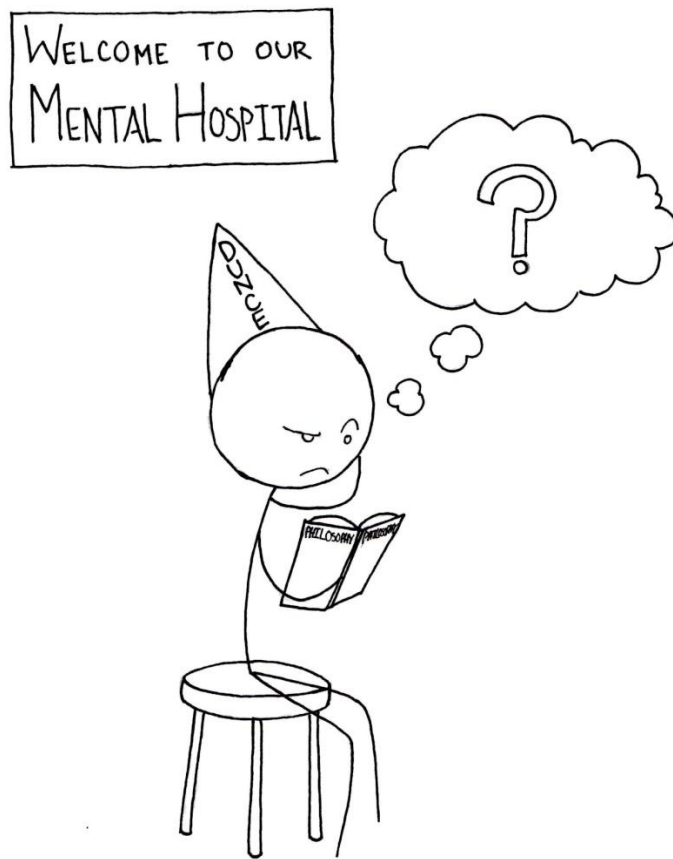


# A Most Reasonable Death



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## Foreword (Please Read)

This book may be said to be many things. One could call it a manifesto, a journal of ideas, an extensive suicide note, etc. I personally believe it to be an introductory philosophy book which is the collection of my philosophies on various issues. The intention of this book is to demonstrate that I am not crazy and that I am of sound mind and possess adequate mental competence equal to if not greater than the average person. I want to show that I am rational and reasonable in my choices even if I make mistakes and am wrong to commit suicide. Since suicidal persons are all too often written off as being incompetent or otherwise irrational, this book aims to thwart that viewpoint by showing how I have thought quite considerably and profoundly over many philosophical questions which I could not do if I were crazy, unreasonable, and incompetent.

**For readers who don't know a lot of philosophy or are not interested:** I highly recommend reading at the very minimum chapter 10 if you are someone who cares about understanding me the author. Otherwise, I also highly recommend chapters 8 and 9 if you don't wish to read the full book. I have tried very hard to make this book accessible to non-philosophers. However, you will find the first two chapters and sections 3.1-3.3 not so easily accessible in spite of my attempts. All other chapters I believe are readable for any audience regardless of philosophical background. I do recommend looking up any terms you are unfamiliar with though so as not to be confused on what you are reading about. You may also find it helpful to look into the sources I have used which can be found in detail in the bibliography.

**For readers with philosophical background:** I admit that I am not as skilled at writing a publically accessible book while maintaining a rigorous philosophical analysis as some such as Daniel Dennett or Shelly Kagan. If you are well-read in philosophy, you will likely find much of this book rudimentary and/or wrought with errors. You may also remark some areas of ignorance on my part regarding other works which discuss in fuller detail the topics I will be treating in this book. My apologies for these inconveniences.

**For all readers:** I invite you all to criticize my book as much as you can. Not all criticisms are good or valid, but please criticize away at any rate. Criticism allows others to learn from errors so as to avoid them in the future. You will find that I criticize my

ideas both in text and in my appendix entitled “Self-Criticisms” which I hope you might take a look at to see some potential weaknesses I have found in my own writing. All in all, I hope you can find something worthwhile from this book even if it’s just what not to think. Also, while I would like to demonstrate my own mental competency, feel free to deem me irrational, unreasonable, incompetent, or insane as you see fit. I merely ask that you do so with consideration of good reasons, justifications, and some understanding of my positions.

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother  
whom I love more than any other real person who has ever lived.  
May she find the peace, tranquility, and happiness she so avidly seeks.

## Special Thanks

I thank all the authors and organizations whose information I used to reference in this book. And I thank Olivia Hale for doing the cover art for this book. It's a superb rendition of what I was looking for.

I want to give a special thanks to all my favorite philosophers who have inspired me intellectually in so many ways including but not limited to: Pyrrho, Shelly Kagan, Bertrand Russell, Charles Pierce, William James, Michael Cholbi, Hilary Putnam, Daniel Dennett, W.V.O. Quine, John Dewey, and my favorite philosopher of all time, David Hume.

# Chapter 1

## Skepticism, Truth, and Pragmatism

### 1.1 Starting out

One needs to start from somewhere, as it would so seem. Philosophically, this may be done in a number of manners. For instance, one might take the route of Descartes and doubt methodologically to the point of solipsism (the position that one can only be certain of one's own existence and not of others'). Of course, doing so has certain problems. He didn't doubt reason itself. While he did doubt things like triangles must be three-sided and  $2 + 2$  must equal 4, he didn't doubt the idea of "If p, then q. P, thus q." One sees this, since he came to his conclusion of "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) since the implications thereof are that the law of non-contradiction must necessarily hold true so that one cannot truthfully say that the existence of doubts may be doubted. Putting aside that the cogito doesn't even validly prove the existence of an I (I personally favor Nietzsche's criticism thereof that Descartes presupposed the I, and the argument is thus viciously circular (1989, p 16)), even such a method presupposes background, i.e. one's reasoning faculties and at least some logic are necessary to use. Indeed it is as Neurath's boat puts it, that it would be absurd to take apart completely a boat on which one finds oneself at sea in order to fix it. The reason I find such an analogy so fitting, is that we must continue to act in our lives, and thus cannot put everything on hold at once. Instead, we must work on things piece by piece. Another reason in favor of this analogy is that we do not realize the boat is problematic until we have already set sail. In the terms of life, we do not see errors in our beliefs or ways of thinking or circumstances until we are of an age where we can come to such conclusions, by which time we have already begun to participate in social interactions, feelings, belief systems, and the like. A baby doesn't doubt whether it reasons well or even could.



So instead of starting from an absolute initial position, which may be impossible anyway, I shall instead start by analyzing reason and logic itself. It should be noted that everything I write and think, I try to do so under the philosophical position of fallibilism. Fallibilism can be described here as the notion that one can be wrong about any belief, idea, expectation, etc. In other words, there is always uncertainty and never pure conclusiveness. This also applies to itself. Because should fallibilism ever turn out to be false (i.e. that we can have doubtless knowledge), then fallibilism will apply to itself, demonstrating that it wasn't as universal as previously believed. Thus even if fallibilism should prove to be unnecessary in all cases, I am not doing anything contradictory now, since fallibilism can apply to itself without contradiction.

If logic is the way or perhaps mode by which we reason, then what can be said of reason itself? Logic, being a field of philosophy in which I have not much delved, is something I naively assume. When I begin to question my logic, such as "If a coin is heads-tails, and I see heads after flipping it, then the other side must be tails," I have no explanation for the actual reason behind it other than repeating the idea. Looking at "if p then q, p, thus q" one can accept the form and proceed to question why p and why q. What I am doing is to question the very format, the validity of such an assessment. Yet I can neither understand why it is that way nor can I refute it. I look at the examples of saying, (A) "If Tom is a cat, then Tom is a mammal. Tom turns out to be a cat, thus Tom is a mammal," or (B) "If it is raining, then Tom won't go outside, it's raining, thus Tom is not going outside." Be it a semantical syllogism as in A or a causal syllogism as in B, I agree to both conclusions but aside from the form itself I cannot give a more fundamental explanation as to why it should be an agreeable conclusion. So I have been put into a corner where my hands are tied and I must accept at face value that these forms are adequate, despite my lack of knowledge as to why. I accept logic and reason then, without asserting its universal truth.

Of course, naïve logic and reasoning can be a lackluster stance. Humans, for all their mental prowess, use heuristics, biases, shortcuts, fallacies, irrelevant appeals, etc. to reason, creating errors. Unless taught (including self-teaching), people tend not to be adept at logical puzzles or tests as I have found to be the case. So when I say I accept logic and reasoning, I do so as a filter of sorts. The better working a logical axiom works, the more I'll accept it. On the other hand, poor track records in methodologies, such as in logical fallacies, the less likely I am to accept it. Of course, I am a human with very

imperfect logical skills myself, and I fall into epistemic pit falls more so than I would like, but I do try.

A similar situation arises when I question certain axioms of logic like the law of noncontradiction. To be entirely fair, I don't believe I have the right to claim that it is necessarily impossible that A can be not A at the same time and in the same way as A is A, but I myself am unable to think in such terms fully. However, I can think in terms of A cannot be not A in the same time and manner and because of that, I do assume such a principle. The same goes for the law of excluded middle and the various laws of identity (such as communicative, reciprocal, etc.) among others. (I apologize for a non-exhaustive list, but as previously mentioned, I am no logician, and would surely fail at an attempt to list all necessary assumptions and logical forms I have as a reasoning human being. It also has little impact on my overall philosophy of death which is the main purpose of writing out these arguments in the first place.)

One can make the case that we learn about these rules. After all, I see that whenever it rains, Tom the cat stays inside. And I learn to associate rain with Tom refusing to go outside to the point that it becomes a learned induction and isn't necessarily true. Furthermore, I am taught that all cats are mammals, and the things people call cats apply to the description of Tom. This is a gross oversimplification of this kind of learning theory, but that aside, I still have some contentions. The question hasn't been answered as to how we come to formulate these very forms of thinking. I may be taught that certain things are cats, of which Tom is one, and all cats are mammals. But there doesn't appear to be any learning of one category encompassing another and if the former has X, then X is a part of the latter category. And again, I might strongly induce that Tom won't go outside if it rains, but there's no learning that an absolute correlation of raining and Tom not going outside means that raining necessarily excludes the potential for Tom going outside, since we never can come to such an absolute, and therefore there's an assumption. One might contend that with each time, the induction gets stronger and stronger, and upon analyzing the increase of strength, one can therefore just carry on the strength increase to the hypothetical of "if p, then q, p, thus q." But again, there is an assumption of the absolute case which one cannot make in conjunction with fallibilism and by virtue of the fact that learning is rooted in observation and we do not observe absolute conditions. Therefore my conclusion of logic and reason is that we must accept certain axioms (Ex. Law of noncontradiction) and

forms (if  $p$  then  $q$ ,  $p$ , thus  $q$ ) because we cannot think otherwise, which means we cannot communicate such ideas. And if such ideas cannot be communicated, then writing them on a computer would be a waste of time and effort at any rate.

This is not to say that learning is not a great part of the equation. Indeed, I believe it is through learning and memory and thought experiments (which one assesses through previously acquired empirical data) that the axioms become keener. After all, I must have learned through experience that “If Tom is a cat and some birds migrate in the winter, then Tom migrates in the winter” is wrong, or at least doesn’t follow. The skeleton structures of the validity of arguments seem to be partially unjustified and unlearned, but the inner workings thereof do seem to be contingent on having experience to base one’s assessments on. (I say “must”, but perhaps logic is innate. I doubt that, but I don’t disregard it completely either.)

Having my assumptions and forms in place, I then need to employ them. But in addition to these, there are other “activities” I cannot help but do. For example, I cannot help but observe, conceptualize, and extrapolate from my observations and conceptualizations. I should note that I am using the term “observe” extremely liberally here. At the risk of overgeneralizing, I will at this moment state that this usage of observe applies to any form of understanding, learning, or empirical gathering of information in the general sense. So if I see Tom jump and fall a lot of times as an infant, not only am I observing in that I witness such acts, but also my understanding of what’s going on (i.e. Tom, jumping, falling, and landing). The conceptualization would be something like my association creation or the increase of strength in inductions. Finally, extrapolations might be the conclusions I make in some cases. I understand these terms are fairly vague, and I haven’t well-defined them, which is a problem, but I hope it is nonetheless clear enough to see that the neurological processes of learning and belief forming are such that are just in my own nature, out of my control and unchangeable by my own will of determination, should it even exist.

I want to note here, that this simplistic beginning of an axiomatic version of truth theory says little to nothing about how the world actually is aside from my own limitations. Indeed, even if all of my axioms do not correlate to reality, it may be the case that I am still bound by them, as I couldn’t think outside of the manner by which I think, even if I could understand that I were wrong. This is what I’ve come to when I try to

make some sort of foundation for myself, if you could even call it as such, but I will put it back into question later on. But for now, I shall expand on my skepticism.

## 1.2 Pyrrhonian skepticism

What do you know? I cannot say the answer as readily as I might to the question, “What do I know?” I can say that I know that George Washington was the first president of the United States, that octopodes (octopuses) have eight arms with some exception room for genetics and environment, that the angles of all triangles have a sum of 180 degrees, that water is formed by two hydrogen atoms bonded to one oxygen atom, that I have a computer, that I am now typing, that I exist, etc. But for all that I say I know, I cannot shake off my doubts that any of these could be wrong. I’ve already touched upon fallibilism, but I want to present my skeptical position more fully.

So on the other end of the spectrum from knowing there is not knowing. Let us play around with the idea that we do not and cannot know anything at all ever. This is at least a contender for the most skeptical of positions to hold. I find that even if this were the case, and I do leave open the possibility that it may be, it cannot truly be held. To hold it would be to know something. Would I not know that I know nothing? There appears a contradiction which prevents this from being an attainable position, though that doesn’t mean it cannot be the case that it is nonetheless correct. Most people would then assume that not only can we know something, but if absolute not knowing isn’t possible, then we must know something. I am not convinced that this is the case. Still, it is very reasonable to believe that we must know something. After all, do we not all know that we do not know everything? I like to think that I know that I do not know everything. I have seen in books the number of kilometers describing the distance of the sun from the Earth, yet I cannot say I know the number, even if what I read was correct. But this knowledge that I do not know isn’t all that knowledgeable, in my opinion. The example I just used was purposeful. Up until now, I haven’t defined what I mean by “I,” “know,” and “not.” This is important, because if there is no “I” then “I” can’t really know anything. Furthermore, perhaps knowing simply requires possessing an idea which corresponds to reality. But this leaves open the possibility that I needn’t be aware of my knowledge to know something. So even if I can’t say what the distance from the sun is, I might still know it. From this, perhaps I could know everything, but not be aware of it. Now, I do not hold this position, as when I ask what somebody knows, I hope they are at

least able to recall their knowledge. But be wary, to require that knowledge be conscious in order to count as knowledge means that while you aren't thinking about Paris being the capital of France, you don't know it. Furthermore, I don't know what specifically distinguishes cats from dogs, but my lack of ability to express the difference doesn't mean that when I see a cat, I don't know it's not a dog.

So is there a middle ground to absolute not knowing and absolute minimal knowledge? I think so. My position is that I do not know if I know anything or not. I am uncertain about absolute knowledge, I am not even completely certain about my uncertainty. I cannot say all I do know, for I do not know of it, nor do I know that I do not know of it, at least not entirely. What I have just outlined is called pyrrhonism. Pyrrhonism doesn't state that knowledge is impossible, but it doesn't assume knowledge either. It pushes forth suspensions of belief. By neither asserting A nor its opposite, not A, one is able to detach oneself from the problem.

As you may have accurately remarked, for one who says I don't know things, I sure do have quite a bit to say. But please do not misread me. When I write, I do so under the mentality of fallibilism and pyrrhonian skepticism. If I say that I have come to the conclusion that the rules of the English language are arbitrary, that doesn't mean I do so with conviction. I am open to change my mind, as I have done ever so often up to this point. Anything I believe, I do so tentatively. Even my pyrrhonian skepticism is not written in stone in my mind, even if I use it every day to make sense of the world. All that I believe falls upon my fallibilism, which as previously discussed, is not with potential error itself. I do believe I have set up a highly universal, working skepticism.

But pyrrhonism doesn't go very far on its own. Merely not making assertions doesn't help with day to day necessities of knowledge. How might I, as a pyrrhonist, take a math test if I don't assert that "1 plus 1 equals 2" is unequivocally true? I think it's a trap we fall into too easily that action requires 100% certainty. I am not 100% certain that my favorite grocery store is still open. But that doesn't prevent me from going there anyway. I am content with going about my life using the probabilities from inductive reasoning. Some pyrrhonists maintain that probabilities aren't important, and that a pyrrhonist doesn't judge based on them such as Sextus Empiricus. While I can admire this kind of suspension, I like to think of myself as a practical person. So when I do something like take a math test, I will tentatively accept things, but not 100% and I find this to be a way

to still hold on to my pyrrhonism without forsaking the world around me. Besides, even pyrrhonists do things, and whatever they say to reason why they do whatever they do, their reasons mustn't be absolute, just reasonable, practical, convincing, or otherwise probabilistic for them. I suspect that anyone who denies judgement to such a radical extent isn't being honest with how they actually go about their lives.

Another factor in my thoughts which can be attributed to pyrrhonism is my general aversion of absolutes in my language. Throughout this book, you'll find several instances of me using words and expressions like "probably," "generally," "I think," "according to me," "I try," "it seems," "it would appear," and so on. These aren't all that necessary so long as one understands that even my most blatant of declarations are not without room for error. Nevertheless, I am more comfortable adding them in quite often to remind the reader of my position as well as to embody my ideas within my language.

One last thing I want to discuss specifically on skepticism is the importance of communication. Let's say I know how all of physics works, but I am unable to express myself in such a way that others can understand. I would not reproach others for not believing me. If someone starts talking nonsense, even if from that person's perspective they're telling the absolute truth, I am in no position to accept what they say. Effective communication is highly necessary in order to assess the truth of things. This is why I tend to dismiss notions I cannot effectively comprehend, potentially because proponents thereof haven't expressed the notions in a comprehensible manner. Moreover, I am skeptical that anyone has discovered or otherwise known the truth about things, because thus far, nobody and no idea have stood up to the highest levels of scrutiny. And even if we pinpoint someone or some idea and accept it as perfectly true and accurate, I can still maintain that at least the so-called truth in question has yet to be portrayed in a well communicated way. I do not believe all of my ideas will be as clear as others. Nor do I wish to come off as finding the best possible methodologies or ideas, even if imperfect. I don't think I'm right about anything. I just do my best and keep things tentative so that should I find something better, I can adopt the better of two ideas.

### 1.3 What is truth?

Now I have a foundation of certain beliefs, of logical forms, and of how I form beliefs the way I naturally do. It is now time to bring in talk of truth. What does it mean to be true? But perhaps first, what can be deemed to be true in the first place? Most

would agree that “The table is true” is at best, a poor description in English and a nonsense statement. Tables can’t be true, because true doesn’t describe tables. At least in English, true can describe sentences. Some philosophers argue that true actually describes the ideas behind the sentences, but even if so, there’s little harm I think in saying that on a communicative level, it is indeed the sentence, or proposition, which ‘true’ modifies. To be honest, I think it depends on whether ideas can be propositions, or if propositions are a product of the ideas, but cannot be in the ideas themselves. If the latter, I don’t think it’s fair to say that the word ‘true’ could describe the ideas themselves, since language seems to be a kind of substitute for the actual things and their going-ons. But this isn’t all that important. I just wanted to add it to show that I didn’t just assume that true only describes propositions.

Turning to observations of the world, I will now look at what constitutes a proposition as true or false. Let us first look at what is traditionally called analytic propositions, the simplest and generally least controversial of which are definitional and categorical truths independent on empirical observation. I have no problem saying that “A bachelor is an unmarried man.” And “An unmarried man is a bachelor” are both true by virtue of the law of identity (not precisely the axiom itself so much as an application thereof). But I would equally be in no quandary to assert that “A blarg is a five thuted flosh.” and “A five thuted flosh is a blarg”. I hope this clarifies that again, I have said nothing about the world in accepting definitional or categorical (an example would be, if Bill is a bachelor, I immediately agree that under the definition given above, he is an unmarried man) knowledge, since even though you have had experience dealing with men, marriage, and thus bachelors, you haven’t anything to base your understanding of blargs, floses, and thuts to verify my claim. But I still maintain that such a statement is true. The reason for this is (and this kind of contextual analysis will be reoccurring throughout) that within certain parameters, one can have absolutes. If I define blargs the way I did, then I can be absolutely correct in agreeing to the definition. These are tautologies, and thus no room for error. Moreover, nothing novel or useful comes out of them. If Bill is a bachelor, and I know this and have the definition of bachelor given above, then I would not learn anything new if someone told me that Bill is an unmarried man. This problem is relevant, as definitions appear to help with communication. I even weakly defined a few terms previously already in order to avoid miscommunications. But why should they be helpful if they give no novel situation? I think one way that definitions can help is if the two communicators are using different definitions. So if

Kate believes that a bachelor is a grey cat, then I would learn something novel (or at least be corrected of my mistake) if she told me that she owns a bachelor and I was puzzled as to whom she owns and what she's doing owning another human being in the first place.

Please do not mistake my view on analytical statements. I do not believe that they describe the world as it is. They needn't correlate to the real world at all. They may do so, as has math seemed to do very well, but you could sit in a chair and create a whole other math system with no relation to the world. I would still deem your new math true in so far as it is internally coherent. Definitions have no bearing on the world, because language as a whole doesn't. The rules governing the English language are metaphysically moot. This book could have been written in Japanese, or French, or Zulu (with room for translational differences). English needn't be existent at all! The world works just fine in non-English speaking regions of the world. Thus, when I talk of parameters to create absolutisms, those parameters separate the analytic from the world. Analytic statements are things of language, not of going-ons "out there." This is necessary to understand, because some people try to use definitions to prove the existence of things. I cannot define unicorns, souls, or a deity into existence. I can define processes or put a name to something observable, but observation does need to come first.

Also, I use the term absolute to describe analytic statements, but naturally, one might revise them if one sees fit, since they are only absolute in a non-absolute way seeing as they needn't be as dependent on the world out there as they typically aim to be in everyday language. You can define a cat however you want, but to communicate, a cat does have dependency on a certain kind of creature that walks about the Earth and meows. I don't always know how to use every word I use the way others do (for years I had the meanings of sympathy and empathy swapped). Besides, language changes over time as a whole. For all that, I still find analytic statements useful, as they are so abundant in language, which is why I include talk of them here. There is more to analytic statements. For example, I would say that "Water is H<sub>2</sub>O" can be both analytic and synthetic. If analytic, it's just a relation of words in English. If synthetic, it aims to describe the composition of water. However, I am trying to keep things as simple as I can here and won't pursue other issues in analyticity.



