenomena connected with power, or highlight a few important relationships. They are presented concisely without explanation or discussion. Other valid descriptions are also possible.

- **Respect** implies that a person will place voluntary restrictions on the direction and use of his power. **Mercy** is voluntary moderation in the use of power in the pursuit of justice. **Love** may be seen as the intentional use of power to do good.
- **Freedom** is governed by the interaction of power, strength, independence, interdependence, need and value. The more we think we need, the more power is given to those who can fulfil them and the less freedom we have. Interdependence tends to increase collective power and individual benefit at the cost of reduced individual freedom. Independence does the opposite.
- Our inward sensitivity when combined with fear reduces our strength. Our outward sensitivity increases our power in that we become aware of needs in others that we can help satisfy.
- **Threat** is the communicated willingness to use power against another under stipulated conditions. However, it betrays an internal conflict and reluctance in the one making the threat. Threat originates from the desire to use power without diminishing it, paying the price of using it, or revealing that one does not have it!
- **Deterrence** is the believable readiness to use one's power to control the willingness of an opponent to use his own power in certain ways. It differs from 'threat' in the sense that it is a passive rather than active use of power.

- People who are frustrated with their evidently 'weaker' position in relationships often confuse strength with power. As a consequence they may act in a forceful and aggressive way that does little to hide their vulnerability while severely detracting from their otherwise attractive qualities. In contrast, those who know their inner strength generally have less need to put on an outward show of power.
- **Morality and ethics** exist entirely within the framework of power, for we can never be reasonably judged except in relation to the way we use the power we possess.
- The power to destroy is always greater than the power to build.
- People who are attracted to positions of power nearly always find that they have much less power than they anticipated. Their power and position is highly dependent on support which must be bought at a price.
- Power is the ability to cause or prevent change. All decision making and power are oriented to the future.
- Power of one kind is traded for power of another kind depending on the values we place in priority. It is often sold for convenience and comfort.
- **Bullying** occurs when the party with the greater power uses it to make its will prevail over one who has less power simply because it can.
- Every person will inevitably be under some form of control because society cannot function effectively otherwise. If we learn to control ourselves, we keep more of our power and freedom. If we fail to control ourselves, our power and freedom will be taken away and others will control us.

The Realities of Personal Power

As with natural abilities and social opportunities, power is not uniformly distributed among human beings. Some will inevitably have more than others. Those who are accustomed to abundance may err in the direction of behaving as if they are invincible and develop blindness to their vulnerability. At the other extreme, many develop feelings of powerlessness with a strong flavour of fatalism. The truth is that none of us is omnipotent nor are we totally without influence. However much or little our power may be, we have no licence to disown it. We must use it to make a difference no matter how large or small.

Chapter 11

SECURITY

For better or worse we are sensitive beings. Sensitivity is the basis of fear and the desire to defend. Ever since the legendary Adam and Eve tasted from the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' people have been trying to protect themselves with a variety of means from fig leaves to space-age systems.

Basic Concepts

Sensitivity lies at the heart of the security issue. It is sensitivity that enables us to appreciate beauty and distinguish it from ugliness; know the difference between good and evil; to like and dislike; feeling pleasure and pain. Without sensitivity we could have no values and preferences. There would be no internal criteria on which to make fundamental personal choices and whatever freedom actually existed would be meaningless. Sensitivity is not a simple thing. If it were, we could never grow, develop and experience the joys of in-depth understanding. We would never get any fun out of building something complex and making it work. It is sensitivity that enables us to 'experience', giving rise to a huge variety of feelings ranging from the explicit to the very subtle. The dictionary is full of them from anguish... to ...zeal.

It is both natural and rational to **try to preserve what we like and to seek to prevent what we do not**. This is the basic motive behind the pursuit of security. It is also here that the situation becomes complex and often confused. To begin with, our knowledge is imperfect and unsophisticated and our ability to discern the harmful from the beneficial is very underdeveloped. The crude protective measures we implement also stop much of the good from getting through, and they are very limited in their ability to resist the full range of possible assailants.

Security is a term which is vastly **more meaningful when it is qualified**. First we need to be more specific in what we are attempting to protect or prevent. Blanket statements such as 'protect ourselves from harm', are reasonable but unhelpful: We may as well be asking for a padded cell with impregnable walls! Security is a matter of kind and degree. For every measure that is taken against one possibility, there will be forces it cannot resist and other possibilities against which it is ineffective. One is reminded of the knight in shining armour who escaped death from a hail of arrows only to be knocked off his horse by a low branch he did not see in time.