The interesting question regarding definitions is not so much are they true, because they by definition (interestingly, ironically, and perhaps even presuppositionally enough) are, but rather how do we get out of these self-inferential parameters? In order to talk beyond self-truths wherein there's no new information, we must take away the boundaries by making a references to something that the original subject is not. Thus, we simply need to relate something to something else. I believe this is the true nature of synthetic propositions (opposite of analytic, thus these can be about the world), that is, relating A's to not A's.

Let us look at an example. Julie states that her dog barks at people it doesn't know (and I am in the category of people it doesn't know). The relation here (and I don't mean Julie's ownership of a dog) is that between the dog's barking and the conditions therefor. Immediately, I don't know whether it is true or not. But what would it mean to be true in this case? Well, whatever it means, it has to be in accordance with my axioms, and there doesn't seem to be any incoherence in such a statement. But something is still missing. One intuitive response is that it must be what really or actually happens. If that's what's missing, then it's a matter of how reality is, and does the statement describe or correlate with it. I am skeptical of correlational theories of truth. One reason is because it begs the question, which deflationary theory shows (it demonstrates how correlational theories tend to show how propositions are true if and only if (iff) they are true). To say that the statement must correlate to reality is to say that it is true, but the original intuition is to say that true means it really happens. In other words, such an understanding defines itself and is a tautology, which I am trying to avoid. (Another reason is our detachment to reality as humans which is discussed in 3.1-3.3.) Moreover, it begs the question as to how we know what does and does not correlate to reality. So we cannot put the parameters onto reality itself.

Instead, let us make the parameters onto ourselves, that is, our very beliefs. That is, in a way, what I did with the axiomatic portion in relation to coherence. The way I do this is through pragmatism. A synthetic proposition is true iff the expectation of experience corresponds to the experience perceived through testing. So I can test Julie's claim by presenting myself to her dog. Julie is right if the dog barks at me, that is, she should be expecting to perceive the dog barking at me. Now, I go to her house and the dog barks at me in front of her. She *turned out* to be right. But notice how I didn't say "iff" a couple sentences ago. That's because the original claim was that her dog barks at

people it doesn't know, not just me. The claim held true in my case, but might not for my neighbor, whom it also doesn't know. And so, the openness of the claim prevents me from accepting it as absolute after just experiencing it for myself. And as one might guess, absolute certainty doesn't appear to be attainable under my personal pragmatic dictum.

I want to quickly dispel a few pseudo-problems. One might question what it would mean if Julie believes the claim but isn't around to experience the result. She might be willing to accept my word for what happened (for justification theory, see chapter 2) or might choose to set up a camera or other means of verifying what she couldn't first-handedly experience. Being empirical in one's methodology is precisely what I'm advocating, but in a particularly instrumentalist way. Another pseudo-problem is how my version of pragmatism can handle problems of experience such as optical illusions or times when our brains do not encode or retain information accurately or efficiently. If I make the hypothesis, "I will see a bend in the spoon when I submerge it partially in water," I would be right. But does this imply that the spoon bends? No, merely that I will see the bend. But then how might we come to the conclusion that the spoon doesn't bend? I could say "If the spoon bends when put partially in water then I should feel the spoon where I see it." And if I test this by putting my finger in the water and try to get the bended image of the spoon to touch the image of my finger, I will not feel the spoon and thus have debunked my hypothesis and can thus understand that neither the spoon nor my finger are bent in the water. One last pseudo-problem I will discuss here is how pragmatism accounts for non-binary truth propositions like the liar's paradox (This sentence is false). To understand why this has no bearing on my pragmatism, one must realize that this is not a synthetic proposition. It doesn't talk about anything beyond its own subject (i.e. this sentence). Therefore, it belongs to the definitional genre of propositions. And my axiom of noncontradiction disallows that this sentence be true or false. And I could easily call it non-true or simply undefined, but whatever I call it, I'd do so by virtue of giving the category a definition (for example, contradictory propositions) and putting propositions in accordance with my definition underneath the category.

I need to now defend my pragmatism from substantial problems. One serious question which arises is what do I mean by experience, test, and perceive. Experience (and perceive as a synonym) here means the sensation of the mind's conceptualization. Taking a cat as an example, my body observes by various means such as sight, hearing,

spatial-awareness, and the like and assigns the gathered observations to a generalized thing in my mind. I don't know the exact process, but from what little I know of human biology, I believe it's a matter of the biochemical functions of the nervous system. After all, the image of the cat which exists in my head (I experience/perceive) does not mean that the cat is literally in my head. It is a mere conceptualization of the cat. I could make a distinction between impression and sensation as did Hume, but I'm comfortable in just saying that there are varying levels of clarity depending on the state of the brain (like being drunk vs. sober) and memory (how well did you encode it, remember it, etc. Also just to dispel this now, it seems I presuppose here a correlational theory of truth when I just said "how well" but all I mean is if you record a car crash and you encode/remember it "accurately" then your mental conceptualizations would match your experience of rewatching the recording, which is my pragmatic axiom for synthetic propositions).

Testing also needn't be direct. Looking at how physicists have detected the existence of microscopic entities such as atoms, we can make an epistemology that uses inferences, postulations, abductive reasoning, and so on. If I have sufficient reason to believe that the nature of x, given that x exists causes some observable result y upon testing with certain measures, then by following the testing procedures and getting result y, we can say we verified x. This kind of indirect testing would require more thorough investigation, however. Since we are dealing with observations of effects and not the processes themselves, more careful consideration and corroboration among various tests are in order for indirect verifications, I believe.

The term incorrigibility is useful when I talk of this kind of experience. One may tend to call a statement incorrigible so long as the claimant is talking about a first-person subjective experience that the claimant believe is true and is speaking honestly about. I have trouble with this, because I want to know what is meant by "speaking honestly" and "believe is true" in this sense. After all, it seems problematic to say that incorrigible statements are always true when these terms are in the definition itself. Of course, one can just maintain, as would I, that incorrigible statements are in the same group as analytic propositions and axioms. This gets rid of the issue of presupposition, but what can be an experience here? Again, I refer to the mental conceptualization. So I may feel hungry in spite of the fact that I just ate and am full. Is it incorrigible? It seems odd to say yes if we accept that I am full. So incorrigibility must literally only talk about the mental sensations and not the actual state of oneself. "I feel hungry" is incorrigible, not

saying that my body is hungry. Another issue very similar to this deals with introspection concerning rationalization. If somebody steals a car and gets caught, they'd be questioned as to why they did so. Let's suppose they lie, stating that they desired it to feel in control over their own life. Initially it may be a lie, but sometimes minds can be persuaded to believe things it initially doesn't, and the person's claim becomes incorrigible even though it wasn't why they stole the car. Here, one must limit incorrigibility to what one believes about oneself and not facts about oneself, even facts about reasons which seem incorrigible but aren't. It might be the case that incorrigible states can only occur for present (or general present as the moment to moment present is not very easily talked about since when we try to understand it, it's gone into the past already) conditions and not describe past or future. A statement is thus incorrigible iff the statement is about a first-person subjective mental experience and the claimer categorically agrees with the statement. And although incorrigible statements are to be treated as true, I think they are tentative, though I would say much less so than synthetic statements tend to be.

Testing involves manners by which one can potentially falsify the proposition. Why must the proposition be tested such that it is possibly wrong? Here is where I shall invoke fallibilism. If I say that the cat is one foot long but am not willing to admit that I am wrong despite any evidence to the contrary, and someone else does the same with the proposition that the cat is two feet long, then synthetic propositions and synthetic truth seem to fail. We cannot just allow for all people to be infallible about synthetic propositions, as contradicting statements would lead to contradictions, which the axiom of noncontradiction couldn't allow for and I incorrigibly cannot even make sense of such a model of the world. But here's an issue. What if someone incorrigibly senses the cat as one size, and another person another size? Surely my pragmatic axiom "A synthetic proposition is true iff the expectation of experience corresponds to the experience perceived through testing" could agree with both people. John experiences a small cat, but Jim experiences a big cat, and upon testing (like placing the cat in a box they both agree is big) they maintain their original experience. But I don't believe in talking of big and small and such adjectives outside of one's personal perceptions. Because the very definitions of those terms are subjective, that is "The cat is small" and "The cat is big" and "The box is small" are all definitional truths dependent upon one's personal preferences for big and small. The relation is not about what the cat is compared to the box, but rather what our definitions of big and small are and how do cats compare to the

box in accordance with those categories. But if the propositions are about measurements in feet, we do not experience “one foot long” in our mind because our conceptualizations are not spatial, as they would so seem. It’s an understanding of using a foot ruler. And when one tests the cat by measuring it with a yardstick, (supposing the cat is one-foot long) only the proposition “The cat is one-foot long” will hold true as it is the only proposition which would correlate to the experience of seeing the cat lined up with the one-foot mark on the ruler. But if the cat were not so long, one would still have to measure using something other than the mind to verify its truth or falsehood. By not permitting falsehood to be possible for synthetic claims, one dispatches one’s perceptions from what one is talking about, and therefore takes away the relation which makes the proposition synthetic in the first place. The cat’s size is synthetic, in that there is a relation between the incorrigible experience of the cat and the cat (unless idealism is true, which I will refute to the best of my abilities later).

#### 1.4 Fundamental epistemic concerns

This entire time, I have been essentially dealing with epistemology (theory of knowledge). I have given my initial understandings of how I assign the label true to propositions, be they definitional or synthetic. Indeed, according to my view, true and false are attributes we place onto propositions in conjunction with our axioms and in accordance with our empirical investigations in the world. Now I shall work on some epistemic issues to further my position as well as continue to discuss issues. A warning, this section is not fluid between the ideas. It is a mix of various topics just to give some foundational comprehension of my epistemology to ensure that it is able to handle a variety of tasks.

The term “know” in English has three general meanings, those being to know a fact, to know how to do something, and to know by familiarity. The third form needn’t necessarily be explained, seeing as it is not meant in a similar sense as the other two. In many languages, those two meanings use different words entirely, and despite their similar pronunciation and written form, I would say the mind of an Anglophone also understands that they don’t mean the same thing. However, at the risk of being overreaching, I will say that my pragmatism can account for knowledge by familiarity. If I know about Susan in math class, then I have some experience with her, I might know her so well to the extent that I can make hypotheses about her behavior based on what I

have learned about her personality and am accurate to an extent beyond lucky guessing. But what about Paris, France? I've never been there, and I've only gotten information second handedly. I still maintain that I can make some propositions. For example, if I hear over and over again that the lines to get into the Louvre are long and slow, I would expect to hear a similar statement from a new person telling me of their experience in Paris. Of course, it's a weaker kind of experience, and it takes many more cases of coherency to justify belief than with personal cases, though I wouldn't say it's impossible to get similar results provided enough cases. Turning to the second form of knowledge, I needn't know how a bike works in order to ride one. But I do need to have some knowledge. I need to be able to accurately predict how fast my legs pedal and how fast I will feel that I'm going. I can propose certain incorrigible experiences of balance and body position to account for turning without falling and other skills for riding a bike.

I shall now discuss solipsism and idealism. As already stated, I cannot have absolute certainty concerning synthetic propositions, which is the case with whether or not other minds exist or even other objects. Let us start with the former doubt. My epistemology is a form of coherentism, and as such it doesn't necessarily lead to a description of reality how it is without any minds to perceive it. Indeed, it is quite the opposite, in that it is entirely based on how the mind understands the world around it. So on what grounds could I even say that there exists such a reality without my perception? Interestingly, through pragmatic reasoning, that is the conclusion which comes out. I can use propositions and testing to show things like object permanence and the intentionality of other people when they coherently speak of something I haven't any experience of, such as Paris. Another reason to neglect idealism and especially solipsism is that it has no bearing on life. Even if such ideas or true, it has no hindrances on my ability to test hypotheses and seek coherence and validation to better understand the life I experience. They are thus negligible on a very grand scale.

In fact, I would argue that the reverse (i.e. realism) is strongly supported by pragmatism. My pragmatism is not in the business of discovering the world as it absolutely is. Instead, it has certain axiomatic parameters to set up its methods and then works to verify and falsify hypothesis through testing. But humans can miscode, misremember, forget, and misinterpret information. Each person has biases as well as their own perspectives, axioms, and levels of reasonability/justifiability. And some people even have certain neurological capacities, functions, or hindrances others haven't.

It may be that someone could coherently accept two contradictory statements. But even if that were the case, so long as nobody else can, those ideas are trapped in that mindset and cannot be meaningfully communicated such that others will receive the message as intended. But with pragmatism in general, we are able to use a system that isn't as strongly influenced by our biases and mistakes (albeit still imperfectly) to describe a world we all experience. It may be the case that the table, no matter how many tests one performs, doesn't *really exist*, because only my mind exists or the physical world itself is just an illusion of ideas. But with tests, realism gains evidence, I think. Tests can be from something as simple as being able to place a dinner plate on its top and eat dinner while sitting at it every evening to something more complex like someone writing a message on it to be read by multiple people who then write what they read on a piece of paper, after which they read what others wrote and find that everyone wrote the same thing because they all read the same thing. That the table does exist independent of my knowledge is at least the simplest and most accurate explanation given the information provided. It might be that whatever I wrote created the scenario of others writing the same thing, but sometimes others agree and sometimes they don't, and fallibilism along with pragmatism leads to a very secure and beneficial position. It explains with some grounds of evidence and in an attempt to avoid as many unjustified assumptions as possible. It's not perfect, it may or may not describe reality flawlessly, it's based on how humans are and how their minds work as well as how they are able to communicate ideas, it may have to compete with other coherent theories of equal stature (providing there are some on a general scale, but there most certainly are on small scales like specific competing scientific explanations with the same amount of justification, evidence, explanatory power, etc.), and it cannot prove absolutely that metaphysical realism is true, but I believe it's the best, most coherent system available to me with the scope of working on everyday knowledge issues as well as theoretical epistemic issues. Furthermore, it describes how people behave (of course, I understand this might be circular, but only in a similar fashion as science is understood by humans and also studies how humans understand things under those understandings) since whenever people act deliberately, they do so with understanding that those actions have consequences and if the means and consequences are desirable, they act in accordance with beliefs which will achieve such ends. This is not to say that all actions are caused by beliefs, as reflexes like jumping out of harm's way is an action but not done with the belief that "If I jump back, I will not experience pain" followed by testing that proposition. But it is the case that when people

act deliberately with time to consider the consequences, they do so by virtue of expectations. And my pragmatism is such that the evaluation of consequences is more likely to promote accurate results. Pragmatism is usually said to be the philosophical position that something is true if it is useful, but for me, what is useful is to have expectation match experience through verification.

As already clarified, I am very skeptical. I understand that there are a few problems with my epistemology thus far on a very global scale. One such problem is that of disagreement. I already touched on this earlier, but here I'll expand it. I incorrigibly can intuit what I can and cannot make sense of. But even though I may not be able to coherently make sense of contradictions, some brains might. I still maintain that those ideas would have at least many difficulties being communicated to me, but it would be rash to say it is impossible. After all, I have learned of concepts and have been convinced of certain ideas which I previously didn't fathom or take seriously. Note here how I used "didn't" instead of "couldn't." I might have always had the capacity but just wasn't at the time aware of those concepts or was given inadequate explanations. So it may be the case that I do have the capacity to understand that which now I incorrigibly cannot (and I maintain the use of incorrigible here as it deals with my present awareness). But who has the better axioms in this case? If somebody doesn't have the axiom of the law of noncontradiction, are they any better or worse off in using my pragmatic theory? I'm unsure, but we mustn't forget that my pragmatic theory works in conjunction with my axioms, so it wouldn't be fair to assess their truth attributions based on my axiomatic set. And to be fair, I have no reason to disagree with them beyond the fact that I can't comprehend their position. But this leads to a suspension and not a refutation. I simply cannot speak for their best interest in describing the world provided that their means of understanding is radically different than my own. But this doesn't affect my own pragmatism either, for even if others have different axioms, mine may still remain the same and I therefore must still work in my own framework.

The problem I just described deals with coherent theories of truth in general. If other coherent theories exist and are on par with one another, there would be no justification in accepting one of the other except if one simply understands one better or is biased in favor of one. I have yet to be presented with a coherentist theory on par with pragmatism, but would concede such a sort of acceptance if ever presented with one. And



at any rate, coherent theories don't necessarily even correlate to how reality is objectively. They might, but they might not, and there's no way to distinguish the two possibilities.

But an even deeper problem arises, which is the regress problem. The regress problem states that all justifications of claims require justifications themselves, which then require justifications, and so on and so forth. The regress problem states that either one must have an infinite regress, a foundation which is not itself justified (foundationalism), or a loop of justifications onto itself (coherentism), all of which are invalid and undesirable. Clearly, my pragmatism is of the third kind, or so it would seem. I first deny the infinite regress for a couple reasons. Initially, I am skeptical of non-conceptual infinities, as they have never been experienced empirically as far as I am aware. Further, even conceptually, infinities tend to lead to contradictions which mean they are not even comprehensible for me, so naturally I couldn't accept such a theory as of now. But even if some infinity existed, that is not how humans actually justify claims. If a child asks its parent "Why" and the parent responds to the best of their ability, either the parent will eventually concede that that is simply how it is or will use some earlier statement to justify the justification even though they already had to justify that justification and thus make a circular argument. Let us look at foundationalism. Just because one unjustifiably accepts a foundation, that foundation may not be rooted in reality. This is why I am fallibilistic even on my own axioms. But what I find interesting is to question what it means to unjustifiably accept something. Earlier I have said that this kind of attribution is self-referential. Assuming this to be true, then it follows that foundationalism is essentially a circular argument (i.e. P is true because it is true). But what of coherentism? It might be said that when a parent loops the chain of justification onto itself, the entire loop serves as a foundation for all other things to be based upon. In other words, coherentism is essentially a foundationalist argument. I find this very humorous, because in some way, the seemingly trilemma of the regress problem turns out to be one single problem which is not justified. All arguments which are not set up into pre-established parameters fail the regress problem and are ultimately unjustified. This is why I have based my epistemology on how humans function, because at least then I can understand how people make sense of the world, even though all of my ideas, including my axioms and definitions are ultimately unjustified. I am a pyrrhonist with regard to truth claims globally. It is only within parameters such as how do I make ideas or how do we perceive the world that I talk of believing things. But without those parameters, which my own epistemology recognizes as self-administered, I withhold

belief because anything I say is unjustified, even this statement. I am pushed into a corner of suspension about reality as it is. All I can do is communicate how I think and how others think to the best of my abilities, but this does not take away from the seriousness of the regress problem.

For anyone familiar with 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy in England, you may have noted that my pragmatism is very much like logical positivists and their verification principal (specifically Ayer's verificationism (Ayer, 16)). Logical positivism has been discredited as a philosophical failure. I imagine my pragmatism is just as much a failure, but I don't know what could better replace it. And as previously stated, I need to work with beliefs somehow just to function in everyday life. But I think that seeing how useful and functional it is, it's unlikely to be a total falsehood. I don't mean to dismiss criticism though. One issue with the verification principle is that it itself cannot be verified empirically, or so the contention goes. My verification principal that, "A synthetic proposition is true iff the expectation of experience corresponds to the experience perceived through testing," falls into a similar problem I think. It's not an analytic statement, because it's the very foundation of synthetic statements. On the other hand, you cannot experience "x is true." I have to bite the bullet, and accept that I haven't a solution. But in a similar fashion, in math, to my understanding (perhaps I'm wrong), sets needn't always contain themselves as Bertrand Russel might have had it (Russell, 228). Additionally, the scientific method can't really be tested scientifically. I'm not trying to claim that my pragmatism is on par with scientific methodology, but it is a methodology of sorts to help distinguish true and false sentences with regard to everyday experiences. My point is that such a problem doesn't impede on practicality. I might be able to further defend my principle by saying that it's only paradoxical because it is put into words as if it were an analytical statement. But it's more of a methodology after the fact of developing reason skills based on induction to help make sense of the world around us. Thus to put in an analytic rule-type fashion is to misuse its function. Put simply, even though I wrote my synthetic dictum as a proposition, this was because it was helpful to do so. But in actuality, it's not meant to be a proposition about the world. It's a tool, a methodology, for people to use so as to discern truth from falsehood. So the mistake may have been to write it as a descriptive proposition in the first place. Lastly, it may be the case that my set of propositions being analytics or synthetic is too naïve and incorrect. Maybe there are propositions of another kind, and maybe my synthetic dictum is of this unnamed third kind. Though I doubt this, because analytic for me means self-

referential and synthetic means not self-referential. By law of excluded middle, I think it's a very solid dichotomy with no room for a third kind or hybrid set. I apologize if this is unclear, but epistemology is just two chapters of my book, so I don't want to go too deep, even at the risk of losing credence. Although, I think if the geniuses who founded logical positivism are not thought of as unreasonable, perhaps at least nor am I to too much of an unreasonable extremist for trying to defend its verificationism. I also don't know to what extent my analytic/synthetic distinction stands up to contentions similar to what Quine put against logical positivism. I think I've evaded such problems, but I might simply be blind to my own shortcomings.

There are many problems in epistemology, but I believe I have substantially discussed the groundwork of my own epistemic theory.

## Chapter 2

### Knowledge and Issues Therewithin

#### 2.1 Knowledge as a justified, true belief (JTB theory)

From simply listening to everyday chatter, it doesn't take long at all to realize how very lightly the word "know" is used. People seem to "know" that a decision is "the" right one. One "knows" what transpired based on a past memory. One "knows" the kind of person someone is and how they will behave, perhaps when one tells them some news. One also "knows" how a certain event is going to turn out because one has speculated it so, even though one doesn't realize why that speculation is as such in the first place (i.e. from induction of similar past circumstances, our cognitive heuristics and biases, our subconscious abstraction from other models we have about the world, etc.). The list goes on, and notice how I'm speaking strictly about knowledge about propositions, not about knowing a person (although there may be some continuum between this and propositional knowledge about that someone's behavior or knowledge about a city with one's familiarity therewith), nor about knowledge of how to do something (again, there may be a connection as I have previously proposed). Yet, in nearly any of these cases, one can be and sometimes is demonstrated to be wrong, especially when claiming knowledge of future events, as disproving past factual errors is at the very least seemingly more difficult.

Considering everyday usage, it may appear that epistemic knowledge with which I'll be dealing in this book isn't even in the realm of awareness of most people. So what do I mean by epistemic knowledge, and how does it differ with colloquial knowledge? So far, the best way I have found to talk with people about it in order to be on the same page is through using examples of simple philosophical problems. And so, I will actually do so here.

Let us begin with Tom and Sally, the former states that the number of water molecules in a particular full cup is even, whereas the latter says the number is odd, both just from looking at it. One of them is right, or has stated something true. From my own flavor of pragmatism I'm confident that so long as one had the capacity to count the number (which would need to be finite) of molecules and the number didn't change during the process then through experimentation, one would discover that the number is indeed even or odd. However, it seems quite obvious (though considering the variation in beliefs spread across the world, someone would be likely to disagree) that neither "knows" that they are right, or "knows" the answer at all for that matter. The fact of something being "true" even in a correlation-to-reality theory of truth is at least not sufficient to know something. (One way one might be said to know just by looking is by having the mental capacity to mentally assess the dimensions of a cup full of water and know the volume of both, followed by knowing based on past experiments of the precise number of molecules existing in a given unit of volume (which may never be known but we'll just assume there is a scientifically accurate way of doing this without need for estimation) and then arriving to a conclusion. But then of course, I question heavily that such analysis is "just looking" at all. For future reference, the suspension of belief had when answers are equally uncertain (or certain) is often referred to as a null-hypothesis.

Next is the broken clock thought experiment (Russell, 1948), but with my own style of elaboration: The time is 10:13 in the morning. I wake up and see the sun's general location, which my brain processes subconsciously. I know that I sleep nine hours almost exactly whenever I don't set an alarm clock, which I happen to have not set the night before when I went to bed at approximately 1:00 a.m. I was very tired, so I didn't take long to fall asleep. As I sit up, I look to the clock on my wall and find that it is 10:13. My roommate wakes up from me waking up and asks me what time it is. I tell him that it's 10:13. But unbeknownst to me, my clock had broken and stopped at 10:13 the previous night and I didn't notice. So the question is, "Do I know what time it is in this scenario?" From all the times I have heard or asked this question, people answered in the negative, except for one occasion.

One Mormon missionary told me yes. Taken aback by an answer I was not at all expecting, I asked why. She explained that what mattered most was that I believed that was the correct time and it was. Essentially, this means that for her, knowledge is constituted by a belief coinciding with truth. Now, I deny this conception based on her

correlational theory of truth and based on the first example with Tom and Sally above, because each one might hold sincere beliefs about the number of water molecules in a cup. But after our discussion, I considered a more plausible way one might answer yes to my knowing what time it is.

For anyone who is familiar with this thought experiment in philosophy, it hopefully is extremely apparent that my additions are not innocent. Indeed, with my additions of knowing when I went to sleep, how long I must have slept, the general time of day based on the sun's location in relation to my window view, etc. many people who say no to the original thought example might be now compelled to say yes. But what if the time really is 10:12, but I say 10:13 based on the clock's reading? I imagine some may still say yes, while others will say no. I would explain both answers based on each individual's personal theory of knowledge. If knowledge requires that one is correct in a correlation to reality way, then one is compelled to deny that I know it's 10:13 when it's really 10:12. As for those who still say yes, I cannot speak for all of the defenses of that answer. However, I will present my own.

I will take a general starting position to define knowledge: knowledge is a true, justified belief. In order to know X, one must believe X or better put believe that X is true. If one doesn't believe X, then one cannot know X. X also must be true. But here's something to note. My theory of truth states that P (when P is non self-referential) is true or becomes true iff the expectation of experience corresponds to the experience perceived through testing. The testing in the assessment of truth evaluation is in essence though, justification. In other words, truth derives from justifications. This understanding changes how to assess epistemology drastically. If truth boils down to justification and knowledge is defined as a true, justified belief, then knowledge simply becomes a justified belief. And just like any epistemology which requires justification, not any and every justification is adequate for knowledge. Indeed, my analysis runs into Gettier problems and the like. Moreover, to fully establish a theory of knowledge, I will need to be able to differentiate between justifications and their epistemic capacities, how to discern relevant and irrelevant justifications, what amount of justification is required to claim knowledge, etc. It only seems intuitive to me that justification, taking the place of two out of three general parts of the definition of knowledge, should be discussed the most in my epistemology. Whilst I will discuss the basics of justification, because it is so integral to my epistemology, I am unable to present how my justification theories deal

with intricacies and specific problems proposed throughout the years. But I will give some basic principles of how justification works after discussing some belief relating issues.

## 2.2 Belief

I will first start with the nature of belief. Firstly, how do we come to believe anything at all? Well let me tell you (supposing that you don't speak Japanese) that in Japanese the noun 'promise' is 約束 (yakusoku). I wonder if you believe me. What if I added that I studied Japanese autodidactically throughout high school and then went on to complete Japanese courses at the third-year level my first year in college. Do you believe me now? What if you doubt that I did any of this? And if you do believe me, how did you come to do so? Perhaps is it because out of your own ignorance of the Japanese language it seemed plausible that the two unidentified characters above probably mean something and my word for it is good enough for you? Well how about this; the Japanese word for society is 毎回 (maikai). In fact I can even explain to you why these two characters are used for the term. The "hat" over the first one represents a roof (i.e. the heavens) watching over the irrigation fields (note how it's a box cut up into smaller boxes). The second character represents levels of society like social rings that are all still connected to each other in proximity. Surely my explanation only adds to my credibility here. Society is actually 社会 (shakai). Now I ask you this: What is society in Japanese? I'll have you know that I told the truth about the word promise and lied about society. 毎回 (maikai) means each/every time. To verify me now, you can use a dictionary or ask someone else who knows these words.

I hope that everyone who initially believed me became skeptical of what the word for society is in Japanese, especially when I told you what it really is. If I'm correct, then at least for a little bit, you were unsure whether to believe me or not and about what society is in Japanese. But perhaps you accepted what I said each time without question. For the latter group, I simply suggest a bit more skepticism because out of the many things people will tell you, accepting them without question will surely lead into quick contradictions. And if you simply disregard all future contradictory propositions even though they were presented to you with the same credibility as whatever you first

accepted, then you are believing with inconsistency in your standards of credibility.) For the first group who hesitated, perhaps who still don't know what to believe, an explanation might be in order. I find that belief is formed more or less holistically. That means that when you hesitated you did so because somewhere in the process of believing or not, the second term I said means society was compared to the first (a very quick note as I won't go into this issue much, the way I present this is that in some way your brain must remember to a minimal degree that the second word wasn't what you thought before, which means that memory is at least somewhat necessary having implications for internalism vs externalism and memory's importance in belief formation and maintenance). Then when I told you I lied, you may have generalized that possibility to all my claims about Japanese words. Why? Well even though there can be many words for the same thing (soda and pop are the same thing in many regionalized American vocabularies), that is not what I presented. Instead I explicitly gave you a contradiction. Believing me about Japanese words quickly proved to be a failing system by which you can't effectively understand words. The very fact that my system of word input came to a contradiction feasibly put my entire credibility in Japanese into question. Put simply, I have become at least seemingly unreliable. Maybe you were able to initially accept that I did succeed in Japanese college courses but at the time of your hesitation, that, too, was likely put under doubt.

This is not to criticize you for hesitating. Indeed, I think that too often whenever new information is presented which is contradictory or otherwise incompatible with previously held beliefs, assuming that the conditions under which one is presented with the two incompatible beliefs are equal (equal credibility, explanatory power, evidence, justification, etc.), one is more often to disregard the new information instead of putting all of the incompatible beliefs of equal epistemic status into a state of non-belief. And note how I said non-belief instead of disbelief. This is very similar to the notion of null-hypotheses. So back to the question of the number of water molecules in a cup, we can safely agree that the number is odd or even. But without sufficient reason to accept one answer over the other, one would be best to not believe either. This doesn't mean that when Sally suggests the number is odd, one ought to disbelieve her. Indeed, we don't have any more reason to disbelieve that it is odd than to believe that it is even. But one can still suspend belief altogether. And I suggest a similar response to dealing with incompatible beliefs of equal epistemic status. And at the risk of being overreaching, I will even dare suggest this to deal with competing scientific theories of equal epistemic



status. Of course, I understand that if indeed beliefs are holistic then one may simply choose to believe in one over the other based on their own personal related beliefs, biases, past experiences with similar epistemic crossroads, etc. But perhaps my suggestion could prove more reliable as it will base belief judgements on more consistent standards. Nevertheless alongside fallibilism, I will at least advise strongly that in light of being presented with incompatible beliefs of the same epistemic status, should one hold one belief over another, one might be in a better position to at least hold it tentatively, ready to dismiss it should a competing belief exceed the held belief in epistemic status.

Another important issue when dealing with beliefs is the matter of choice. Whether you ended up believing me or not about Japanese words, you may have done so with hesitation and deliberate evaluation (if not in that example, imagine a time, if you can, when you did). In this case, it is very tempting to say that through evaluating the claims and your position to believe me, you made a conscious decision to either believe me or not. I am not so sure about this. The extent to which you believe me or not was based on how convinced you were. And while you may have had to consciously process how credible I was, I maintain that you don't choose to be convinced by something. Let's suppose you ended up believing me about the Japanese words at the end when I told you the truth. You may have arrived to that conclusion after hesitation and then realizing that I was trying to make a point about holistic belief systems and reliability and then believed that I honestly admitted to lying but then told the truth as I had presented it. But even though these thoughts ran through your head so to speak, did you really choose them or did they just naturally happen in response to reading? When somebody tells you something funny that happened to them or you read a scientific journal and read about some new discovery with evidence to back it up, do you believe those pieces of information through a conscious choice like choosing what you eat for breakfast? As far as I am concerned, I believe things based on how well I understand them, how credible they are to me, and whether they fit in my understanding of the world in relation to other relevant beliefs, none of which I choose (regarding the last, to avoid circularity, I mean that I don't choose to accept new beliefs in light of other beliefs. It would be circular to presume that none of these other beliefs were decided to demonstrate that we don't choose beliefs!).

And even if you don't believe me but you "accept" what I said and go along with me, I don't think this is chosen either (Note the quotations. I think that generally "accept

x” and “believe x” are interchangeable, but like many words “accept” can have multiple meanings and I wanted to use the meaning with a connotation of pretending in this context). You may well choose (I will discuss determinism vs free will in 3.5) to nod your head and behave as though you believe me, but that’s a façade. Your inner belief that I’m not to be trusted, however, is not consciously decided. Indeed, when I do that, I’ve noticed a qualitative difference. I can *feel* the ability to choose to nod my head in spite of my disbelief, but that *feeling* isn’t present or at least unobserved on my part with regard to actually not believing, not being convinced about, something. It almost seems like to choose to believe something is an indication that one doesn’t believe. After all, if you told me your cat’s name is Cloud, and I say to you, “I choose to believe you,” that statement could make you believe that I am attempting to deceive myself into belief, but naturally without deliberate effort and psychological self-manipulation, I actually don’t believe you. But I am open to the idea that at least in certain situations (perhaps hesitation followed by analysis is a genuine case) we may have some choice in the matter (provided free will). I’m simply not yet convinced of any such case!

A last note on belief is what it means to believe. I would like to propose that belief is not merely instrumental or behavioral, as there are many beliefs we hold or adopt unconsciously without even thinking about their practical implications (take for example, we believe somebody introducing us to a group of people we have no intention of talking to or about). I find this very tempting because many of our beliefs DO shape our behavior and our thoughts, but I think there are unused and superfluous beliefs we just have from time to time. So instead I think of beliefs as just ideas we hold or adopt based on our standards of credibility and convincingness. I agree with the notion that belief is an assent, and disbelief is a dissent. What of non-belief? Well that is a suspension in which there is neither assent nor dissent in accordance to not being convinced of X or convinced of ‘not X.’ Again, belief is tied to justification, adding to the importance of justification in knowledge. Thus in the water molecules in the cup scenario, I can hold neither belief nor disbelief to either claim about its even or odd numerical value.

### 2.3 Limits of knowledge

I want to now establish an unpopular view (in epistemology) that knowledge is not in an all or nothing situation. I noted in the beginning of this chapter that people use the word “know” in several situations such as knowing how a person is going to react to a

given situation. One may just say that in such cases one is using the word wrong and conflating with strongly believe. I am partial to agree in most cases. However, let us say that a mother has told her daughter the same joke over ten times throughout her daughter's life, and each time the daughter reacted in an overall similar way. On say the thirteenth time she tells the joke, she "knows" what her daughter will do just as she has each time before. But unexpectedly, the daughter's reaction isn't the same. Should we axiomatically deny the mother knowledge because her hypothesis failed, even in spite of what is reasonably sufficient justification based on inference? I would say not. Considering that truth and by extension is likely best tentative for us humans and that we must comprehend the world through our biological faculties which are prone to error, biologically (inter-neural miscommunication) and psychologically (namely biases), I think that to have "know" be a factual indicator is too high of a standard, and not only for everyday usage but also for knowledge seekers like scientists and philosophers. Because then we shouldn't talk of knowing anything we don't know 100%, which I would say is everything, or at least we don't have enough reason to say we have 100% knowledge on anything. So giving knowledge such a standard is effectively a good way to eradicate its intellectually honest usage. If we can get past this notion of knowledge being factual, then my claim doesn't seem so hard to accept after all.

But one also shouldn't be too quick to say that anyone can know anything with the slightest bit of evidence in one's favor. Obviously it seems much more plausible to know that water is made up of hydrogen dioxide molecules than to know that the moon is going to break by a giant asteroid next week. And another reason to not give up on knowledge despite it not being an inherently factual verb is that in doing so, then one has no reason to hold certain beliefs over others, which is nonsensical. We believe that which convinces us, and someone who requires evidence and reason to believe without being overly confident in one's knowledge tend to (looking at the success of philosophers, scientists, and likeminded humans) have a clearer and more accurate understanding of the world, by which I mean their beliefs tend to be in line with what they observe beyond lucky guessing and without forming overly broad beliefs or beliefs which might be true but without adequate justification for believing in them. (This is not to say that anyone has ever been right in this sense overall, but merely that people who do adhere to reason and evidence have higher occasions of accuracy than would those who don't.) I know I haven't made a slam dunk case for non-factual knowledge, but I have no problem saying

that the mother did in fact know, just not infallibly, that her daughter would react the way she had expected, even though she turned out to be wrong.

One contention one may have to this notion is similar to how we ought to think about tentative truths. When something thought to be true turns out not to be true, we don't say that the original thought was true and then wasn't. We simply say that it never was true. Indeed, scientific truths (and if all truths are tentative, then all truths) may be thought best as true until something better with more evidence and explanatory power is shown to be true and previous truths now shown to be inadequate after more research is simply that, a previously held truth. If knowledge were thought in this way, then current knowledge is merely a placeholder for some future knowledge which has more reason and evidence in its favor and has a more adequate truth. Putting this in the mother and daughter example, it would be said that she held her hypothesis as knowledge but the result was that she now knows how her daughter actually reacted on the thirteenth telling of the joke. While I find this kind of thinking acceptable, I have no qualms about simply saying she knew incorrectly how her daughter would react, and afterwards she replaced her old knowledge with new knowledge which fits the experience better. I doubt my way of thinking is very convincing and is probably revolting to many who think of knowledge as necessarily factual, but I only wished to explain my stance and not to present it in such a way as to have others adopt it as well.

Returning to the clock problem, I would say that in my original giving of the problem, I do know that the time is morning based on the sun's location, my internal clock, my knowledge of my sleeping habits and time of sleep from last night. I even would say that I am in a position to "know" that it's 10:13 regardless if it's really 10:13, 10:14, 10:12, or so on within reason (more on this later). Obviously, I would be skeptical about my clock if it said 3:00 or would be skeptical about my clock or my sleep patterns if it said 8:00 and I know when I went to bed at 1:00 but am not tired after only seven hours of sleep, thus affecting my belief about what time it is and consequently my knowledge thereof. My belief and knowledge would also be lessened if the wall clock said 10:13 but my phone clock which I take for more reliable said 10:20 or especially if after five minutes I look again to find that the wall clock hasn't changed.

This last detriment (especially) to knowledge reveals some important implications on the relation between belief, justification, and knowledge. I don't only

think that belief is required to have knowledge, but I also think that justification or a lack thereof directly affects belief. When I see the clock hasn't changed, I begin to wonder if it had just then broken or if it broke earlier. At first thought, I can assess the probability of both possibilities. Let's say I remember seeing it at 8:15a.m. ten days ago. Then it could have broken any time at 10:13 between now and then, meaning that for it to have just broken is only one possibility out of twenty and thus has a 5% chance of being right, which I would say is not enough to favor. But what if I saw the clock at 7:47 last night? Now there's a 50% chance the clock was working until a few minutes ago. I would still be doubtful, but much less so. But for all that, I personally wouldn't believe so strongly or much at all that it was 10:13 when I looked at it this morning. Still we shouldn't disregard all the other justifiers such as my sleeping patterns. I still have a rough estimation as to what time of day it is, but the more precise I estimate the less certain I become and thus my belief and thus knowledge are gradual and proportional in relation to the amount of justification. So not only is knowledge not an all or nothing, but so too is belief, as I see it. After all, for anyone who has done a difficult mathematical problem which they aren't sure about, it seems perfectly reasonable to say that one can believe that one has worked out the problem correctly, but perhaps not entirely or half believes and half doesn't or hardly believes at all without disbelief or a suspension of dis-/belief.

Indeed, fallibilism would have it that all beliefs and by extension all knowledge is tentative. To be 100% certain of anything is to assume that one is not only correct in a correlational sense, but also that one could not be wrong, that no amount of reason or evidence could be sufficient in demonstrating that one is wrong. And induction being the most certain form of reasoning (one of my most certain beliefs is that the sun will rise up tomorrow, or that I will at least experience what I call a sunrise), we need only see throughout the history of philosophy and human thought to find that nobody seems to have achieved such a position to reasonably be so certain. Besides, induction itself is not a 100% guaranteed tool. As far as astronomers can tell, there will come a day when the sun will die, and although that will be after becoming a red giant and consuming the earth in its expansion, there will therefore be a day when from any of the planets in our solar system (after the sun's energy runs dissipates entirely), one would be wrong about believing one will see a sunrise the following day. If one cannot be reasonably 100% certain of something, then again by extension, neither can one have 100% knowledge. This is not excessively controversial in philosophy (even if few would agree), but in what is to come in this chapter, I think it's often disregarded when analyzing knowledge.

I would again like to point out that I am not stating that 100% knowledge or belief is absolutely untenable or that I believe it to be so. I have come to the tentative conclusion that it is untenable through understanding how the ideas and propositions set forth throughout human history have been revised, refuted, debated, dissented, or otherwise unabsolute. Moreover, even if something did ever seem absolute such as the law of non-contradiction, it may still seem more intellectually honest and safeguarded to be prudent in permitting room for future doubt. This may seem like fallibilism cannot be doubted, but this is not the case. I imagine that in some circumstance (let us say a god who convinced me of its godhood bestowed some infallible knowledge unto me), I could limit or even disregard fallibilism. Fallibilism is tentative itself, I simply have not yet needed to limit or disregard it.

## 2.4 Justification and warranting belief

Now has come the time to discuss justification, justifiers, and convincingness. I will begin by retracting something I said earlier. I stated that my sleeping habits and my knowledge thereof, the sun's location in the sky, etc. were "justifiers" to my belief and knowledge of the time of day. While this is not against how we might talk of justification, especially in everyday conversation, I don't want the term "justifier" to literally reference such things. I will henceforth call such things "evidence" instead.

So what differentiates evidence from justifiers? To understand my reasoning more fully, it would be useful to reread this after reading the next chapter. For the time being, two terms of some sort ought to be used because one (here, evidence) refers to something in the external world (or at least our experience/phenomenological perceptions of the external world) or how things are (this includes my sleeping habits but not my knowledge thereof (of course, how I attained the latter knowledge also required evidence and justifiers)) whereas justifiers refer to ideas and other mental faculties (mental states is the more common term but I am not going to assume that memories are mental states, at least not now, though I might eventually). I make the distinction explicit to not presuppose the absence of the restriction of our knowledge to our thoughts as we do not first handedly experience anything outside of our own mental lives (I defend this in the next chapter). So when I am justified about knowing the day based on the sun's location in the sky specifically, we can say that the sun's location is evidence. However, it might be the case that I am unaware of this evidence if I were blind, or in a

windowless room. Or perhaps I see it but do not believe it because I live in a technological dome wherein the “daylight” and “sun” are artificial and don’t indicate the daytime outside of the dome. Or more simply, I could be stubborn and disregard the sun’s location as evidence because it isn’t as accurate as a clock or I have some other belief system such that I believe in a flat earth without a real sun which indicates time (though this may be too much of a stretch since the 24 hour system is based on the earth’s location in relation to the sun).

So it should be clear that the sun (safely assuming it exists) is not itself what justifies knowledge but rather our ideas. After all, it is the mental comprehension of the sun’s location that we are basing our justification on. Let us go back to the technological dome. If I didn’t know that it was put up around me over night, I would still use it as evidence in a very similar fashion, such that it is my inner ideas and beliefs which I use to justify my knowledge. Of course, we might say that in such a case, the “sun” doesn’t actually justify my knowledge, or perhaps at least were it inconsistent with the actual sun’s location. But what if it were correlational with the actual sun? I may be correct in judging the general time of the day, but I would be mistaken in exactly what is providing me with such knowledge.

I don’t see this as too problematic. After all if my question is “What general time of day is it?” I don’t think the necessity of me knowing what the sun actually is (mechanical or gaseous) impedes my ability to know the answer. Such information would be important to a question like “Is the sun gaseous as I assume it to be?” This would lead to analyzing what it would mean for a sun to be gaseous and experiment on those hypotheses similarly to what I discussed in the pragmatism chapter. This is not without problems either, because if I used an inaccurate clock or false sun, then they would impede on my knowledge of the time. But it is the inaccuracy which is problematic, not the source itself, even if I conflate the source with something it isn’t.

Of course, it would be folly to think that justification then ultimately relies on justifiers alone. While evidence cannot justify without the justifier such as the beliefs that the evidence is relevant, that the justifiers can be used to form accurate inferences, and that they refer to the evidence, neither can justifiers be adequate without evidence. Indeed, I just stated that justifiers must relate to some evidence. After all, what would it be like to know the time of day and to justify it not on anything external to the mind but

merely one's own ideas that they are correct? I might say in spite of being in a windowless room for weeks without any indication of time, I hold a belief that the time is noon give or take half an hour. I see this as quite similar to the water molecule in a cup scenario. A person can hold a belief without evidence for it. And one might say that one's belief is a justifier. But such a justifier is viciously circular. The time is noon. Why? Because I hold the belief that it is noon. What compels me to believe this? My belief that it is true. It's nonsensical reasoning.