Secondly, security is both a question of **reality and perception**. The reality is that bad experiences do happen to people and the world can be a dangerous place. However, it is known that the average person can see more violence on television in one evening than he is likely to observe in the real world in his lifetime. The possibility is very real, but the probability in fact is incredibly small. By contrast, the incidence of home burglary is very high in some areas and so is marriage breakdown, yet many people behave highly optimistically

leaving their homes wide open and their relationships neglected. The point is that one's perception and feeling of security, or the lack of it, is often inconsistent with the reality. Our feelings of insecurity are strongly influenced by our experiences to such an extent that most people who suffer a misfortune will thereafter grossly exaggerate the probability of it happening and take extraordinary precautions. Others will underestimate their vulnerability because 'it has never happened' to them. A schoolgirl once boldly asserted in a debate on unreasonable restrictions, that she has lived fourteen years and in all that time she had never once been attacked, raped or murdered! The perceptions of security and insecurity are highly prone to distortion and manipulation and billion dollar industries thrive on our fears as a vehicle for selling their solutions.

The duality of perception versus reality is also reflected in the formal study of security. The **objective science of security** involves the complex interplay of power, skill and support; threat, risk analysis, planning, resources and damage control; strength and weakness; system integrity and vulnerability; cost and benefit; information, knowledge, predictability and insurance. It focuses on the *reality* of security and its problems. The **psychology of security** considers values, aims and objectives; fear, anxiety, trust; image and perception; faith, courage and confidence; needs, wants, preferences, attachment, dependency and belonging; and philosophies on security. In general, it deals with the personal issues related to the *feelings* of security and insecurity. Let us state from the outset that neither of these lists is exhaustive, however there is a strong relationship between them, particularly as the reality can have a powerful modifying influence on the feelings and these will, in turn, affect the actions taken.

If we examine any hypothetical situation that involves something that we wish to preserve or avoid, our reasons for wanting to do so may be immediate or more remote depending on whether they are **ends** in themselves or **means** to something else that we value directly. This is the difference between protecting ourselves and our money. The money is only a means to an end, and we must first have learned the connection before any sensitivity can attach itself to it. Our lives are a complex network of means and ends. In the quest for security, every 'end' we wish to protect may require a chain of 'means'. For example, the preservation of privacy requires confidentiality which needs a cabinet that must have a key in a secure location that is protected from unauthorised access ... and so on. At each stage the more vulnerable must be protected by the less vulnerable, the more valued by the less valued. If not, the necessary chain of protection would be irrational and never ending, nor would it serve to diminish our anxiety, but only transfer it to something else. One can be unwittingly caught in a situation where the total cost of protection is greater than the value of the item we are trying to protect.

The Subjective Assessment of Security

Let us assume that there is something particular that we wish to preserve. This item can be material or abstract and can include objects, people, relationships, ideas, prospects, in fact anything we may value.

Our sense of security in relation to that item will be increased by -

- Our *power* to protect it.
- The *resources* available to us to repair or replace it.
- Our *skill* in handling threats to its integrity.
- The *strengths* and robustness of the item.
- The number of *backups* that can act as substitutes.
- Our confidence in our *ability to cope without* it.
- Any perceived fall in *threats* against the item in terms of possibility or probability.
- Our *familiarity* with the environment of the item.

Our sense of security will be diminished by -

- Our *sensitivity* (attachment) to the condition of the item.
- The *weaknesses* and vulnerabilities of the item.
- The extent to which the effective loss of the item threatens something we value even more.
- Any perceived increase in *threats* against the item.
- The *cost* in real and opportunity terms of restoring the item.
- Our *doubts* and uncertainties about anything that has a bearing on the item, such as its robustness, the existence and intensity of threats, our ability to defend it, our ability to restore it or cope with its loss.

Permanence and Maintenance

There is a saying that the only constant in life is 'change'. It contains an element of truth, but it is not universally correct. Permanence is a continuum that varies from the short-lived to the everlasting, and any item can be located somewhere within this range. A butterfly is nearer to the most transient end while the laws of physics are much closer to the other. In general, the more fundamental the item is, the less conditional its existence and the more enduring and permanent it will naturally be. Less fundamental things can be *made* permanent only to the extent that it is possible to maintain the necessary conditions on which they depend. This is particularly notable in human culture where it is said that around ninety per cent of activity is *maintenance* – trying to preserve naturally impermanent things that we value. It involves a continual expenditure on restoration or renewal until the resources run out or the motivation ceases.

The issue of permanence is highly relevant to the pursuit of security from the economic point of view. The more fundamental and deeper our values, the more permanent and less vulnerable they are and the less resource draining their maintenance will be. Correspondingly, the greater will be our sense of security.