It may seem implausible that anyone would justify knowledge like that. However, I find that it is extremely common, but it has a positive connotation under the name of faith. When someone has faith in the sense that evidence and rigorous justification are disregarded a unimportant or even unnecessary to knowledge, then one is left with an unsubstantiated belief, which as far as I can tell is not only epistemically unconvincing but also intellectually dishonest and void of knowledge. Of course, many people who purport faith in this sense do try to substantiate it with minimal evidence and then use that to claim complete knowledge. But I agree with Locke and Hume that one ought to proportion one's belief and trust in that belief to the evidence therefor. I will speak on evidentialism and epistemic morality later.

One very important piece which is missing thus far in my epistemology is explaining what kind of evidence is relevant, how much evidence is necessary, and how does one go about judging evidence as good?

To respond to the first issue, I think relevancy of evidence is heavily tied to how humans learn in early cognitive and psychological development, namely through associations and inferential reasoning. So for example, there are occurrences of wetness when water makes contact with the body. Over time, one is able to extract the if-then inductive logic with regards to water contact and wetness from the memories of previous occurrences. Then from this if-then logic, one can relate the justifiers (a belief that there is water and that it will lead to wetness with contact) to some evidence (the water which is the reference of the former justifier). The water is relevant evidence simply by virtue of its being the predecessor of getting wet. In other words, relevance of evidence is based upon inductive reasoning and if portions of if-then assessments. This is very simplified and watered-down so to speak, but is sufficient for our purposes. I apologize for not giving my fuller philosophy of justification despite all the buildup. But I



highly recommend looking into the psychology of association in language learning for further reading as I think association is also the basis for inductational reasoning.

Conversely, let us say that somebody uses a mood ring to determine how one's day will be. Furthermore, we'll say that green means that something physically painful will happen, such as stubbing one's toe or tripping and falling. Let us now say that many days have passed when the mood ring was green but no painful experience occurred (and for the sake of argument, we will suppose that this person doesn't attempt consciously or otherwise to avoid the "fate" the ring has chosen). Any association between the rings being green and having a painful experience simply isn't a useful induction and won't accurately predict one's experiences. Making if-then statements such as, "If the mood ring shows green, I will have a painful experience" will not be true in that the then portion doesn't come from the if portion. Thus under this line of thinking the mood ring and its colors are not relevant evidences to knowing how one's day will be.

I didn't mean to get ahead of myself, but because these ideas are so closely related, I already mentioned my answer to what kind of evidence is good. I think reliability is one of the best criteria for discerning good and poor evidence (I leave the door open for other criteria such as simplicity, explanatory power, and relevance among others though I will focus only reliability in this chapter). In the mood ring example above, I noted how its color wasn't an accurate indicator of future experiences. By accurate, I meant one's expectations of experiences matching with one's experiences (my form of epistemic pragmatism). But to determine whether one's expectations are accurate prior to experience, one must use inductive reasoning. And inductive reasoning is stronger the more reliable it is. We use clocks to determine time more than merely looking at the sun's location because clocks tend to be more reliable (ignoring that clocks can also be used in windowless areas, during the night, and whenever else one may not see the sun).

## 2.5 Gettier problems

The JTB theory of knowledge has been under serious contention and revision ever since Edmund Gettier in "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge" (1963) created what is now called Gettier problems. The broken clock and the sun dome correlating to the actual sun would be examples. For another example, I prefer something along Roderick Chisholm's sheep problem (1966) as something like the following (I have tweaked it): A farmer wants to make sure that all three of his sheep are in the sheep pen. He goes out

and counts them. But before he went out, somebody snuck in and placed a cleverly disguised dog in a costume among the sheep.

First scenario: that somebody forgot to steal the sheep he was after, leaving four animals in the pen. But while the farmer was counting his sheep, one of the real sheep was behind the disguised dog, which was what the farmer counted. The farmer has a true belief (for, if he investigated closely, he would have three sheep (plus one dog, but three sheep nonetheless)) and is, under everyday circumstances, adequately justified we'll say. But something seems wrong. The farmer doesn't seem to know that the three sheep are in the pen.

Second scenario: that somebody stole one of the sheep and replaced it with the disguised dog. Here when the farmer looks at his "sheep," he points to one, believing it to be a sheep, points to the next believing that one to be a sheep, and then points to the last one, believing it to be a sheep. Two of his beliefs are true and one is not. Yet in all three cases, he's using the same amount of justification with the same standard for evidence. This time, we can say that his knowledge of sheep in the pen isn't true, but is still justified.

Gettier problems seem to demonstrate that something beyond justification, truth, and belief are necessary for knowledge. In other words, they present a reason to doubt that knowledge is equivalent to a justified, true belief. I disagree. In the first scenario, the farmer does know, because he is reasonably justified and has a true belief acquired through a reliable method. He doesn't have knowledge, however, about how his belief and justification are reliable or accurate. This is similar to knowing what time it is while unknowingly being under an accurate technological dome. I would be mistaken to believe that what I'm judging from is the actual sun, but that wouldn't impede on me knowing what time of day it is (supposing, of course, the dome accurately corresponds with the actual sun's location) even if I am using the dome under the false pretense that it is the actual sun.

What about the second scenario? Does the farmer have knowledge there? We'll grant that he is adequately justified for all three beliefs. Moreover, let's say the disguise is really good to the point where if-then hypotheses about what the sheep would look like, feel like, walk like, and even sound like are all met. The dog walks like a sheep, there's a voice box such that the dog will bleat like a sheep, the costume has real sheep wool, and

the textures on the skin of the costume even on the facial features give off indistinguishable perceptions from those of real sheep. Differences of if-then hypotheses would have to be about if you shear it, the wool will regrow, if you dissect it, you will find what you would find in a typical sheep's body in the generally same locations, and the like. But for just making sure there are three sheep in the pen, the disguised sheep is virtually the same as a sheep. I am fine with saying that under closer and closer inspection, the belief that it is a sheep will prove false, but for the task at hand, under my formulation of truth, I can grant that the farmer is right. (This seems absurd and may very well be a strong case against my truth verification assessment overall, but I ask that you keep reading to see if such a hasty dismissal is best.)

As for justification, if the farmer isn't justified in believing that the disguised dog is a sheep, then he isn't justified in believing that the two real sheep are sheep if he uses the same method for all three. We can even extend this to knowledge. If the farmer doesn't know that he has three sheep, then he wouldn't know he has two, or one. Indeed, another farmer who checks on his sheep the same way (who hasn't been scammed with a disguised dog) wouldn't know that he has sheep if he uses the same method as the farmer in question.

I think the problem with Gettier problems as a whole is that it takes from the possibility of being wrong, that in order to have knowledge that possibility must be cut out. This is problematic because skepticism (even reasonable skepticism) persists. People have tried to "solve" Gettier problems with a fourth criterion of what constitutes knowledge. I don't think this is the best way to go about it. Instead, let us first dissect what it would take to not be wrong (in a strict sense) like the farmer. You would need to test several hypotheses to rule out disguises, illusions, hallucinations, clones, faults with one's methods of testing, any tools one may use, etc. just in order to "know" that one's three sheep are in the pen. And after all that, it seems reasonable to suppose some hypothetical situation could still leave you with being mistaken about there being three sheep in the pen. It seems as though the farmer (and all of us for that matter) are subject to being wrong. We are subject to not "knowing." Again, I think that this kind of knowing isn't desirable. Instead of trying to overcome our fallibilism we should make do with what we can in order to get the best, most consistent, most reliable, most accurate, most efficient results and methodologies that we can using the faculties at our disposal such as logic, reasoning, justification, standards of evidence, technology, past knowledge,

scientific theories, etc. Skepticism will seemingly always be there, and if anything Gettier problems are a demonstration of why fallibilism is a good position to hold.

Now, concerning my statement that the farmer does know he has three sheep even if he's wrong about the disguised dog. I believe pragmatism comes in handy here. If the farmer needed to count his sheep because he was planning on dissecting them and learning about sheep anatomy, it would then be the case that his "knowledge" won't get him too far with the faux sheep. But if he merely wanted to count them because tomorrow he will shear them, then his "knowledge" will be useful and fits a reasonable standard. Depending on what the goal of knowledge is as well as how precise or certain one wants to be about any given information, the standard of knowledge should accommodate. One might consider a chair one sits on. It *could* be the case that somebody came in one night and replaced it with a near identical chair, but even if so, I would say one can know that it's the same chair, even if that knowledge isn't true in that it doesn't correspond to reality as a whole. But what if it's a valuable chair that will soon go on auction? Its value and authenticity raise the standard by which one should be able to claim knowledge. But if the faux chair is indistinguishable even under professional and particular scrutiny, what should it matter to the seller, or to the buyer for that matter, that it isn't? Nobody, aside from the person who replaced the chair, would know or even be able to know. Such knowledge and the capacity to know on a correspondence to reality level are unimportant or even reasonable because to put the standard of knowledge so high is impractical and unobtainable. Unless you want to suggest that you don't know that the clothes you're wearing while reading this are really the one's you think they are, then it seems like standards of knowledge are proportionate to things like what is at stake, precision, certainty, the uses of knowledge, etc. This is why it can be reasonable to "know" where a store is after asking a passerby for directions but not for asking a passerby (who's knowledge on the subject isn't demonstrated or credited) how quantum mechanics work and the practical implications thereof. However, I unfortunately won't go into what the various levels and their standards are, as I myself have been and continue to reformulate them from case to case.

## 2.6 Evidentialism and the ethics of belief

The final part of this chapter will be devoted to the ethics of belief, particularly those based on William K. Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief" (1877). In this essay, Clifford

writes about how our beliefs affect our actions. This permits our beliefs to enter the realm of morality, since if our beliefs dictate our actions and our actions and behaviors are the subjects of moral questions, then so too should our beliefs be considered in morality. He uses a story of a ship owner who permits a ship to sail whose condition he has good reason to doubt. The ship does indeed fail at sea, causing death to all on board and loss of property. Clifford believes the ship owner is at fault for acting in such a way that was unjustified according to the evidence of the ship's condition. But even if the ship owner were unaware of the evidence, he is still to blame, for it is his responsibility to ensure that his actions are reasonably justified. And even if the ship were to sail unscathed, the ship owner is in the wrong, says Clifford, for an action once taken is good or bad in itself, not in its final consequences. He concludes that "... it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. (5)"

Now, Clifford does give some analysis to what extent this should affect our behavior. He doesn't think that this conclusion would lead to absolute skepticism for we may safely assume, based on daily evidence, the uniformity of nature. So I can walk outside justifiably under the assumption that doing so is not going to harm me (for example, the air isn't poisonous) because I have good grounds upon which to base that assumption. But let's say, a truck full of toxic gas breaks down two blocks away in the neighborhood, and the air outside my house is poisonous for once. I believe Clifford would say I can still justifiably go outside with my safety assumption since I have no practical means to investigate the toxicity of the air nor do I have justified grounds to do so. The idea that actions are right or wrong despite the consequences should work both ways after all. But if the truck were in front of my house, and I neglected to read the toxic label from my window or otherwise failed to properly investigate the evidence presented to me, then I would be doing something wrong, according to this view. Further, we may take others' word if we have reason to believe that they are being honest as well as that they are knowledgeable on the matter at hand. This means that we aren't expected to do the impossible and be experts in every aspect in our lives.

But I still have some problems with what Clifford writes. Firstly, in the ship story, even though he might say the crew of the ship was justified in accepting the ship owner's judgement, they, too, should have some skill in investigating the condition of ships if they choose to embark on one. Moreover, they equally had the evidence of the ship's

condition at their disposal. Thus Clifford ought to hold them equally responsible for their demise and their poor decision making skills.

I also think Clifford's conclusion is still far too strong in spite of his efforts to show that it wouldn't drastically change daily human life. With words like "anyone" and "always" I find that everyone is immoral for acting unjustifiably. I say this not because day to day we don't act reasonably enough per se (I actually don't think anyone does all the time everyday due to biases, heuristics and the sort), but because we discover things empirically newly as individuals. I can reasonably go swimming now, but as a child who does it for the first time not with a parent but with another friend, I wouldn't. You see, the parent would have the right kind of authority for me to base my decisions, but another child wouldn't. Even if that child was taught that it was okay by their parents, I wouldn't be reasonable in trusting the child's judgement. I would be doing something immoral. But let's go further. Babies and toddlers act without justification of evidence almost every day, probably more so than any adult, yet there's something weird about saying that one is most immoral (even in just one facet, here, justification of actions) during the first few years of life. But babies are included in "everyone" and "always."

In addition, I take qualms in this chapter with the idea that beliefs must be linked to behavior, but since I generally agree without fully embracing the idea, it's not too great of a contention. However, later in chapter 4 I will give my misgivings about the idea of morality being contained in the action, consequences ignored. So even if I were to have a moral duty to assure that our actions and beliefs, the two being inseparable, be justified by evidence, my analysis and conclusion would differ from Clifford's since I would stake mine on the consequences.

For all that, I do believe some form of evidentialism (the duty to believe based on sufficient evidence) is for the best. I think we ought to believe based on reasonable evidence, but not in a universal, moral sense of the word "ought". I would like to remind the reader that I consider myself a pragmatist. In the last chapter, I mostly focused on how my pragmatism works regarding how to reconcile expectations and experiences so that we can have a functional theory of truth about synthetic claims. But at its core, pragmatism grants that truth refers to what works. If I am not interested in knowing how the world works to the best of my capabilities, then I wouldn't care how to best ascribe truth and falsehood to various claims about the world. If all I want is x, and y is a means

I believe can get x, then y is the truth for my case. In my own case, I want the x to be as close to reality as I can get, to have as many true beliefs as I can have and to rid myself of as many false beliefs as I can in such a way that what I believe and don't believe is based on good reasoning and justification. Yet not everyone is like that. Most people don't care about whether or not someone is justified in believing a reading off of a broken clock. Most people don't care if water is water because of its chemical structure or because of its relation to us or whatever. Rigorous definitions just aren't important to them. And while I personally like to base my beliefs on reason and justification, I find myself readily unjustified in asserting that everyone ought to do the same.

When I first was introduced to pragmatism, my initial contention was to come up with a story of a wife whose husband is cheating. She has evidence to believe her husband is cheating, and let's say that he actually is cheating. I thought it bizarre to say that if she doesn't care so long as he still loves her, if she prefers to not consider evidence for the sake of her feelings, then the proposition "My husband isn't cheating" is true for her. But I have come to accept this analysis and here's why. I said in this paragraph, "...let's say he actually is cheating." What do you think I meant by actually? Well, according to my idea of truth as given in the last chapter, I mean that were we to run empirical tests, our experiences would be such that we would experience the man cheating. But I'm the kind of person who cares about my experiences matching up to my experiences, or at least have my beliefs such that they would match my experiences were I to perform tests. This woman isn't that way, so she needn't ascribe truth or falsehood to propositions the same way I do. If truth is what works, then we must take into account the goal for which we are working. This permits a plurality of different goals, and while I can speak of the merits of my own and the shortcoming of others, I only may do so with the presupposition of some goal. The woman's truth propositions fall short when it comes to the reconciliation of experience of evidence to her beliefs, but it is very good in keeping her mood from falling and in keeping her marriage. Sure we might say that if her goal is to be happy and if she were to be happier knowing that her husband is cheating, then her truth theory fails. But to do that is to have the goal of happiness in mind and a certain methodology to reach said goal in practice, ergo pragmatism. Thus pragmatism can be as robust as the goals should require.

This view of pragmatism is why I am fine with people not caring about knowledge in philosophy or science or math or art or sports or anything, since truth depends on a

certain end to meet. One can still help others by pointing out errors in their methodologies to attain their ends, but to say that one single end is the way everyone should aim for is an assertion I don't hold. I don't feel like I have the authority to assert my ends over others nor do they have the authority to assert theirs over me. The ends we seek are based on our deep-rooted desires for ourselves, as far as I can tell, and I don't think we can or do consciously choose those desires. It makes little sense to me to claim that others ought to want what I want. At the very least, I don't have the justification to support such a conclusion.

In regards to evidentialism then, the duty to believe on good reason and evidence exists for those who care about their beliefs. It's an epistemic duty, I find, but not all people concern themselves with epistemology. But for those who do care, they would be wise to believe based on evidence to the extent that the evidence supports their beliefs. Since I don't believe in absolute evidence, I don't believe in absolute beliefs, thus fallibilism. And just as strength of belief should be proportional to the evidence, so too should the epistemic duty be proportional to the cost. A ship owner has more responsibility in verifying the condition of the sea ship than a person on vacation does in verifying the condition of a boat in a lake. The sea ship failing has much more at stake, thus warrants more care and justification. A boat on the lake doesn't have much as much at stake, but that too depends. If the people getting on can't swim and they aren't life jackets, then even in the middle of a small lake, a small boat's failing could be disastrous. But if everyone can swim back safely with lifejackets to shore and the boat itself isn't considered important (such as the money lost not being an issue), then the requirement to check the boat's condition is much less strong. It might even prove insignificant in such a case. The point is that epistemic duty is also dependent on certain factors, such as the consequences of certain outcomes.

As for the moral implications of evidentialism, I'd like to give my own story, a hypothetical but realistic one. Let's say a father believes homosexuality is a sin, and those who are homosexual go to hell. This father also believes that homosexuality is not an inborn trait and can even be gotten rid of through the right kind of therapy. He discovers that his daughter identifies as a lesbian. Not wanting her to go to hell, he seeks the kind of therapy he believes will "cure" his daughter of homosexuality. He enrolls her at an anti-homosexual institution. What happens there is actually quite horrendous. They torture the clients until they renounce their homosexuality (even though it's just



suppression) to such an extent that psychologically, it works long-term due to the psychological trauma inflicted. Now, let's say that the father did something immoral (I certainly would). We can agree that his beliefs are somewhat responsible for his actions. If he didn't believe in hell, the fear that motivates him wouldn't exist. If he didn't believe in the effectiveness of anti-gay therapy, he wouldn't enroll his daughter in an institution. One way to solve the immoral act is to rid the man of his beliefs, thus putting beliefs in the question of morality. But we could instead focus on the act and put moral rules in place in spite of one's beliefs. So even if you do believe there's a hell and you can prevent your child from going to hell through psychological suppression, you still shouldn't do an immoral action. Here it is the action which is immoral, not the beliefs. If people think killing is good, I would question them and poke holes in their moral theories, but at the end of the day, I don't believe in thought crimes. Let people believe and think whatever they will. It is actions and their consequences which are the subject of morality in my view, as will be seen in a couple of chapters.

So this is essentially my epistemology, or the basic level of it. I doubt it looks appealing to most if anyone. But it is what I am currently most inclined to believe. But what do I know? (If you read this chapter, I suggest reading chapter 5 to see my epistemology in action so to speak.)

## Chapter 3

### Miscellaneous Subjects

I wanted to have a chapter dedicated to metaphysics, one to philosophy of mind, one to language, and one to phenomenology, but I didn't have the will nor the proper time to write these chapters. So instead, I will be writing on various subjects in different sections of this chapter. The subjects I will be covering are the following in order: phenomenology, words, my philosophy of mind, the soul, and free will. If you are not interested in philosophy (and believe in the soul and free will), I would generally recommend only reading the last two sections. Otherwise, I find the first three sections much more interesting topics of discussion.

#### 3.1 Phenomenology

What is phenomenology? Well, it is the study of phenomena. It looks at how we as beings perceive, experience, and understand reality. For our purposes, I will only be discussing my ideas on the matter, though there are some very fascinating theories from the last few centuries of philosophy. I particularly found Hume, Sartre, Ayer, and Heidegger to be particularly enjoyable to read and read about concerning this subject matter.

To begin, I will say this, that I believe human beings to be separated from reality as it is. That is to say, when I see a book on a table, I'm not seeing the book for what it truly is but I am only experiencing my perception of the book. This mental depiction so to speak of the book may or may not be like the actual book, but that discussion will be dealt with later on. For now, I am going to explain I arrived to the conclusion that we humans do not perceive reality as it is.

We all understand that things can appear differently under different circumstances. A white piece of paper looks red when under red light. A tree looks small

when looked at from a distance. A street looks narrower and the lines seem to converge the farther down you look. We all understand the limits of perception. This can be explained by appealing to the circumstances of our observations. A white paper looks red under a red light because of the red light, and we see color due to how light reflects off of objects. A tree looks smaller at a distance because the angles of the light bouncing off the tree into our retinas are different than when next to the tree. A similar point can be made about converging lines of a street. But this writes off a very important point as though it were nothing. We cannot help but perceive things a certain way. Whether up close or far away, we perceive the tree some way or another. Indeed, I find that at any given instance of observing the world around us, we do so under a certain way of perception. We cannot help but perceive in the ways that we do. We cannot just turn off our subjective perceptions and observe objectively (I'll return to this point later). I reject direct realism (the notion that our perceptions are direct and non-relational to reality) for numerous reasons, one being that if we were all perceiving things as they truly are, our perceptions wouldn't differ from the actual state of affairs.

Let's work through this idea. If we measure a tree at 5 meters tall, we all agree that the tree is 5m when it appears taller than us or when it appears shorter than us. And almost everyone would agree that the tree is 5m tall even when no one is perceiving it at all. In other words, the actual state of affairs regarding the tree's height is independent of our perception. Yet our perceptions can and do change. Our perceptions needn't be representative of how things are. If the tree is the real object, and its height doesn't change under different conditions, then what we are perceiving may just not be the tree but our mental perception of the tree itself. Even though we all observe the same tree, we all have differing perceptions. Even a single person will perceive differently. Imagine how big a playground used to appear to you as a child, but once you returned to your old school as a teenager or adult everything which used to appear so big now appears so small. This is usually because you are a different height now than you once were. I believe our perceptions therefore change not only based on circumstances of our observations, but also based on our beliefs about ourselves. What I mean is that even a child who grows older but due to a condition is no taller than when in elementary school may still see a playground as smaller than before due to the person's self-understanding.

However, even though our perceptions may not exactly match up to actual objects, like trees, that doesn't mean we aren't still perceiving the tree, many people will

say. I agree that we indeed are taking in the same “information” so to speak. We all are looking at the same “tree.” And we all agree on things about the tree such as its height, girth, texture, color, type, the presence of green leaves, etc. For all that, it seems unlikely that we all have the same phenomenological experience of the tree. We would agree on texture whether we think the tree bark feels crusty or just rough. We would agree whether our perception of brown and green were of different shades. We would all agree regardless of our perception of the tree’s size. Instead of saying that we are all perceiving the same thing, it seems to me that we are all perceiving our own subjective experiences of the tree. That is to say, that since our phenomenological experiences are variant, so too are the things which we are perceiving. So we do not all perceive the single tree as it is, but each of us has a subjective interpretation which is the true object of our perception.

When I look at a white piece of paper under a blue light, I don’t have the experience in my little head-movie-theater of a white piece of paper under a blue light. I have the experience of a blue paper. The paper isn’t blue, but that’s my experience anyway. My perception doesn’t correlate perfectly to reality. I am always perceiving in such a way that my body can perceive. I find that what we perceive is thus not the actual world of reality but of the brain’s interpretation of reality. We don’t perceive trees and papers but mental abstractions of trees and papers given to us by our neural processing of sensory inputs.

I find sense-data theories of perception to be the most accurate in explaining how human beings perceive the world. Essentially, what a sense-datum is is a mental part of one’s experience. This is vague and not a very good definition whatsoever. But let me explain. I could not say that a sense-datum is defined as being the conceptualization of external sensory inputs, because sometimes, those inputs aren’t there. When a person is hallucinating or has an experience such as phantom-limb pain, I do not deny the phenomenological experience of the person in question. However, in such cases, the experience is not derived from an external source but is contained causally within the brain itself. The sensation of feeling one’s no longer existent hand is not caused by nerve endings in the hand (maybe it is in the forearm, but I’m not sure) but by the brain stimulating neurons in such a way that they would if the neurons in the would-be hand were receiving sensory stimulation and sending messages to the brain. I couldn’t define sense-data as being infallible, because I don’t think of them as being purely epistemic concepts. I imagine a snail might have some sort of phenomenological experience of

certain neural stimulations, but I would also deny that the snail has beliefs or knowledge. Still, for creatures with the capacity for beliefs and knowledge, sense-data are seemingly infallible. When I have the sensation of hunger, regardless of my digestive track's state of affairs, I am correct in saying that I feel hungry. A person who looks at a white piece of paper which is actually a hologram which looks unquestionably real is correct in talking about experiencing a white piece of paper even though there is no white piece of paper. An important thing to note is that I do maintain that sense-data can fit in a naturalistic and physicalist worldview. I think the fact that our bodies take in neuronal stimulations and through transduction transmit these inputs biochemically through neural pathways which are received and then processed by the brain is a physical natural account of sense-data.

What about physicalism though? How could I possibly be a physicalist if I think one doesn't experience material things in the outside world but just mental things in my head? Simply put, because I think mental things are physical, which I'll explain in section 3.3. As a brief demonstration, let us look at a misperception of double vision (Hume 1739, I.IV.ii). If I hold my finger at the right angle and distance, I can see two fingers. We all agree I only am looking at one. That is to say that my eyes are only receiving input from light bouncing off of a single finger. And I think we can all agree that when we do this, we phenomenologically experience two fingers. It would seem that one of those fingers in our perception isn't real. And if it isn't real, then the perception isn't physical. This is where I disagree. Even though one has a false perception of the external world, the perception itself can be physical. It's still neural on-goings in the brain. It's simply that the brain's neural on-goings aren't processing as they would when one perceives just a single finger, thus giving the phenomenological perception of two fingers.

I am still an empiricist in that I believe we only can have concepts of phenomena we have experiences. It would be pointless to expect someone who cannot feel pain to imagine what it is like. A colorblind person cannot imagine what colors are like, even though they can have an idea of what colors are and what things have what colors (by way of extrapolating discourse on colors in language). In order to have a phenomenological understanding of something, one must be or at least must have at least once been stimulated from an external source which led to the brain producing the experience. I can have a hallucination of a duck because I have already had the

experience of a duck. But I think imagination has limitations to what the brain is able to produce. And at least thus far, I believe that the brain can only produce experiences insofar as it has had some external input at least once. If I never felt anything with a hard texture, I doubt my brain could hallucinate or imagine a hard texture, even if it has the disposition to be able to experience hard textures. Now, I suppose a scientist could theoretically induce a brain state which would lead to experiencing feeling a hard texture, but this again is from an external source. The brain wouldn't imagine it on its own.

I want to discuss properties. Earlier I said we can agree about a tree's color, texture, and green leaves. We all describe water as feeling wet. We all know what it feels like to feel a sharp pain from something like a needle. Cotton balls have a specific feel to them. Bright lights and dim lights give us different experiences even of the same color. Properties of things such as color, texture, intensity, and the like are sometimes called secondary properties as opposed to primary properties like shape, extension, and number to name a few. Focusing on secondary properties, I would like to offer my skepticism regarding their existence in the external world.

Let us specifically look at color, because it's an easy one to demonstrate uncertainty of. Some people are colorblind (specifically chromatic colorblindness). We can agree that when looking at a blue book, the colorblind person's retinas are receiving the same kinds of light reflecting off of the blue book as a color-seeing person's retinas. But due to the difference in the retinas (specifically the presence of kinds of cones that function similarly) between the two people, the colorblind person does not have an experience of color whereas the color-seeing person does. So far so good. Humans generally do have three types of cones, and color-seeing people are privy to knowledge about the world that colorblind people aren't. Imagine an experiment involving hiding two similar looking objects whose only difference is color and a letter written on the back to match the colors. A colorblind person cannot accurately match two red balls with hidden x's and two blue balls with hidden y's and so on even though a color-seeing person can. Because of these kinds of facts, it would seem that to see color is to have a more accurate perception which correlates to reality. However, consider the rare condition of tetrachromacy whereby the person has four types of cones as opposed to the common three. These people could out test color-seeing people in a similar ball-matching experiment and have experiences of colors we triconals cannot imagine. Does that mean tetrachromatic people have a more accurate correlation between their

perceptions and reality? Indeed, a mantis shrimp has fourteen cone types. Perhaps then, it perceives color much more vividly and thus much more accurately. It is not clear that having experiences of secondary properties demonstrates the reality of those properties in the world.

I actually believe that secondary properties are illusions our brains fabricate. Whether a person is ignorant of how color is based on the frequency of wavelengths which reflect off of objects or not does not change one's perception of color. A blue book still looks blue to me regardless of whether color exists in the book, in the frequency of light waves, or not at all. This persistence of perception leads me to doubt it in the first place. Just as a magic trick can still work even if you understand how the trick works, I find the brain is unable to take the knowledge of how light works and apply it to how we perceive color. It doesn't really matter in this regard, since illusion or not, we are bound to perceive in the way our bodies permit us to perceive. And whether or not having experiences of properties do indicate properties in the external world, it would appear that between colorblindness and tetrachromacy, we triconal people would be inaccurate in our perception of color; either we are seeing something that isn't there or we are missing out on perceiving things which are there. While I do admit that color perception allows us to distinguish light frequencies, I maintain that the phenomenological experience of color, the "what-it's-like-to-see-color" is not knowledge of the external reality, just a means by which our brains process our capacity of distinction. If we could somehow distinguish light frequencies without having a subjective qualitative experience, I think we'd be closer to reality than with the qualitative experience or at least not as illusioned.

Something important to mention is the properties of sense-data. If an actual book cannot be blue, and blue isn't merely contained in the frequency of light waves itself, then where is it? One potential answer is that a proper blue is a manifestation of the disposition of an object to reflect a certain frequency of light waves. This dispositional explanation has some promise I think, but isn't enough. It doesn't account for the other half of the picture, i.e. the interpretative portion of the retina, the optic nerve, the visual cortex, and the brain's conscious processing. A dispositional account would have to include the dispositions of the creature doing the observations as well. As a sense-data theorist, I would say that the property is not embedded in the actual object, but in the phenomenological experience itself. A common objection is that if one were to open up the scalp and look at a brain which is experiencing a blue book, one wouldn't see

a blue book. Therefore blue isn't in the head. Sense-data are physical after all. Depending on what the objection is trying to contend, I look at this objection as missing the point. The qualitative blue is made up not of something blue in the head but by the neurons firing in such a way as to give a blue experience. If you want to have a blue experience, look at what the person is looking at! Then your brain will react neuronally such that you will experience blue. Looking at someone's brain will always look pink because that's the experience your brain gives you when looking at a brain. Still, if the neural on-goings gives the brain a blue experience and these on-goings are physical, then something physical is blue. Or at least something would be blue if blue existed. But since nothing seems to be blue but the experience itself, this may be a reason to deny the existence of blue and other properties altogether. For all that, I do seem to believe in these qualitative properties insofar as we only talk about our experiences. The best explanation I have is that to say something is an experience of blue is to say that one's brain is behaving in such a way that causes one to believe one is experiencing blue. Unfortunately, this answer is unsatisfactory, even for me. I admit that this is an unresolved issue, but not enough to deny sense-data, not yet at least for me.

What about primary properties? Well, this one I'm not so sure about whether or not we could be so inaccurate as to make them all up in our heads. Still, let's imagine someone is born with a brain that cannot perceive straight lines. Straight lines to this person look like wiggly lines to us. Wiggly lines to us look even wigglier to this person. This person would call the same lines straight which we do. She would use the same language when talking about lines even though her experience would be different than ours. Supposing eyes which move in a perfectly straight line of motion when looking across a straight line, a "straight-seer" would see this person's eyes move in a straight motion. If this person were to watch a "straight-seer's" eyes glide along a straight line, she would perceive the eye movement to be slightly wiggly. This would be the same with observing each other's fingers glide across a "straight" line. Unless I am mistaken, straightness is a primary property. Yet it would seem we run into a similar problem here as with color perception. Does straightness exist in reality? It seems like it to me, but if an entire species of human-like creatures couldn't perceive straightness but still interact with the world just as well as I and other "straight-seers" can, then I don't have much reason to conclude that my perception is more accurate than theirs. At least with color, some new knowledge is gathered, that being the ability to distinguish between light frequencies.



In addition to the uncertainties of properties being real or mental fabrications, the more we learn about the world, the less it seems to align with our experiences. A ball may seem to have certain properties like its shape, solidness, smoothness, etc., but a ball is comprised of atoms which are mostly empty. Looking under a microscope, one would see bumps in the seemingly smooth surface. But the bumps are too small for our sensory nerves of touch to detect. It appears perfectly round, smooth, and solid in our experiences, but none of these are the case. One might contend that a ball does have these properties at one perspective but not in another. We are of a certain size relation to the ball and thus perceive the ball as we do and the ball has the properties we perceive. But if we were microscopic, our relation to the ball would change, and so the properties would change. This is problematic, because I don't see how the same singular object could have a different set of properties (I'm making an appeal to Leibniz's law of identity). Moreover, this makes it seem like perspective has the potential to change the state of affairs of things, which I deny. Our interpretation of an object should not alter the object as it really is. To have this capacity, our thoughts would need some method of causal power over the world, which I don't see it having. Hallucinations don't make the objects of the hallucinations appear.

So far I have argued that we can only ever perceive the world around us through a means of our brains processing biochemical messages sent through neural pathways after our nerves receive external inputs. This has a serious implication of skepticism which is used as one reason against sense-data theories. The implication is that if we only know about the external world through internal sense-data, then we have never directly experienced the external world. But if we never experience the external world, then it seems we cannot have knowledge about the external world, since our knowledge rests upon empirical observations. Indeed, it becomes unapparent that the external world even exists. For this reason, sense-data theories can easily lead into idealism (Huemer, 3.2).

I am not an idealist despite agreeing with the skepticism of the external world. I don't think we know about the external world as it really is. I think we only ever deal with our mental lives, our thoughts, our phenomenal experiences, our beliefs, etc. For all that, I believe we do in fact have good reason to believe in an external world. We learn about the world, and what we learn is in stark contrast against our experiences. The nature of light, atoms, shapes, etc. are found to be unlike what our perceptions would tell us. It

seems unlikely that only our perceptions exist if only because by working with our experiences, we can discover new things, even things which we do not experience without empirical investigation. Beyond that, there is good reason by way of evidence and corroborative theories that the universe is much older than humanity or life on Earth at all. Unless we're willing to accept that the universe began with sentient life, complete with tons of facts unbeknownst to the sentient creatures, the simplest explanation is that sentience is not the constitution of the universe. I believe in an external world by means of inferential and abductive reasoning, not induction. This does mean that my belief isn't as justified as it would be if we could arrive to this realism conclusion through induction of experiencing external existences, but I don't care. Acceptance of physical objects beyond our perception is still the best current explanation as far as I'm concerned.

For all that, existence is about as far as our analyses should go concerning the external world. I personally think our perception creates illusions by adding things to our experience which aren't there such as secondary properties (and maybe even primary properties). At the very least, I am uncertain as to whether the properties of our experiences can be said to be accurate in correlation to reality. Beyond properties, I have misgivings about the nature of perception and the logical possibility of direct realism. As observers, we observe through a means of observing. This means is perception. And I find that perception creates a sort of veil between reality and the observer. To ask what reality is truly like is a loaded question which cannot be answered. A thing is only "like something" insofar as it is perceived in a certain way. But once you include a certain way, that introduces subjectivity, which detracts and distorts the objectivity. An "ideal observer" is an impossibility, as far as I can tell. The ideal observer would have a subjective experience of what it is like to observe. Therefore, the experiences of the ideal observer would be skewed in the way that the ideal observer perceives and interprets the information. Direct realism would have us believe that when our neurons receive external stimulation and encode the inputs into biochemical signals, nothing gets lost, added, or changed. It's a perfect translation. Direct realism would have us believe that our brains when processing the signals do not lose, add, or alter the perfectly translated information. These are huge claims, which I highly doubt. Just because the inputs come from the external world, that doesn't mean we perceive those inputs as they are. Glass, while seemingly clear does ever so slightly distort light which travels through it. Even a crystal clear lens (a perfect retina so to speak) would distort the inputs. I cannot even

imagine what a non-interpretive experience would be like, since we always interpret our experiences on a neurological level. So whilst I grant that direct realism is possible (and as I say later how we should pretend things are more or less), I have some very large doubts about its truth.

Because I do not believe we can say anything about what reality (the state of affairs dependent of our observations) aside from its existence, I want to clarify a few things. I am not making the claim that reality is not like how we experience it. I may claim that color doesn't exist, but that is because I am making claims concerning our experiences and not reality. I arrived to my conclusion of color not from looking at how reality is, but by looking at the plurality of experiences and the plausibility of favoring one over another. It might be that triconal vision is actually the way the world is, but I think the existence of tetrachromacy and colorblindness put triconal vision in a dubious position. I also do not think that we should change our language to appeal to this understanding of our relationship with reality. We don't need to talk about "tree sense-data" and "green sense-data" even if to do so would be more correct. I'm fine with talking about trees and green things as a shorthanded way to talk about our experiences. I'm fine with acting as if we were directly aware of the external world, because for all intents and purposes, when we talk about objects we are talking about our sense-data which we are directly aware of. We don't discuss non-interpreted experiences with each other outside of philosophical contexts. We talk about objects not property-suspended substances. Our common sense leads us to believe in an objective reality we are all open to perceive, and in a way I think our common sense is correct!

We do share an objective experience, but it's not the external world that we share in our experience. It's the intersubjective objectivity we arrive at through agreement and corroboration. It doesn't matter if my green and your green are the same phenomenological experience for the two of us. If I tell you to grab the green cup on the table in another room, you'll get me what I want. So what if what I mean by green cup is the sense-data of a particular thing with a certain shape, color, texture, etc.? That's not how we think or talk. We all experience a tree, even if it's not the same experience among us. I agree that we all are getting roughly the same inputs from the same tree when we're looking at it together, but that's only half of the story. It says nothing about the room for error in transduction, the room for mistranslations, the room for interpretation, the room for subjective additions to the experience, the room for how human beings perceive

trees, etc. In my truth analysis from chapter 1, I don't need to expect the individual sense-data in my hypothesis which I'm testing for, just the general experience. I'm fine with saying that I expect a room key to open up the room's door without limiting myself to only discussing my expectation and experience in sense-data terms. My sense-data theory shouldn't have much effect on what we talk about or how we act. But regarding truth and accuracy, I do believe that we are not directly aware of reality and are limited to our mental experiences. It's just that this fact even if true doesn't change much about our daily lives. We still see color, experience time, perceive shapes, have subjective experiences, etc. Even if we may never know what reality is like or whether our perceptions are accurate in accordance to reality, we can still make claims, justify those claims, and have knowledge. I could be a brain in a vat, but I'd still be right in saying that after I type this sentence I'm experiencing, I'll end it with what I call a period. See what I did there?

### 3.2 Words

Continuing my assault on realism and direct perception of reality, I'd like to begin my discussion of words with talking about the "veil" they put in between our comprehension of the world and reality itself. People seem to have little problem in accepting that language is human constructed. If all the humans suddenly disappeared tomorrow, the words in books and recordings of television shows still broadcasting would be meaningless. There wouldn't be any rules of grammar, or semantics in phonemes of certain orders, pragmatics of tone and social order, or even syntax. And yet, people like to claim that rocks, libraries, and books would still exist. I find this inconsistent. If language is an artifact that is mind-dependent, then so too are the object contents of language.

Let's start with a library. Roughly defined, we might say a library is a building which is used as storage of books. However, library is a mental concept. The actual building is not a library. The amount of books isn't a library. Without human beings around to walk into a building with a storage of books, I believe such a building wouldn't be a library. It would just be the physical building storing physical books left. But hold on, a building is just a word referring to the holistic concept of the individual constructive parts which form the structure. That means the structure itself might be a real part of the external world, but "buildings" are mental artifacts. And books are bounded objects with

pages, words and/or pictures. However, again the actual physical substance of the book may persist after human sentience is eradicated, but “books” would no longer exist since “book” is a concept, not a mind-dependent thing. We can do this with pages, paper, images, ink, words, bricks, shelter, room, space, shelf, wood, structure, etc. I go so far as to say that even when saying “mind-dependent physical substance” or “thing-in-itself” I am not describing the actual external object. “Things-in-themselves” wouldn’t exist after all minds are disappeared. I do believe something is left. But as soon as I give that something a name (even the name of “something”), I then discuss a mind-dependent concept and not the actual something.

What this all means is that it is incorrect on the strictest level to talk about the mind-independent reality. It’s technically incorrect to say that stars will continue to exist after there are no longer minds to perceive them. The thing which continues to exist is not a star but a star’ so to speak. The thing which gives us the experience of a book is not an actual book but a book’ so to speak. But even still, I am unable to faithfully do what I’m attempting to do with adding apostrophes after the noun to denote the mind-independent object. This is my ultimate point. Even when we try to bracket our mind-dependent concepts, we are unable to escape them. We MUST think in terms of our mental concepts. We cannot talk or even conceive of the mind-dependent world. We are permanently barred from experiencing reality based on how we think. This isn’t so bad, because language permits us to communicate our ideas. So even if our ideas are distorted representations of reality, we can still go on with our lives as if we were directly aware of reality. The only people this should affect are philosophers, linguists, psychologists, and physicists who care about the relationship between humans, their understanding of the world, their language, and the external world itself. I believe this skeptic conclusion should be admitted (supposing my line of thinking is correct), but that we should then just accept it and move on, doing our best to work with the intellectual tools and faculties available to us. I wrote my skepticism of realism not to incite a global change, but just an admission of our limitations so that when we search for “truth” we search in the right places and don’t squander our time talking about reality as it really is, since we can’t talk or even think about it without distorting it.

The rest of my discussion of words will be about definitions. Definitions are important so that one’s ideas and concepts are being understood in a clear and meaningful way. I believe there are not right or wrong definitions, but that definitions

should be judged based on functionality, utility, and intersubjective comprehensibility. However, I am skeptical as to whether we can give precise definitions. To demonstrate this, I will be looking at a handful of words and presenting areas where definitions can fail significantly. I'll start with nouns.

In chess, there are pieces called rooks. To define what a rook is, let me start with its shape. The rook is the castle looking piece. But this isn't a good definition or even a piece of a good definition, because chess sets sometimes come in non-traditional forms. A chess set based on a television series for example would have rooks which don't look like castles. Indeed, you could make your own chess set with pieces of paper, and the pieces of paper with an r written on them would be the rooks. Some people may define a rook based on its function in the game. So a rook is defined as the piece which can only go horizontally and vertically and begin in the bottom corners of the board. This is problematic because let's say someone has a traditional looking chess set and uses the horse looking pieces as the rooks (based on this definition). If you watch them play and see a horse looking piece move four spaces vertically, you'll say the person is playing the game wrong. That person may contend that the rook is not the castle looking piece as you claim, but the piece which moves like a rook moves. This may seem fine for a personal game, but I think we can adequately reject that the person is using the rooks and the knights correctly. So maybe our definition of a rook should be based on the intention of the creation of the piece. This way pieces of paper with the letter r can be rooks and so can castle looking pieces. In both cases, the piece is designed as a rook. However, if I misuse a piece, such as making the designed rook piece as a chair for a doll, its intended function is lost, but I think we can still call it a rook. Personally, I think the function-based definition of the rook has the most promise, but misusing a thing's function doesn't seem to take away the ability to still give it its name in spite of it not following its definition. This is a problem.

To further illustrate my point, let us look at chairs. A chair can't be described by its shape, because chairs have a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Not all chairs have backs. Not all chairs have arms. Not all chairs have individual legs. Not all chairs have a seat with a regular shape (like a square or circle). This gets even more complicated depending on culture. In China, sofa chairs such as a love seat or a recliner are not the same word as used with a wooden chair, as I was taught. This means that as an American Anglophone, I call things chairs that a Chinese Sinophone wouldn't. My definition of

chair would need to encompass more examples than theirs. To define a chair based on function or design would also be unpromising. Some chairs are artistic. They are designed to never be sat on. In fact, you could make a chair made from barbed wire which couldn't feasibly be sat upon. Yet if it is in the general shape of a chair, I and pretty much everyone else would call it a chair even though definitions aren't based on shape! Another problem is the idea of brokenness. A chair split in two might still be considered a chair, just one that's split. Or let's say a four-legged chair is missing a leg, is it no longer a chair? Sure, it's a broken chair, but I think it still belongs in the category of chair.