The Feeling of Insecurity

What makes one person feel more insecure than another?

Differences in:

- Values, needs.
- Sensitivity - innate and learned fear.
- Specific life skills.
- Internal resources - health, energy reserves.
- Marketable skills - ability to earn support.
- External resources and support in relation to needs.
- Their experiences of vulnerability,
- Knowledge, understanding & perception of environment.
- Religious beliefs.
- Learned attitudes - suspicion, cautiousness, orientation to competition versus cooperation, optimism versus pessimism versus realism.
- Control of thoughts and imagination.
- Robustness of self-image and identity - humility.
- Confirmed belonging, acceptance and affirmation by others whose relationships we value.

Belonging and the Sense of Security

Belonging to a supportive group, particularly if it is accompanied by unconditional acceptance, is likely to make us feel that there are more resources available to us to protect what we value and more 'willing support' we can draw upon to handle any demanding situations. In this, it diminishes our feelings of 'aloneness' and the pressures of self-reliance. The knowledge that we are contributing to the group may subdue any doubts we have about ourselves and our abilities, and make us feel that we have a 'legitimate' claim on their assistance when we are in trouble. It provides a form of security in its own right in that it helps to satisfy our need for stable relationships. Being a welcome part of such a circle allows us to accept our idiosyncrasies and explore ourselves more deeply in a safer setting. It provides on-going confirmation of the validity of who we think we are and our 'value' as people. This, in turn, increases our confidence in ourselves. Like all systems, however, it can induce its own dependency, possibly inhibiting the development of security at a deeper level. The ideal is clearly a proper balance between interdependence and independence.

Dependency

Total independence in providing all of our needs is not realistically possible in modern society and even if it were, people cooperating will always be able to achieve a higher quality of life than each in isolation. In an interdependent society, a major part of our security will necessarily be conditional. We must 'purchase' most of our material and social needs by contributing something of comparable value. While we are able to earn an income, material security is rarely a problem. Not all of our social needs, however, can be bought with money and their satisfaction may require special characteristics and skills to attract the desired attention from the right person. Such is often the case with establishing intimate personal relationships. If we fail, as long as we are emotionally mature, we generally learn to live without anything we cannot have.

The problem of dependency arises when a person lacks confidence in his ability to replace something or someone that fulfils a need, and cannot see himself living at a tolerable level without it. Such a relationship is dominated by excessive attachment based on fear. Often it degenerates into a power struggle involving deception and manipulation through which the very thing they want to preserve is destroyed. Dependence is natural and socially acceptable where, due to circumstances beyond his control, a person cannot contribute enough to society to afford the basic necessities of life. Where dependence is based on personal insecurity as distinct from inability, the problem requires deeper investigation with a professional approach.

Security and Meaning

In any adventure there is risk. We are necessarily operating in a situation which we perceive to be comparatively insecure at least in some respects, otherwise it would be difficult to regard it as anything more than continuing to explore our comfort zone. To induce us to get involved, the adventure must offer us hope of gaining something of greater value. In other words, it must be meaningful to us in some way. The greater the meaning, the stronger the motivation and the higher the risk or insecurity we are willing to accept. This 'insecurity', however, has an important difference - it is taken on voluntarily and is more superficial than the values being pursued through the adventure.

Meaning and security are also related in a deeper way. A consciousness of meaning in our lives, especially when it is associated with making a contribution through useful work, reinforces our self-respect, and thereby helps us to feel more secure in our self-image and identity.

While a sense of meaning offers security of a kind, security does not provide meaning. Basic security may help us to pursue things that are more meaningful, for it is difficult to focus on broader, deeper and longer-term visions when all our resources and attention are taken up with our immediate survival. However, security itself does not guarantee that we will do meaningful things. In fact, our attachment to it can have a strong tendency to inhibit a potentially more meaningful life. The histories of all major religions are full of pertinent examples, not to mention the biographies of many of our heroes.

Some General Observations on Security

The Reality

- Perfect security does not exist. There will always be a need for some faith.
- There is always some point where the pursuit of security is the cause of its own demise. We can add reinforcement to a system until its own weight kills it.
- Greater security at a more fundamental level will diminish our need for security at a more superficial level.
- Security is essential to any building process. It is largely for this reason that we pursue science: We seek the unchanging permanent stable

principles and relationships because they help to make our environment more predictable. It is also part of the reason why we make laws, including the law of contract. Stability and predictability increase our sense of security.