To solve this chair problem and rook problem, I used to believe (and still think it's a promising endeavor) that definitions ought to be assessed by a list of criteria. Then a portion of the criteria must be met in order for a particular object to be considered falling under a categorical definition such as for "chair." But this is not without problems itself. How many criteria does a definition need? Is it arbitrary? Could a triangle just have two criteria: a closed polygon and has exactly three sides? Or should the criterion of all angles equaling a total of 180 degrees also be included even if perhaps superfluous? And what about the number of criteria fulfilled, is that arbitrary? If we come up with 9 general criteria, it isn't clear whether a chair only fits in the definition after meeting, 4, 5, or 7 criteria. The whole point of the previous paragraph was that chair is such a wide category that it's too difficult to give a set of criteria which all chairs meet. But how much diversity is to be allowed?

All in all, I think the problem with defining categorical nouns has problems because our definitions are not in accordance with our psychological and neurological category-making behaviors. To this day, I do not know how to explicitly define a cat and a dog with words or even with criteria lists so as to always put cats only under the cat definition and to always put dogs only under the dog category. However, my brain is implicitly able to differentiate cats and dogs no problem (aside from computer generated *mélanges* of the two, which I don't care about for our purposes here). I never look at a cat and mistake it for a dog or vice versa. My brain naturally is able to categorize cats, dogs, chairs, and rooks. Our brains may have problems if we include jaguars, mountain lions, tigers, etc. as cats and wolves, hyenas, foxes, etc. as dogs because that line of categorizing, as demonstrated by zoology, leads into categorizing some creatures of different species and domains as belonging to the same group but categorizing other creatures together solely when in the same species or domain. In other words, even our natural tendencies

can be inconsistent. For all that, I leave it to sciences of the brain and language (and philosophers thereof) to further explore the means by which our brains come to form categories. After we have a good understanding of that, we might be able to “translate” the process into defining categories with our language (we also might not be able to do that). I believe that might be the most promising future of categorical definitions.

Another problem with definitions and even mutual comprehensibility of language itself lies in subjective understanding. Take the word family for example. Some people define family as only blood relatives. Some people define family as only people with whom one has a close, personal relationship. Some people have a mixture so as to include non-blood relatives as well as blood relatives with whom one doesn't have a close personal bond such as a cousin one hasn't met yet or one's deceased family members. Some people think that anyone who shares the same ideology are family (consider how religious folk or groups in social ideological movements sometimes call each other brothers and sisters just because they believe in similar things). But focusing only on the first two groups, we can easily imagine a conversation between Sally and Todd wherein Sally says she'll be visiting her family over break. When Todd hears this, he understands her as saying she'll be among blood relatives. Sally is actually going to visit her old friends from high school. There is a misunderstanding. This example shows where even though language is fluid and even though we understand each other very well and have meaningful, coherent conversations, there is a lot of room for misunderstanding based on person definitions. Take note, that we often realize in a conversation that our definitions aren't similar, and then we can define our terms. But I maintain that sometimes our conversations are unhindered by different definitions and we go on to falsely believe that we had a mutual understanding. I'm not saying this to make people define every term to ensure comprehension. Firstly, I think definitions are problematic even just for ourselves, let alone trying to have another person understand what one's definitions are and mean. Secondly, defining every term would be impractical for it taking too long. It might even be impossible if you had to define all the words used in your definitions. You'd be defining things either infinitely, circularly, or foundationally. In other words, you'd run into the regress problem. My point is that even though we can safely assume coherent communication to a large extent, we should hold a skeptical attitude in the background. But it's not too important.



As for other words like verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, I believe definitions lie heavily in relational explanations. To define “to move” is to talk about spatial relations over time. “To run” might be defined by appealing to the specific movements of leg muscles and legs and/or by appealing to walking at a faster velocity compared to when “walking.” There is no specific velocity to be considered running as opposed to walking. Running for one person might be at the same speed as walking for another. Indeed, even some nouns like family are relational in accordance to oneself or whoever the subject of the family in question is.

Defining “run’ as “to walk fast” is problematic because of how fast is to be defined. Again, there is no set velocity. It seems to me that adjectives are widely relative. Even adjectives denoting properties like color are potentially relative. My red may not be your red. But red is still best defined I think as the description given to the experience one has in relation to observing what we call a red object (which I would say is really just an object’ (note the apostrophe) which under certain light conditions gives off the experience of red to brains which can receive such inputs).

I spoke of velocity not being a defining factor in “fast.” Similarly one couldn’t use a specific numerical value of length to define “tall” or “short.” But even if we did say something like tall being defined as at least 3 meters in height, we still would still have problems. A meter is an intersubjectively agreed upon instrument of measurement. Working within the parameters of accepting this unit, we can “objectively” (I would say intersubjectively objectively which is good enough) talk about distances. But the actual length of a meter is arbitrary. Even if we were to base a unit system by starting with the smallest measurement we can conceive of such as a Planck measurement, that may still be arbitrary since it would be based on our abilities of comprehension. So our language puts us into a position where we set up artificial parameters within which we can mutually agree on things and use our parameters to arrive at knowledge. But our knowledge is still reliant on arbitrariness and our subjective understandings. Human-independent objective knowledge is unachievable as far as I can tell. At the very least, our language limits and liberates us in this way.

### 3.3 My philosophy of mind

I identify myself as a property dualist. This is a response to problems with substance dualism and materialist theories of consciousness (and metaphysics).

Substance dualism maintains that there exist two types of substances in the universe, material and immaterial. A book and the things which constitute the book like atoms (quarks perhaps?) might be said to be material things. But the mind (and/or soul) and free will is considered to be mental in that they are not comprised of material substances but something else and are not subjugated to the laws of physics. I will be giving my misgivings of substance dualism in the next two sections and won't go into it here. On the other hand, there is substance monism which can be materialist, physicalist, neutral, or idealist (among other less common forms). I have already rejected idealism. I consider myself a physicalist but only insofar as physicalism includes things like photons, quarks, energy, and other non-material components which make up our universe. I find materialist theories of mind to be unconvincing for various reasons depending on the position. But since I'm not writing a book about philosophy of mind, I think John Heils' *Philosophy of Mind* is a good introductory (and fairly deep and concise) text. As I'm only writing a section of a chapter on this matter, I will go straight into how I arrived at my property dualism and what it is.

I wanted a position which could account for property changes regarding changes of composition. To give a commonly used example, hydrogen and oxygen atoms and molecules have certain chemical behaviors and properties. But combine them in such a way as to produce water, and new properties are formed. Make hydrogen peroxide, and still the properties are different. Even on a human experience level as opposed to chemical, the property differences of water, hydrogen peroxide, hydrogen, and oxygen are apparent. A sum of components does not necessarily share its components' properties. I wanted a metaphysics which could easily account for this.

It's not even just a matter of constitution, but also of structure. Three matchsticks do not make a triangle when aligned. But if you put one end to touch another with each end being touched and no ends being isolated, you have a triangle comprised of matchsticks. The properties of the triangle hold true for this newly formed triangle but only if the components are in the right structure. Even a book whose pages are all ripped out and put into a bag wouldn't be a book per se (maybe one could call it that just like a broken chair), but a mess of components of what used to be a book. Order is very important. Bsuacee is not a word and means nothing. But rearrange the order and voilà; you have the word because which means something to Anglophones.

Consciousness only seems to happen with neural systems so far. Every instance of a mind seems to only occur when there is a neural system (namely a central neural system with a brain). With lack of evidence of a mind without a brain and the inductive evidence of minds always and only with brains, I think it's prudent until further evidence to accept tentatively that consciousness must have a brain. Moreover, consciousness seems to be in a direct causal relation with the brain. Doing certain things to the brain, like severing the corpus callosum (the connecting tissue between the two hemispheres) or a lobotomy have significant effects on one's awareness, perception, mental capacities, and personality among other consequences. For these reasons, I think it's fair to agree that consciousness is intimately connected to the brain. And since tampering with the brain does affect the mind so intimately, to destroy parts of the brain is to destroy some of one's consciousness which can happen with lobotomies and severe neural damage such as that in Phineas Gage's case. It follows then that to destroy the brain completely (i.e. kill the brain), one's consciousness would end in response. It would be very strange indeed to find out that the more you destroy the brain, the more you destroy the mind, but once the brain is completely dead, the mind survives in its entirety (such as soul theorists would have us believe). Thus I also make the claim that the mind is dependent on a brain by way of a causal link from the brain to the mind. That is to say that the brain causes the mind. Consciousness is a product of the brain.

One question to consider is whether or not the mind has any causal power. It certainly seems so. When I have a conscious desire to stand up or move my arm, my body follows in accordance with my mental desire. I doubt this is what is happening though. I think since the brain causes the mind and also controls the body in unconscious ways, it makes more sense to say that the brain is doing both the thinking and the doing. It's simpler for a brain to give rise to an idea of standing up and sending messages to the legs to push the body upwards than for a brain to give rise to an idea of standing up and wait for the idea to return to the brain to cause it to send messages to the legs. And as John Heil put it in his book, a movie scene on a theater screen is not caused by what's happening in the movie or the images but by the film which also is causing the images in the first place (193). (Heil is not an epiphenomenalist. He used this example to help the reader understand what is called epiphenomenalism which is what I'm arguing for here.) I believe the causal relationship between the brain and the mind is a one-way street. I think the brain's on-goings cause mental experiences such as conscious desires but that conscious experiences do not affect the brain. So when I talk

about a desire motivating me to act, that's just a shorthanded way of saying that my brain is functioning in such a way as to produce a mental desire experience and also produces physical action. The apparent ability for our thoughts to control our bodies is an illusion at worst and a miscommunicated state of affairs at best when we discuss our behaviors.

I consider myself a property dualist because I believe the mind is a part of the physicalist world but its properties are not. As discussed in my phenomenology section, I think properties like blue and wet (and possibly even shape, though I'm not so sure or justified) are mental fabrications and do not depict the actual external world (or better put, we cannot and epistemically should not assume that they do). I do believe that our mental experiences possess these properties. Thus the properties of consciousness are different than external properties. I'm not even talking about how the external world is like. Even in our experience of reality, I think our mental properties are different than the properties of the objects of our experiences. That sentence needs some unpacking. My experience of a tree lacks certain properties that my experience of my experience of a tree has. One such property difference might be intentionality. My thoughts can be of something such as having thought of or about a tree. But even in my experience of reality, it seems to be difficult to say that what I experience as a tree is of or about something else. Indeed, consciousness itself seems to be one of these properties! Nothing but brains seems to have consciousness. And even then, not all brains do have consciousness, I would say, such as a dead brain. How can I possibly reconcile this? The answer is property dualism. Despite there only being one substance (i.e. physical), properties can be physical or mental. And mental properties are the products of a certain kind of physical system like a brain.

In a similar fashion to hydrogen and oxygen atoms bonding in various ways to form new things with new properties, so too do I believe that our brains, our neural systems form something new with new properties when in the right kinds of structure. This structure would need to include the movement of proteins and neurotransmitters so as to exclude dead brains. It's a system which produces the mind. Consciousness is a product of the brain. And the properties of consciousness are not contained in the structure or the composition of the brain itself but emerge as a product from a brain with the right kinds of structure and composition. Property dualists tend to say something like consciousness being "over and above" the brain. I agree to this in so far as we would

agree that the properties of the triangle are “over and above” the three matches in that structure. But I don’t agree that this is something spooky or supernatural. It’s just what happens with neural tissue functioning the way it does in a system. I think humans are products of evolution. Our minds are just a product of our biology. There’s nothing supernatural or non-physical about it.

Before getting into objections to my view, I want to mention the possibility of non-organic brains. I am inclined to agree that artificial intelligence could have minds and consciousness so long as they have the phenomenological experiences as products of their physical systems. However, I think such a mind would be different than ours in a categorical way. Recall that definitions don’t work well with just composition or functionality. So while I call human minds “minds” by being emergent products of human nervous systems, a computer having an emergent product of phenomenological experiences of a computer’s hardware might be called better a mmind. Mminds would be very similar to minds, but the significant difference in the physical make-up would likely cause a significant difference in the emergent product, ergo mminds with cconsciousness from bbrains (computer bbrains with computer cconsciousness in computer mminds to be exact).

I only want to discuss two main objections. The first is that my philosophy of mind should not be too convincing. I barely justified my reasons for property dualism and only gave a very simplistic account for the sake of time and chapter space. But even if I were to give all of my justifications and go on and on about explaining my theory as best as I could, it still shouldn’t convince you too much. While I don’t think it would be fair to call the process of emergent properties spooky or supernatural, I do have little explanation of how new properties ever emerge from compositions of things in a certain structure without those properties. Even with water, I cannot give you an adequate explanation of why water has properties hydrogen and oxygen do not aside from talking about molecule bonding and how that affects shape, boiling points, melting points, and the like. But even still, there seems to be something unaccounted for in the explanation of new property formation. It’s an incomplete theory at best and an undeserving one at worst.

The reason why I’m only discussing two objections is because this last objection which I made up myself is enough for me to doubt the plausibility of property dualism on

its own to a very large extent. The objection is that my theory regarding properties is viciously circular. Neither hydrogen nor oxygen has the property of being wet to the touch. Water does have the property of being wet. I use this as an example of a non-mind occurring emergent property, but I can't. I believe wet only occurs in the mind. Only sense-data are wet. Or at the very least, only thoughts in the head have the property of wetness, as far as I'm concerned. This means that my example of water having a new property cannot count. After all, it's not the water that is wet but my perception of water that is wet. This means that for me, all properties are mental. Talking about non-mental properties is talking about something I don't think we can talk about. So when I say that the mind has new properties, I'm essentially saying the mind only has properties. This is a special pleading on my part, and it's enough to warrant not accepting my theory until my argument is less circular and I can actually use non-mental examples to make my point. The best current fix to this problem I have so far is to say that I get new properties in my experiences from water than in my experiences of hydrogen and oxygen alone or in another structure. However this kind of reasoning may not be adequate in finding non mental examples of new property formation. And if I am correct about humans being limited to mental phenomenological experiences, then it might be necessary to be circular. But since I didn't give a full account of my phenomenology, I don't expect anyone to accept my philosophy of mind for this reason.

Please recall that the purpose of this book is to write down my philosophies so as to demonstrate reasonableness, competence, and to explain myself, not to convince the reader that I am right. If you think I'm on the right track, feel free to look into property dualism as well as John R. Searle's philosophy of mind (though he rejects property dualism). While I disagree with him on certain aspects, I agree with his philosophy for the most part. I actually created my property dualist position before I even knew what property dualism was or who Searle was. Yet I find my ideas similar to both. And in case I do fully give up on property dualism/Searl's biological naturalism, I'm inclined to believe that eliminativism may be the next best theory. Even as a property dualist, I'm not so sure that the mind isn't irreducible. Besides, I already stated at the end of my phenomenology section that I might be inclined to reject the existence of secondary properties in totality.

### 3.4 Soul

This section is for my readers who believe in a soul or aren't sure. For philosophers who have already read arguments against the existence of a soul, I doubt you'll find anything novel here, other than my personal style of presenting the arguments. This section is nowhere near exhaustive, nor is it very deep or rigorous. It's not a too important topic and thus doesn't require too much argumentation.

The first reason that the existence of a soul is unlikely is that many people who believe in a soul believe that it can affect physical objects. This means that souls could control and animate bodies, they could make our bodies move and act through free will, a ghost could move an object or even be seen for that matter (since in order to be seen, light would need to reflect off of the ghost which is a physical phenomenon). However, this is doubtful, since in order to affect physical objects, the soul would need to be able to interact with the physical world. However, in order to interact with the physical world, the soul would be subjugated to physical properties and laws. This means that the soul would be physical, not immaterial, at which point I would question calling it a soul.

But maybe I'm getting a head of myself. Maybe a soul is usually immaterial, but can manifest itself physically in order to interact with the physical world. Aside from the implausibility of explaining how this could even be possible, I would then suggest that at least during the "physical manifestations" of the soul, scientific instruments ought to be able to detect the soul. Yet there is no substantial peer-reviewed evidence for the existence of a soul, which is surprising if they exist. You would think that with even the slightest solid evidence, one would be credited for the scientific discovery of the millennium. So the pseudo-scientific published articles which don't get put forth in academic circles seem to only preach to the choir by not meshing with more respectable journals to get their evidence peer-reviewed and tested by skeptics. After all, if the evidence were demonstrable and repeatable (and true), the skeptic could follow the methodology and arrive to the same conclusion.

Even ignoring the utter absence of good evidence in favor of the souls, the theories of how souls work seem illogical or otherwise highly implausible. An immaterial substance which interacts with the physical world would need to be able to interact some way. But it's hard to imagine how something non-physical can even affect causally something physical. For that matter, it's hard to imagine what an immaterial substance might be like. Does it have parts or is it a single thing without composition of smaller

parts? Can it have location? Is it subjugated to time (in which case, if yes, it is subjugated to gravity)? If not, how can we even conceive of it? How can something exist if not at some place in some time? What does existence mean if existence doesn't require time and space?

I understand there are ways of getting around the causal theory through what are called occasionalism and parallelism in philosophy, but they seem to run in the face of causal problems on their own without a god especially, which I'll be arguing against in chapter 5.

Besides, I have another important doubt against the soul, that being when it begins to inhabit a human body. If it is during conception, then I wonder what happens when a single zygote splits into two to form twins. And sometimes, the two zygotes actually recombine (Gazzaniga, 2, 15-18). This would be a very odd transition for a soul theorist to explain. And it seems odd to put it the advent of a soul anytime else. After the physical body is there doing what it does, how does a soul begin to animate it? What does the soul add that the body itself cannot do? What happens to the body when it gets a soul? Are there any physical changes that are detectable? If so, where's the evidence?

And what happens to a soul after the body dies? Does it keep going? If so, I wonder what souls can do without physical bodies. Can they see? Can they hear? Can they think? Can they have emotions? All of these processes have physical causes to them by way of perceptive pathways, neurons, and neurotransmitters. It's hard to think about a soul doing anything without a body.

Plus, a soul which is posited to explain consciousness and the mind runs into some problems. Firstly, there is no substantial evidence (I won't accept testimony here because this claim has significant metaphysical consequences and thus requires much more reliable and demonstrable evidence) of there being a brainless mind or a brainless consciousness. This doesn't mean there aren't or can't be, but until presented with minds without brains, we have no good reason to suppose they exist. Secondly, tampering with the brain affects things like consciousness, personality, decision capacity, and other things which are supposedly jobs of the soul. But that means physical changes can affect the soul. Looking past the problem of causation again, it does make it hard to believe that destroying some of the brain prevents some of the soul to manifest itself (by having full mental capacity), but by destroying all of the brain, the soul is unaffected. Even if we



were to say something like the soul is the electrical energy in a closed circuit which is like a body. If you mess with the wires, the electricity can't do its job, but you didn't actually destroy the electricity. Fair enough, but if you completely destroy the wires, the electricity doesn't resume its jobs. At best, a soul may animate a body, but it doesn't persist beyond a body. Souls are not enough to posit a life after death (see chapter 6).

These are just a few of my reasons against the soul. There are more, and you might consider looking into philosophical arguments for and against a soul, but I hope it's clear that I do have some fair enough reasons to reject the soul. Maybe if a soul theorist could meaningfully explain what an immaterial substance is like and provide empirical data to support one's ideas, I'd be much more open to the idea, but until these problems have been resolved and until actual scientific or well-established empirical evidence is presented, I'm going to remain highly skeptical. For further reading, I suggest Shelly Kagan's *Death* and Michael Gazzaniga's *The Ethical Brain: The Science of Our Moral Dilemmas*.

### 3.5 Free will

Free will is such a discussed topic in philosophy that I am almost certainly going to accidentally plagiarize or borderline plagiarize unless I specifically go out of my way to find others who wrote similar ideas to my own. But I won't do that out of laziness (please note that this laziness is not as present in future chapters as this was the penultimate chapter written). Besides, these ideas are still mine which I arrived to by myself. They're just not anything new, I imagine.

I will begin my discussion of free will by placing skepticism on the idea of libertarian free will. Libertarian free will is what most people think of when talking about whether free will exists or not. I would like to give a definition of free will, but the best I can do is to say what it isn't. Free will is a capacity for an agent to choose an option without her choice being determined by factors outside of the agent. This may seem like a positive definition, but when pressed to explain what it means to make a free choice, I along with everyone else it would seem to me have no explanation of what it is, what it's like, and how it works. At the very least, free will proponents do give negative qualities such as not-determined, uncoerced, and not-random. While proponents still haven't given an explanation of what free will actually is or what it positively entails, this explanation given is good enough for our purposes.

I have problems accepting the metaphysical plausibility of free will. I find that our decisions (our mind in its entirety even) come from our brains. This means that our decision making process comes from physical governances of our neurology. In other words, our choices are made by biological factors outside of our control. But even if I were to reject the idea that the mind is fully caused by one's brain which is controlled by external systems out of the mind's power, I would still take issue with free will.

Imagine a choice between cereal and eggs for breakfast. Lucy understands the two options and introspects what she wants to eat. Maybe she includes other desires in her analysis such as eating a balanced diet, knowing she didn't have much protein in the last few days or maybe she needs more grains today. She might consider other factors like not having milk for cereal or a clean frying pan to cook her eggs. And maybe she's running late and needs to choose the quickest option. Regardless of what she chooses, it seems it is in her power to choose. It's not her body that's choosing, but her mind (remember that I'm granting a separation here for the sake of argument). Except, where did her desire to eat come from? Where did her hunger come from? Maybe she's not hungry but wants to be healthy. However, this desire also seems to not be in Lucy's control. She didn't choose to have this desire. It came from other people telling her about how being healthy is good. Yet, I doubt she chose to accept that this was worthy of desiring. She just came to desire it over time. And for that matter, even if she did choose to want to be healthy and thus eat breakfast, before introspecting on her options, it would appear that she had another choice, to introspect or to not introspect. But as far as I can tell, it wasn't her choice to begin introspecting in the first place. She did it unconsciously. Her introspection happened without her using her agency to do it. And if she considered that by eating something without introspection, that wouldn't be a choice so much as a mindless behavior and that's why she did in fact choose to introspect, we just moved the same issue one step back. She didn't choose to begin introspecting on the merit of introspecting!

Moving along, we might grant that while our initial thoughts are not chosen, this is not important. Free will doesn't have to concern every action and behavior of our minds, only the ones which one does undertake through conscious introspection. Fair enough, but I find similar issues. Regarding Lucy choosing on the basis of her preferred tastes, I am skeptical as to whether she has a choice in the matter. If she feels like eating cereal, I don't think she chooses this craving consciously. It just happens that she is

craving it whether she thinks about why or not. What about other reasons like feasibility of the choice, dietary considerations, and time constraints? Still, I find her choice is out of her mind's control on the basis of these reasons. She doesn't choose to put more weight into not being late to work than into eating eggs instead of cereal for breakfast. She doesn't choose to be swayed by her desire to eat a balanced diet. She doesn't choose to rather eat cereal because she doesn't want to go through the effort of cleaning a pan. And in all these cases, she doesn't choose to have these considerations in mind. These thoughts would just pop into her mind while concentrating on breakfast. If she's running late, she wouldn't will herself to consider this factor. She would subconsciously (thus out of her control) have the realization that eggs would make her late for work.

Another problem with free will is preference. This was already implied in the objections given above about Lucy not choosing to put more weight into timeliness than breakfast. But since this is an important factor in my opinion, I want to expand on it. Let us say that I have a choice between a cereal I love (A) and a cereal I just kind of like every now and again (B). I don't think I really have a choice between A and B. Firstly, I don't choose to like A much more than I do B. I don't even choose to like what I like in the first place. Regarding tastes, some people come to enjoy tastes they originally disliked or grow tired from tastes they used to enjoy. In either case, I don't think they make conscious decisions to like or dislike the tastes over time; it happened on a biochemical level without their consciousness making it so. Desensitization is not an action undertaken by the mind. If the objection is that one can choose to methods for the sake of desensitization, that is essentially choosing to change one's tastes, again I disagree. One did not choose to think of these decisions, be persuaded by them, or choose to desire to get desensitized initially.

Returning to my A or B choice, supposing the morning in question is one in which I have eaten both cereals in the past week, it is probable that I am going to choose A without question. I only like B every now and again. My choice is determined by my preferences and my preferences determined by biological factors outside of my control. (This last statement is pretty much one of compatibilism, that determinism and free will are compatible so long as what we mean by free will is something like behaving in accordance with our desires and preferences without coercion. On a superficial level, I consider myself a compatibilist, but when pressed, I do deny that we act freely since our desires and preferences are themselves determined out of our control.) If we had a

rewind-time device, I am willing to bet that I would make my choice for A that morning every single time. It would be out of my choice to choose otherwise (unless I knew about the test, in which case I might choose B to subvert the results but that we be done out of an unchosen desire to subvert the test and not a question of A or B cereals).

A lot of support for free will comes from denying determinism, the idea that present conditions have set causal relations to future conditions thereby making all future events set in stone and unable to be otherwise, ergo pre-determined. But this doesn't need to be the case. Quite frankly, I have a suspension of judgement as to whether the universe is determined or not. I'm not sure if a radioactive material does spontaneously decay or if with a rewind-time device it would decay at the exact same instances every time. It may be that we don't know enough factors to realistically predict or reasonably assume that there is some underlying causal system. But it doesn't matter, because even if things on a sub-particle level are undetermined, a free will theorist would still need to demonstrate that one's actions are undetermined. I do understand that the brain is made up of sub-particles and that since I believe in emergent properties, it might be the case that my brain's behaviors could be undetermined. However, I have no good reason to believe this is the case and in fact believe to have reasons against this being the case. Besides, even if the universe and the brain's functions are undetermined, free will would require that our choices be non-random. So combatting determinism alone is not sufficient, although it is necessary.

I want to discuss two contentions to my idea that we don't have free will. The first is a thought experiment. Imagine a supercomputer which can accurately predict all future events in a deterministic universe (please note that I believe this is an impossibility because of my arguments against omniscience in chapter 5, even in a deterministic universe). I go up to the machine one day and ask it if I will eat cereal A or B tomorrow. The machine prints out a piece of paper which tells me I will eat cereal A. I go home and the next day I eat cereal B, thereby disproving the machine. I return to the machine and find a piece of paper which it wrote out to me, dated yesterday just after I left. It reads, "Kegan asked for an answer between two choices. I printed out what he would have chosen without asking me. But because he had the intention to prove me wrong, whatever I wrote would be the one he wouldn't then choose. Knowing this before he even came up to me, I printed out one answer and waited for him to leave. Then I

printed this paper which explains that he ate cereal B. No, Kegan, you did not prove me wrong.”

What happened? Did I prove it wrong after all since it initially printed out a false answer? No. This machine knew (so to speak) what I was up to before I did. It predicted my behaviors accurately and acted in accordance to what would inevitably happen. And it also predicted that it didn't have a choice to act differently itself. That's why one can't reject determinism on the grounds that the computer made a choice to print one answer or the other or to tell me that it had already predicted what was to come. It did what it predicted it would do in a determined universe and was unable to act differently. The same goes for me.

The second objection which also follows from the first objection is that to reject free will is to reject responsibility for their actions. This needn't be the case so long as we parse responsibility. Even if a person isn't metaphysically responsible for acting one way or another, we can still socially and legally hold a person accountable for their actions. After all, by doing so, we are in effect being an external factor in shaping their future actions. Environment isn't chosen but still affects one's neurology and thus one's behaviors. Even moral responsibility can exist even if metaphysically speaking, one is determined. A moral action would still be moral even if done without free will (depending on the moral theory). Thus even though I may be predetermined to do an immoral action at time  $t$ , I can still be held morally responsible. It is my action and the consequences are my fault even if metaphysically it was out of my control.

At the very least, I think it is in our best interests in society to act and speak as if we had free will. Indeed, that is why I still talk about “making decisions” and “choosing of my own volition.” Free will, like the mind having effects on the body's behavior, may be just an illusion, but it doesn't matter. Whether we are aware of the illusion or not, the illusion persists. It is socially, legally, and morally useful to pretend as if we had free will. Thus let us admit the illusion and resign ourselves to it, just as we do with color in light of scientific understanding of color (not to mention my phenomenological ideas about color). And whether or not you agree or disagree, I will hold you accountable and try to persuade you otherwise. After all, it is metaphysically in my nature to do so as much as your reaction is in yours. Perhaps I will be conditioned by others to not try to persuade

against the idea of free will, but again, at this moment in time I believe such a change would be technically out of my control, though I will treat it as if it were in my control.

That is the end of this chapter. I apologize for the laziness put into it. I am rushed for time right now, and these subjects don't have too much importance for the conclusions at the end of the book. I wish I could have written about space and time (I haven't my own theories but would have enjoyed analyzing others'), but alas, I haven't the space or time to write these sections, haha!

## Chapter 4

### Morality

I would like to give a definition of morality, but I don't think I adequately can. There are many different kinds of moral theories which vary greatly on a very fundamental level. All my attempts to give a neutral definition which would apply to all theories and not to exclude others have failed to be neutral. To give an example, describing morality in terms of actions may exclude theories which are agent-based. Describing morality as even existing or being a coherent concept would exclude certain forms of moral skepticism. Thus for me to give a definition is to already lead into an exclusive perspective on morality. So instead of starting with what morality is in a broad sense, I will simply be partial and present what my thoughts are on morality. Though I suggest looking into theories other than my own, since there is a lot of interesting discussion to be had beyond the topics I will be going over. Instead of going top-down, I'll start with what I believe to generally be a good moral theory. Afterwards, I'll take a step back and look at morality as a whole and analyze it on a meta-ethical level.

#### 4.1 Pleasure and harm

When looking at rules, actions, thoughts, and so on as good in such a way that I would say something like, "It is morally right to do x," I find myself always naming things dealing with pleasure. So, benevolence or acting benevolently would be considered moral in my book and happens to have some pleasure as a consequence, namely for the one being benefited. However, not all actions do have pleasurable consequences. Consider giving an infant immunity shots. The child, not understanding the situation would only receive harm done by the needle. This is true on an instant level, but all in all, more harm is being prevented by giving the infant immunity to certain illnesses. Thus even harmful situations can be said to be moral if it prevents further harm. Indeed, I have found that harmful actions tend to be labeled as immoral ones.

Stealing is deemed wrong and gives harm to those who have been robbed. This line of thinking has made me come to believe that pleasure and harm are in fact at the root of moral claims. To say that x is moral is to say that x increases pleasure or diminishes harm and to say that y is immoral is to say that y decreases pleasure or increases harm. This is the essential basic foundation of morality as I see it.

Of course, there are some glaring problems and areas which would give much doubt to such an account of morality. Consider actions which don't seem to have pleasure or reduction in harm as a basis. We can say things like, "One ought to get an education." Here, the goal doesn't seem to be pleasure so much as wisdom and knowledge. Indeed, it would be odd to say that a perfectly moral society would be perfectly moral so long as they only ever did pleasurable things and never did harmful things. We can imagine such a "utopia" as not having things like knowledge or justice or friendships or other things we call good. So it seems goodness has to do with things other than merely pleasure and harm.

I would like to rebuttal this by way of a hypothetical consideration. Imagine if it caused pain to know things such that to teach a child math would be similar to psychologically stressing them no matter how simple math came to the child. Reading would cause migraines. Thinking long and hard so as to justify one's beliefs might be traumatic. Let's say that friendships were painful in that to spend time with someone close would feel just as bad as breaking up feels in the real world. Perhaps we would cry in agony in knowing that justice is served. Conversely, to steal would bring joy to all involved, both the thief and the robbed. Taking physical damage would feel as enjoyable as spending an exuberant day at an amusement park. Lying would feel as relieving as telling the truth in our world. Now, I ask you to consider for such a world where this is the case, whether our so-called good things like knowledge, friendship, and justice would still be good and whether our so-called bad things like pain, stealing, and lying would still be bad. Personally, I find that the things we call good which aren't immediately pleasurable are in fact pleasure producing. It feels pleasurable to have friends, to know things, and to live in a just world. Likewise, it brings harm to be lied to or to lie even, to take physical damage, or to be robbed. To say that there is something more that a utopia needs than pleasure and the absence of harm would require that one demonstrate how such additions do not themselves fall under the categories of pleasure and harm. To my knowledge, no virtue, no objective list theory, and no other form of morality adequately



produces something it calls good which doesn't have some pleasurable outcome or reduce some harmful outcome (be they direct or indirect). Even something like divine command theory where a religious person believes it is moral to kill one's child under certain circumstances in spite of how much harm would be done to both the child and parent still places their actions under pleasure or pain. To not do what is moral would lead to hell, or maybe simply doing an injustice to God in which case one might say a greater harm is being avoided by killing one's child. Such a case would be extreme, but nevertheless, I find our behaviors to be moral and immoral based on relations to pleasure and harm in the overall scheme of things. Pleasure and harm needn't be direct consequences. (A counter to my thought experiment might be something like saying that even if being benevolent and charitable caused pain for the agent but good for the recipient, such qualities would still be moral. But my counter to that would depend on the overall cost of pleasure and pain as I'll make clear shortly.)

Another problem with this hedonistic thinking is how it relates to multiple parties. Imagine someone who gets pleasure from harassing others. Is it in this person's interest to harass others? I doubt it. Even if someone does get some pleasure from harassing others, we might deem their actions immoral on the basis of the overriding harm it causes to others. Just as the overriding benefit of immunity can overcompensate for the harm of an injection, so too can harm override pleasure. As for harassing being in the person's own interests, they may get some pleasure from the harassment but in the long run be harmed greater by the social consequences. Further, they might be harmed upon reflecting on the harm done by means of sympathy and empathy. But what if this person gets away with it and doesn't feel harmed by regret? In this case, I will bite the bullet and admit that the person may be acting in their best interests to harass others, provided more pleasure than harm come to them. However, this neglects a basic idea of the nature of morality as I see it.

Morality deals not with pleasure and harm as they deal with a single person's well-being but as they deal with multiple sentient creatures' well-being. To act morally is to benefit overall. To act immorally is to harm overall. There is more pleasure overall, I would think, to live in a world where people didn't get harassed at the expense of certain people's displeasure than to live in a world where people did get harassed at the expense of certain people's displeasure. That is to say, I am willing to bet that the overall pleasure received from not being harassed is higher than the pleasure of harassing and the overall

harm of not being able to harass is lower than the harm of being harassed. Indeed, even if the mass majority of people wanted to harass the minority, I still remain doubtful that to harass would be moral for reasons discussed in my section on negative utilitarianism.

Despite my attempts to reconcile one person's well-being and another's, I must confess that I can't adequately do so. You see, I believe that people's values of pleasure and harm with respect to a certain action may well differ from one person to another. Thus, getting harassed for person A may be more harmful than getting harassed for person B. And person's C's pleasure from harassing may be much higher than person D's. So it is imaginable that person D harassing person A is immoral due to the overall negative welfare, but person C may morally harass person B. This is an interesting possibility, one which I don't have an adequate response to at the moment. Maybe one could say that a world with harassment of any sort is still overall worse than a world with it, regardless of the situational computations, but I'm not sure I could defend such a viewpoint (again as we'll see later when I try).

There are many other problems with utilitarianism (which is essentially what I have laid out for you here on a most basic level (specifically a utilitarianism built on a hedonistic account of well-being)), some of which I will address in later sections. However, I want to simply clarify that to my best abilities, I find utilitarianism still the best general route of a moral theory. Even with all its issues, I cannot help but see the intimate, perhaps even necessary, connection between pleasure, harm, and morality. Moreover, as will be explained in the next section, I find morality to lie in consequences of actions, or at least that moral analyses best revolve around consequential considerations. This means that an objective list theory of pleasure and harm would be inadequate for my understanding of morality. Whether utilitarianism of some form or another is the best moral theory, I will be treating it as such for the rest of the chapter.

## 4.2 Consequentialism

I do not believe an action is moral or immoral because of the very nature of the action itself. To inject someone with a needle may generally be immoral, if a doctor injects a patient with a needle for the sake of the patient's health, the action is not immoral. Perhaps this can be explained by appealing to consent, authority, or even utilitarianism itself. It is not the act of injection which is immoral but the act of causing gratuitous harm or the act of infringing another's bodily consent which is immoral. In

the case of consent, we might say a doctor is moral to give medical attention to an unconscious person in a bad condition (though it is at least arguable that consent could trump even saving a person's life without consent). So even consent may be contextual. What about utilitarianism? Sure, particular actions may be moral or immoral given the circumstance, but on a deeper level, is it ever contextually immoral to act in so as to maximize the good and minimize the harm? Honestly, I'm not so sure. It sure seems that the action of maximizing good and minimizing harm is always the right thing to do regardless of context. For all that, such an "action" is not readily an action at all, but a guideline, a rule. It is not a specific action which is maximizing good and minimizing harm being done, but a multitude of actions which together result in the maximization of good and the minimization of harm, as far as I can tell. I suppose to be fair that to the extent that maximizing good and minimizing harm is a single action, then I will admit that morality is non-contextual, but that's not a claim I'm willing to agree to readily.

The importance of contextualism (in the **context** of morality haha) lies in the nature of consequentialism. I believe that consequentialism implies that morality lies in the consequences and not the action itself per se (with the name of consequentialism, no kidding, right?). But if morality were non-contextual, then perhaps morality could be reunderstood as existing within the nature of the action and not the consequences of the action. This needn't be necessarily the case. After all, let's suppose we do admit that maximizing good and minimizing harm is a single action which is moral. Even still, we might persist that in spite of the action's non-contextualism, it is not the action which is moral so much as the consequences which are brought about by the action. The universal action may be good only because it brings good consequences regardless of context. For all that, someone might have some capacity to argue that in such a case of a single moral action, utilitarianism is no longer a consequentialist theory should we place the morality in the action itself. It's an interesting possible position to take which I wanted to mention.

As for consequentialism itself, there are some issues which should be addressed. The first I want to discuss is the objectivity vs. subjectivity of consequentialism. If morality is objective based on its actual consequences, then things like intentions, knowledge, moral reasoning, and agent-based perspectives have no bearing on the morality or immorality of a given situation. Whether or not I have the intention to do the right thing, if my action results in an overall negative set of affairs, then what I did was immoral. It wouldn't matter if I didn't know about morality, utilitarianism, or about

certain factors in the situation. So if I give someone a bottle of medicine to help them but it has an ingredient which they're allergic to, I would still be acting immorally. This is because objective morality would be objective regardless of the agent's perspective. It also wouldn't matter what our observer perspective has to offer. If I look at someone who is acting objectively immorally and I deem the action moral, it doesn't matter. Even if we all agreed as on an action being moral, if the action were objectively immoral, it would still be immoral in spite of our beliefs. This seems very implausible or at least impractical for humanity, and most people are weary to accept it (not that it would matter if true). I have my own reasons for not believing in an objective morality which I'll give later. But for now, let us look at some problems in accepting things like intentions, knowledge, moral reasoning, and agent-based perspectives.

Looking at intentions first, it would seem difficult to defend an action which causes significant harm done with good intentions. Imagine that with the best of intentions to make the world a better place, a serial killer targets people he thinks are making the world a worse off place. This killer might be utilitarian and believes that the harm done by killing is far overridden by the prevention of harm done by the evildoers the killer chooses to kill. I understand that most utilitarianists see death as an infinite harm, but for the sake of argument, let's grant that such is not the case. And in fact the killer is indeed preventing a lot of harm. If just looking at the direct consequences of the actions of the killer and those of the evildoers, we may even grant that the killer is doing more good than harm. But we might say the fear caused by the killings, the loss of death on the part of the evildoers' loved ones, and the harm of living in a society where a killer roams freely do tip the scales in favor of the evildoers living. So in this case, the serial killer is acting immorally overall but is doing a lot of utilitarian good as well and is doing so with the intentions of making the world a much better place for all its inhabitants. For all that, it would appear to me that the intentions do not change the immorality of the killer's actions. What's more, just as most people would (but likely for different reasons), I would take issue with the killer's actions even if the overall net benefit weighed more than the overall net harm. It may be the most moral thing supposing basic act utilitarianism, but there's something very troubling about accepting a moral theory which permits such extreme harms for a small overall positive net cost.

Before disregarding intentions altogether, let us look at poor intentions with good effects. Imagine someone who tries to ruin someone else's life out of revenge by getting

them fired from their job. The revenge seeker succeeds. However, as it turns out, the newly unemployed person ends up at a better job overall in a very short amount of time. In fact, if this person hadn't been unemployed and job hunting, the job would have been given to someone else (for simplicity's sake, we are not going to look at the harm done to this third person by not receiving the job). So long as the overall harm was significantly overridden by the overall benefit, I for one find the revenge seeker's actions moral in spite of the negative intentions.

For all that, I cannot help but also think about how important intentions are on a moral level. It makes morality seem more genuine when done for the right reasons and with the right intentions. Immoral actions seem far more pardonable when done with good intentions than with bad intentions. Maybe intentions only deal with how accountable or responsible a person is morally and not so much with the moral status of the action or its consequences. In order to look closer into this possibility, I'll be moving on in my analysis of consequentialist issues.

As for knowledge and moral reasoning, I'd like to consider animals (the non-homosapien kinds). Let us suppose that animals do not have moral reasoning or knowledge whatsoever. Only humans have the capacity to understand morality. Animals still do harmful things and pleasurable things. Some animals hurt other animals and humans and some animals give other animals and humans pleasure. Can we say that these animals are behaving in moral or immoral ways? Without even the possibility of understanding or knowing morality, are their pleasure-inducing actions moral and their harm-inducing actions immoral? On the one hand, morality of consequences may not revolve around the agents. We might say that an animal or an infant (who has no moral reasoning or knowledge) can act morally or immorally. However, this leads into some problems, rocks don't have minds. But rock slides sometimes cause harm. And rocks are sometimes useful and their existence leads to promoting pleasure and happiness. Yet, I almost certainly wouldn't call a rock as behaving morally or immorally. This might be because rocks don't really have behaviors or actions, so it wouldn't make sense to say they behave in any way at all. Fair enough. Though rocks do exist, and I wouldn't say they are moral or immoral either. For that matter, looking at "being moral or immoral" it seems quite controversial to say that an infant or an animal with no mind could be moral or immoral. This is odd, because morality likely doesn't have anything to do with

intentions. Thus whether or not a baby or animal acts with the intention of being moral, it may not make one difference about it being moral.

To solve this conundrum, we might find it best to first clarify what is meant by an agent being moral or immoral. Up until now we have only been dealing with acting morally or immorally and actions being moral or immoral. A rough clarification may be that an agent is moral if she acts morally in most cases and is immoral if she acts immorally in most cases. Using this, we might end up granting that rocks cannot be moral or immoral since it require acting morally or immorally and rocks simply do not act. And should it be the case that an animal or infant acts overall immorally, we may just have to accept them as falling under the category of being immoral (though I think it would be hard to find such an example of an infant being immoral (but mosquitoes can finally be said to be immoral so long as they have the capacity to act!)). This is strange, but let's grant it for the sake of argument for now.

Even if an animal or infant acts immorally or morally, I think we might be able to still deny that they are immoral or moral. Perhaps in addition to acting a certain way, in order to be moral or immoral, the agent also must have some knowledge of morality and capacity for moral reasoning. This addition is not without purpose. It adds this further requirement to instill the desirable intentions back into moral discussion. Our intuitions (mine at least) lead to a morality which takes intentions into some sort of account (not that intuitions necessarily matter for moral reasoning, but I'm not sure one way or the other). With this new account of being moral or immoral, an agent can act morally or immorally, but not hold moral responsibility or accountability. Indeed, morality as a characteristic of the agent may only be had by those with adequate comprehension and capacity for moral reasoning. This seems like a fair enough fit for intentions and agent-perspectives. It isn't without problems though. It might be that all humans are morally ignorant and thus we don't hold moral accountability or responsibility. Even if humans do have the capacity, it might be that only people who rigorously analyze morality may hold moral accountability and responsibility. Consider the implications of not being able to call the cruelest of dictators immoral or the kindest of saints moral so long as they do not have thorough moral theories. This is a consequence I personally accept, for I do believe this to be the case, but I understand that it's not as appealing as it may seem at first glance. Moreover, this is a weak position I hold and is readily up for replacement or abandonment in light of a better analysis.

Agent-based perspectives are also important when considering how humans actually behave. Humans have various desires and concerns beyond doing what is morally right all the time. Imagine a situation where you have enough time to run in the street and save one of two people from a moving unattended truck going down a hill. If one of the parties is someone you care about deeply and the other is a stranger, you are far more inclined to rescue your loved one. If one party is a person and one is a dog, you will be more likely to save whichever you put more value in. For some, human lives outweigh those of dogs, for others dogs' lives outweigh the value of humans'. Should the case be between two loved ones, you might just make an arbitrary decision out of not wanting to decide whom you would rather save. Or maybe you do what most people would find deplorable but also understandable and do decide to save the person you care more about (imagine between two friends), assuming you even have the time to morally reasoning anything in such a time-constrained circumstance.