- All security is a trade-off and a compromise. Increased security against one threat may reduce security against another. The benefits of protection must also be weighed against the benefits of openness.
- We seek both permanence *and* change. We are prepared to give and sell but we don't want what we value to be *taken* from us without our consent. We can enjoy change on a foundation of permanence, but not the other way.
- Trust is earned and rationally given when there is evidence of loyalty and competence in the person we seek to trust. Unearned trust involves the voluntary surrender of security in the hope of gaining something we value more.

The Feeling

- Our feeling of insecurity will be influenced by the extent to which things that are important to us are dependent on factors beyond our control.
- The combination of dependency, lack of control and a perception of impermanence is particularly conducive to a feeling of insecurity. We feel more powerless in a changing and unstable environment. An increased pace of change adds to the feeling of impermanence.
- Perceived disorder or unpredictability in a system upon which we are dependent, will increase our anxiety and feeling of insecurity.
- Our feeling of security will be influenced by our belief in the benevolence of the future.
- The feeling of security is related to faith, hope and the awareness that we are loved by someone who knows our needs and is able to provide them.
- Two people with the same level of perceived real insecurity may have different levels of anxiety associated with it.

Behaviour

- Reluctance to undertake adventure may be the reluctance to move to a position of comparatively greater insecurity.
- We are willing to pay to be relieved of our feeling of anxiety and insecurity. The insurance industry thrives on our craving for security.
- We may be 'settlers' in some respects so that we can be 'pioneers' in other respects - reckless in some areas and risk shy in others.
- The pursuit of security is based on fear. The problem is that the devices we use to protect ourselves and what we value can severely inhibit greater happiness. They can curtail our development and experiences. In our anxiety to avoid becoming worse off we also stop ourselves from becoming better off. Protection is necessary, but it is fruitful only when used with discernment.

Security and Religion

Human nature is such that the quest for security and 'peace of mind' always extends beyond the immediate present to the limit of our hopes. Whether the

possibility of eternal life is accepted with conviction or dismissed as wishful thinking, the interest in the prospect can rarely be denied. For these reasons, the various religious perspectives are perhaps the ultimate responses to the human quest for security. Most religions offer advice on the subject at various levels from the material to the spiritual, and much of it may be of practical value regardless of one's individual belief system.

Chapter 12

TOWARDS WELL-BEING

The principles that follow, in my experience and observation, provide some of the important keys to personal well-being.

Avoid negative attitudes such as resentment, anger, self-recrimination, envy, jealousy, hatred and bitterness over injustices done to you. Avoid preoccupation with unpleasant, morbid and fearful thoughts. Pleasant thoughts make happier people.

Listen with interest to all your feelings, both positive and negative. They are conveying valuable messages. Do not try to cling to them nor be in a hurry to escape from them.

Have faith and confidence in the good things the future will bring. This is a strong antidote to much of our anxiety, panic, desperation, fear and oversensitivity. It fosters patience and tolerance. Beneficial changes are the product of work, not worry. Be willing to work at making changes, especially within yourself.

Take the initiative. Investigate. Recognise the need to take calculated risks and avoid an obsession with security. Use courage wisely. Make use of the power you have, however little it might be. Maintain some independence for flexibility when you are interdependent with others. Keep the initiative and try not to part with it unless you have to. This reduces the frustration of unnecessarily having to wait for others to act.

Seek the truth. Accept the truth about yourself, your abilities and limitations. This is the essence of humility. Recognising that no human being is the centre of the universe helps place your very real importance into perspective.

Avoid over-commitment of your resources. Your time, money, energy, attention, and other people's abilities and willingness to help are limited. It is a strain to maintain a perpetual juggling act.

Develop a realistic sense of responsibility; know for whom, in what, and to whom you are accountable. Exercise due care, timely communication and action. Seek out those people and environments which are mutually

*beneficial. Get to **know** yourself and those affected by your behaviour. **Love** both with equal emphasis.*

***Be pragmatic rather than dogmatic in matters of morality;** don't disregard rules but apply them where they do 'good'.*

*Don't specialise and concentrate to such an extent that you abandon all links with reality; life and meaning lie in the whole, not in any isolated part. **Practise integrity** using all aspects of your nature, your intellect, your feelings, your instincts and everything else you have, together.*

***Examine your values;** they give birth to your aims and hopes, and it is into these that you place your efforts. Don't keep investing more into a doubtful value just because it has already cost you a lot. Beware of pride; it encourages values that are seldom conducive to happiness.*

***Do things properly** and in the appropriate order; never rush the groundwork or neglect the necessary preparation and maintenance. In the long term, this policy is always more fruitful, satisfying and economical in every respect.*

***Seek a balance** of activity with time to relax and reflect. However, don't be totally preoccupied with yourself. Look outwards and **take an active interest** in people and the things around you.*