I do not wish to discuss to what extent it would or would not actually be detestable to make such a choice. Instead, how about you are in a situation where you can save one loved one or multiple people. Hypothetically, we might say your loved one has the only antibodies to stop an extremely deadly and contagious virus about to spread. You know your loved one has the antibodies and you know that in order to make antidotes, doctors would need the entire blood supply of your loved one. The process will be fatal. What number of strangers would it take for you to morally bring your loved one to die for the sake of rescuing others? Maybe you're a cold-blooded utilitarian and do it as soon as the net outcome is better that your loved one die (perhaps at two strangers). Or maybe, it would take a larger threshold such as 10, or 100, or 1,000 people about to die. Maybe your love is so unconditional and infinite (doubtful as I doubt human brains have the capacity for infinite anything) that you would let the world die out just to stop your loved one from dying even at the expense of all other loved ones' lives and your own. This could also be the case if instead of consequentialism, you believe morality is all-binding in rules such as "do not kill." (I also want to quickly mention that such a case may infringe on rights such as the right to not be killed. Because I am not well equipped on what rights are regarding morality alone, I have chosen not to include the discussion thereof here, though right infringement may be another problem for consequentialists.)

Whatever the case, consequentialism seems to be untouched by human concerns. Morality of the actions which produce the best outcomes would appear to be unaffected

by whether humans like it or not. To act morally seems to be impartial irrespective of other values the agent has. Supposing consequentialism is correct, this might be a reason for humans not to be moral, at least insofar as morality conflicts with other values. Of course, I'm leaving out an important factor. The consequentialism I have in mind (some form of utilitarianism) works on the basis of emotions, namely pleasure and harm! So it would be important in one's analyses to include the cost of doing harm to a loved one in the consequences. It might be the case that acting in favor of loved ones is overall better than by acting impartially.

This may also explain the role of the agent regarding morality. If consequences are what count morally speaking, then a moral action being done is moral regardless of who does it. But we sometimes care! It may be the best moral action to educate infants. And supposing I could be a satisfactory teacher just as much as a satisfactory translator of equal levels, morally speaking there seems no good reason to choose one or the other. But there is for me. I would much rather work with transcripts all day than with children even if helping children were more important a duty. Maybe by taking the harm of me working with children and the harm of me not pursuing my passions for languages would be enough to make translating the more moral option.

I am not so sure this is the case though. While there is a lot of good which comes from having strong relationships, I cannot help but look at a world where everyone loves each other impartially as being overall better. I might be wrong, and it might be that we as human beings can ever only be partial. With that in mind, even if we do end up acting immorally, we may be forever bound to act as though acting in favor of other values were the better case. I leave this up to others to make sense of including you my readers, for I am too uncertain and have no good reason either way that I suspend my judgement even on a practical level (as opposed to my always present global pyrrhonian skepticism).

On a similar note, Shelly Kagan wrote a book entitled *The Limits of Morality*. In this book, he discusses how consequentialism is very demanding. Allow me to quote the extreme position he argues for (quite well in my opinion): "Morality requires that you perform—of those acts not otherwise forbidden—that act which can be reasonably expected to lead to the best consequences overall. (1)" What this means is that spending money or time on yourself where it might be better spent is to act not in accordance with morality. So watching a movie, buying dessert, treating yourself out, might not be



immoral per se, but you could instead be out doing charity work. This is an extreme position, which Kagan readily admits. He also understands that people are not reasonably expected to ever follow all that morality demands or at least they never truly do. But he is nonetheless able to argue that any moderate consequentialist moral theory thus far fails to provide sufficient and coherent defenses to the extremely demanding case and the minimalist case. He looks at how one might argue that one can in fact be moral and not always do what has foreseeably the best consequences and points out where their position cannot also be used against a minimalist that claims we have no reason to be moral ever. In effect, he makes it quite apparent that regarding moral obligation, we have only the dichotomy of always maximizing morality or having no moral demands whatsoever. Neither of these is very appealing. For all that, after reading his book and a few essays addressing his claims, I am currently convinced that Kagan is correct until a coherent argument for modernism is conceived. However this fact weakens, I think, the plausibility of consequentialism. If morality demands so much more than we can give, if it demands that we work always to our greatest limits (but not to exceed them since one is less morally capable if one exhausts oneself too much (7)), then we might be better off not being moral. Kagan does address why he thinks we should be moral, though my understanding of value theory and human behavior (see chapter 7) leave me unconvinced of his appeal to the value of *integrity* (390).

One final issue I want to discuss on consequentialism alone is that it seems very difficult if not impossible to assign appropriate values to and accurately predict consequences of actions. In addition to the idea that values of pleasures and harms differ among different people, even just looking at oneself, it's not clear that everything has such clear-cut values. How many delicious meals does one day at an amusement park with friends make? What is the ratio of a day at an amusement park without friends and a day trip with friends? This only gets more complicated when we try to assess pleasure vs. harm. While we intuit or otherwise can morally reason that immunization outweighs the pain of a shot, it's not so clear that involuntary medical treatment outweighs whatever physical ailments would be avoided. We aren't forced to get surgery for all back pains. It may or may not be better for a person without insurance to get forced surgery against their will in spite of the financial stress it would cause, but I find it difficult to demonstrate that one way or the other.

Regarding outcomes, we simply don't always have the predictive capabilities of assessing what actions will lead to which outcomes. I would agree that lying may be better in situations where if not caught, the consequences are better. But sometimes we don't realize how our lies will impact others' choices and turn out to overall worse consequences. Or we may not foresee a factor which will lead to our lies being revealed, thus causing the harm of betrayal and disappointment, creating overall a worse outcome than if we had just told the truth. Sometimes we tell the truth thinking it will lead to better consequences but in fact lying would have been better even if we had been caught. The sheer implausibility of practically acting in accordance with consequentialism gives rise to much doubt of its merit. This is another area where we might be able to reinsert intentions into our discussion of morality. While morality might be objective in the sense that our intentions do not alter which outcomes are better than others, we are incapable of acting as if we had such moral reasoning skills. Therefore we ought to at least do our best in an attempt to be moral, even if we ultimately fail. I'm uncertain of this conclusion since morally speaking, it would depend on whether trying one's best hopefully is overall better than not trying at all. My point is that this solution doesn't address the problem but merely tries to ignore it, which I'm not so sure is the most moral or most reasonable line of action.

### 4.3 Negative Utilitarianism

Until last summer, I identified myself morally as what is called a negative utilitarianist. I believed that this was the best form of utilitarianism and in fact the best moral theory. However, in order to have better beliefs, after establishing my moral theory, I sought out challenges to it so I could revise or reject it in light of arguments. After reading an essay by Toby Ord which I will discuss, I began to criticize my own views inspired by the criticisms in his essay. I still believe there is merit in negative utilitarianism (NU), which is why I am talking about it here even though I acknowledge that I no longer hold to this theory.

A couple years ago, I was looking into utilitarianism and thought about cases like immunization shots where harm and pleasure were mixed. I considered an example where overall the pleasures would be equal but the harms unequal as well as the harms equal and the pleasures unequal. I found myself believing that where the pleasures are equal, I am inclined to choose what brings the least harm and where the harms are equal,

I am inclined to choose what brings the most pleasure. However, if both pleasures and harms were unequal I found myself inclined to still choose the action which caused less harm, even at the expense of less pleasure. So for example, let's suppose I have \$1000 which I can give to any charity I want. If I choose charity A, a girl with a terminal illness who is not in any pain but still not happy will have an expense paid trip to wherever she wants and will have a wonderful experience. If I choose charity B, I will be helping another girl who is in pain get the expensive medical treatment her family can't afford by the amount of my donation. I would rather reduce suffering than maximize pleasure. But maybe this example isn't good. After all, pleasure from an amusement park isn't as rich as pleasure from health. By the way, by getting the second girl's medical treatment, she would also be in a more pleasurable state overall. Fair enough. But if girl A and girl B needed \$1000 for medical treatment where girl A is not in pain but would be far happier about being healthy than girl B who is in pain and would just be of a mild contentness, I would still choose to help girl B.

Moreover, I thought of how avoidance of situations altogether which reduces harm is favorable to me in exchange for pleasure. Consider an acquaintanceship which is neither very strong nor very weak. By being in this relationship, it is presumable enough that both parties will occasionally get on each other's nerves as two people do. But, there will also be much pleasure to be had. If I look at the overall pleasure I get from some of my weaker relationships, double it assuming the other party receives about the same, and look at the harm done in between us from doing or saying things which offend each other or annoy each other, I actually think it would be better to not have had the relationship. Looking at future prospective acquaintanceships, I try to cautiously avoid them so as not to cause harm, despite the cost of the pleasure lost. For all that, I still thought (and still do think) that pleasure plays a crucial role. In cases where harms are equal, that which produces more pleasure ought to be taken. And even in cases where harms are not equal, causing more harm may still be outweighed by enough pleasure. Take for example the harm of boredom or frustration in an education. I would say the benefits of learning are high enough to compensate. It could be said that there would be harm in not being educated, but even if there weren't any, I still would be willing to express inclination toward an education.

Indeed, I have used this kind of moral reasoning ever since arriving to NU, and for the most part, it works well. I tend to avoid situations which I think cause harm, even

slight harm such as annoyances, at the cost of unachieved pleasures. I have taken up pleasurable tasks only insofar as I think they do not cause harm or insofar as to not do them would cause more harm (well directly that is, since by buying something I want from a company that abuses its workers and sources is immoral on this account (such as the meat industry), but I still do such things) I have become a very prudent person who errs on the side of avoiding excessive or unnecessary harm. To a large extent, NU functions in everyday life. But similar to other forms of utilitarianism, it runs into some very large problems when in extreme situations.

The Australian ethicist Toby Ord wrote an essay called “Why I’m Not a Negative Utilitarian” I am what Ord refers to as a weak negative utilitarianist. This means that suffering and happiness (which are pretty much my harm and pleasure factors) have moral weight and ought to be taken into consideration, but that suffering has more weight than happiness. His problem with weak NU is that one cannot coherently compare the two. To do so would be incoherent if we try to make a scale ranging from how bad suffering is into how good happiness is (which he has a graph of that looks incoherent which is his point). But Ord’s point of a skewed rate being incoherent when looking at things as a whole isn’t convincing to me. If my day has enough good to outweigh the bad and then a single pinprick happens to me, is my good day suddenly bad? If the exchange rate is one small harm is twice as weighty as two small pleasures, and my day is overall good by three small pleasures, then what can we say after the pinprick? Well, now it’s good overall by one small pleasure. And if I prick my finger again, it is now a bad day but just barely. (I just want to quickly point out that I don’t even know what my exchange rate would be, simply that usually harm deters me from gainable pleasure and that some pleasures can outweigh the harms.)

Ord goes on to discuss tradeoffs people make every day between harms and pleasures. He makes the claim that for weak NU, “...there are tradeoffs which are good for the individual but morally bad overall.” He maintains this by proposing that everybody is willing to accept the amount of harms required to be offset by an equal amount of pleasures such that they all balance out. He then claims that the weak NU would be against such an action on moral grounds even though to prevent the action is against the well-being of the people. I think he misses the point here. He seems to think that even if we accept an exchange rate, an exchange whose outcome is a net 0 is overall good for one’s well-being. But this can’t be so. At best, it is neutral as the zero would

suggest. In such cases, it is amoral to take such an action as it neither promotes nor inhibits net harm or pleasure. This also doesn't take into account what the outcome would be of not doing the action. It might be that while no pleasure is gained, the harm of doing nothing will be a consequence. Thus comparatively, taking an action with a neutral net outcome is better. Should both situations be the equal in net outcomes, then it really doesn't matter, as far as I can tell. I suppose a negative utilitarian would rather be prudent, but this is a mere preference of no consequence in this case and thus has no bearing on the state of moral affairs.

I think a better argument would be to attack what a NU would say in light of people being willing to undergo more harm than the pleasures would compensate. Imagine if every time one got drunk, one would have a hangover the next day. Now let's say that the pleasures from drinking with friends and getting intoxicated do not outweigh or equal the harm of the hangover the following day but that the harm is just slightly greater. Most people would probably still get drunk. Most people put more weight into pleasure than harm. I will offer two potential solutions to what should morally happen in such a situation.

Firstly, supposing that my negative utilitarianism is a correct moral theory as part of an objective consequentialism and supposing that Kagan's argument is right that consequentialist morality demands that we all act as much in our power to bring about the best outcome, then we have a moral obligation to prevent what others do so long as the overall net outcome is the least bad (has the least harm weighed against the pleasures). This would require that the harm of disappointment of being prohibited from certain actions would not outweigh the harm of doing the action in the first place. Thus the alcohol-hangover situation would not count here most likely, but other cases might. However, I do not believe in moral obligation, so I don't think this route is the best, though it might be promising if we do have moral obligations.

Secondly, we might permit autonomy as overriding our NU values. Indeed, a great many immoral actions are done every day and are permitted. I don't see why Ord thinks a negative utilitarian would be likely to try and stop people (if that was even his concern), when according to every normative ethical system some immoral actions are given much liberty. If what he meant was that in a perfectly moral world, NU would deny the right to undergo harms for the sake of pleasures in cases where the harms have more

weight, then I agree. But similarly, any consequentialist moral theory would deny certain activities which most people would prefer to do at their own expense in a perfectly moral world.

I will say that I do still think there is a significant problem regarding the exchange rate between harms and pleasures. Even though the rate from one kind of harm to another might be established or at least establishable, the rate between a harm and a pleasure are not. This was one of my problems with consequentialism in the last section, and it still is a problem. How is anyone to decide how much pleasure is needed to balance out some finite harm? It would appear that *some* amount can do it, but what the exchange rate could possibly be and how we arrive to it is beyond me. But in order to have a coherent theory regardless if the exchange rate is one to one or uneven, this needs to be addressed, and I simply don't have an answer. This is one of the main reasons I have abandoned credence in NU.

Ord does give one very good criticism. He discusses how saving people's lives medically or otherwise might well be immoral according to the negative utilitarian. This is particularly true in my case. As I will show in chapter 6, I believe harm to be harmless to the one who dies. Assuming this is true, then so long as the harm of loss caused to loved one's is outweighed by the harms of life had by the one being saved, it would be immoral to save the person. Indeed as Roger Chao put it, classical negative utilitarians struggle with the morality of painlessly killing someone whose death will have no effect of harm on others or to painlessly kill all sentient life at once (58). This is simply one extreme case that NU has difficulty and leads to some very unfavorable assertions of what actions are moral. And just as positive utilitarians might be forced into taking the extreme position that we should always keep people alive medically as much as we can so long as their lives are overall good, so too does NU take the extreme position that it would be moral to end lives immediately should living be overall worse than dying. Of course, no reasonable negative utilitarian would go out killing people, because to do so would cause panic and thus lots of harm. Not to mention the harm of loss felt by those who love the ones whom one kills, supposing one doesn't only kill those without loved ones.

Honestly, if I ever unequivocally believed NU to be the "objectively true" moral theory, I would be fine with biting these bullets. I would be fine with admitting that

saving lives may be doing more harm than good in some cases and are thus immoral. I would accept saying that it is not immoral to kill someone whose death will cause no harm or will cause less harm overall. I would even be fine with saying that if one had a “painlessly end all life button,” pressing it wouldn’t be immoral so long as the suffering of sentient life is overall greater than the pleasure to be had therewithin. I would accept antinatalism (the position that it is immoral to bring new life into the world) being a consequence of NU insofar as the child to be would have more harm than pleasure in life.

For all that, I am not fine that I would ever be fine with those things. I am doubtful as to whether or not intuitions are the best way to reason about morality, but I can’t help but intuit that I wouldn’t press the button even if I did think it to be the most moral action. I am too skeptical of myself to assert moral authority on the lives of others. As I said earlier, I have become prudent. But it would be wildly imprudent of me to think that I have the best moral theory and that I should force it unto all others whether they like it or not. I arrived at NU because I found myself erring on the side of lesser harm done, but to the extent that I am unwilling to err on this side, I must admit that NU is probably not for me, at least its extremities are contradictory to what attracted me to NU in the first place.

Moreover, when I think to myself what a perfect world would be like, I cannot help but include a small amount of harm. I enjoy the thought of triumph over hardships, but to have such a feeling is to have experienced harm. This might be because when I consider a perfect world I do so from the perspective of someone who lives in a world full of pleasure and harm. It might be that true perfection wouldn’t have any harm, but I am uncertain.

Unless a coherent NU is produced which can account for my issues and the issues Ord presents (I didn’t talk about them but I agree with his arguments against other forms of NU), I cannot honestly commit myself to such a theory. I am far too skeptical to readily hold to NU. I do still use it often times when making decisions in my everyday life and I will use it as a generality in analyzing moral issues in future chapters. But that’s just because I haven’t replaced it with something better, and I feel I need some kind of moral theory when working with moral situations. I still do prefer reducing harm than promoting pleasure. I still believe it is better to avoid a situation altogether than to undergo it (such as life or a relationship even). I actually do believe that the death of

someone nobody will mourn, remember, or be harmed by isn't bad. I still find harm worse than pleasure is good. But these notions may not be a good basis for a normative ethical theory as we have seen. For all that, I actually have a lot of skepticism toward normative ethics and morality as a whole. I just use NU as a practical means and not as an objective moral theory. So let us now take a step back as I said we would and look at morality as a whole.

#### 4.4 Moral skepticism/Meta-ethics

Up until this point I have been talking about morality as though it were an integral part of the universe. However I am not so sure that morality is inherently built into the external world. I am not so sure the universe takes sides on moral matters. It might be that morality doesn't exist, that it's an illusion and when we talk about actions being moral or immoral, we're not talking about anything real at all. To talk of what theories or actions or rules are moral would be like having a discussion on unicorns or dragons being more powerful. In a sense, we might have a meaningful discussion, but at the end of the day, neither is actually more powerful than the other because neither actually exists and thus cannot have the property of powerfulness. Of course, we are granting here that actions do exist and instead are looking at the realness of the properties of moral and immoral. Still, to the extent that we could talk of the strength of a dragon, we might be doing similar with the truth of moral theories.

Let us look at the plausibility of morality being mind-dependent. This is important, because if morality is dependent on minds, then it cannot be inherent as a property of the world. Just as the rules of the English language do not give any truth about the external world, so too would moral ideas be fabrications of brains. We would agree that rocks exist regardless of minds (well according to me in 3.2, rocks wouldn't exist but rocks' would). Now in chapter 3 I argue against the plausibility of any properties to be real in a mind-independent way. So I could simply use the same arguments to deny the realness of moral properties. This would at best disprove the realism of what we consider to be moral properties. Just as I do imagine that real external world objects do have some sort of real external world properties, I would then be committed to granting the possibility of some real moral property that we simply distort as thinking creatures into our moral properties (though I would be wise to not speak of the external world with any kind of assertions beyond inferences from our



phenomenological standpoint). However, I find values, such as moral properties, to be particularly doubtable (as chapter 7 will demonstrate). So instead of rehashing all of the arguments in the previous chapter, I will specifically attack morality and what it entails.

There are too many types of moral theories to adequately cover in a single chapter. To do so would go beyond the scope of this book. However, it is very well known that no moral theory has thus far shown to stand up to scrutiny. No moral theory has been widely accepted by means of being accepted for proper argumentation and not social indoctrination (such as what could be said for Christian morality in the past two millennia). But even if everybody did agree on what is moral and immoral, I remain unconvinced that that would suffice to ensure the realness of morality. Indeed, even though I just discussed the problem of non-convergence of moral theories, I do not consider it as necessarily relating to the existence of mind-independent moral facts.

Some people maintain that morality is objective and could not be otherwise. For example, it is true that tumors are bad for the body's health. This isn't some mental fabrication. Even if nobody thought that tumors were unhealthy, it wouldn't change the fact that they are. In a similar sense, we might say that torturing babies for pleasure is inherently immoral. It doesn't matter if everyone thinks it is moral. It would still be an immoral action. I would like to take a moment to wonder to what extent objectiveness requires the existence of the objective facts in question. So for instance, I wonder if "tumors are unhealthy" is objectively true even in a universe where bodies, life, and illnesses do not exist. Supposing all sentient life is on Earth and it is annihilated tomorrow, would tumors still be unhealthy? (This is a question assuming my previous chapter is entirely mistaken, mind you.) Similarly, we can wonder if moral "facts" such as "torturing babies for pleasure is immoral" would still hold true after all sentient creatures are gone. Without the existence of babies, torture, and pleasure, could such a moral "fact" still be maintained? I strongly doubt that these facts would still be in effect. It appears to me that for a fact to be objective, its contents must be real and existing. However, since things like societies, interpersonal relationships, pleasure, harm, minds, actions, behaviors, virtues, and other key features in the content of moral claims are contingent, so too do I believe moral theories based upon such features to be contingent. And if morality is contingent, then it's clearly not inherent, as the two are mutually exclusive.

Still, I think about how I believe that harm is immoral and that pleasure is moral. And to the extent that these contents do exist, I would like to maintain that my moral propositions about them would hold true. But I understand that I do so from my perspective as a human being who sees pleasure as good and harm as bad. It might just be impossible for *me* to conceive of a sentient creature that finds harm to be good without getting pleasure from harm and pleasure as bad without getting harmed by pleasure. It certainly does seem impossible and contradictory though, doesn't it? Still, I don't have any good reason to assume that this would hold true in all cases. It seems contradictory to me, but it would since it's contradictory to my beliefs. But I don't think I'm justified in believing my definitions are universal or founded upon universal precepts.

There is still more problems with claiming to have moral facts (the way most people would like to claim). Such objective, inherent facts are supposed to be non-contingent. Such facts are supposed to be true absolutely such that in all actual states of affairs of the universe, the facts still hold true. But I believe the universe has and will one day again be without sentience. At best these are contingent truths then, but not inherent, objective facts.

Let's suppose I'm right thus far about moral claims being dependent on certain factors such as mental activities which are themselves ontologically contingent. Even still, morality seems to exist here on Earth presently. Even if morality is metaphysically non-objective or non-absolute, it still might be said to exist now. English and its rules also are contingent but it would be absurd to conclude that they don't exist at all in light of their contingency.

This is where I take issue with morality in particular. The way I see it, when we attribute the properties of moral and immoral to whatever we may attribute them to (actions, consequences, thoughts, behaviors, intentions, mental states, characteristics, virtues, rules, ethical lists, etc.), we aren't actually talking about those things at all. If I think a moral statement like "it is immoral to torture babies for pleasure" is not to say anything about the act of torturing babies for pleasure. This is certainly a controversial contention. To justify it, allow me to present how moral properties are unlike all other properties we might attribute.

Unlike properties like shape, color, size, texture, sweetness, friendliness, likeability, pleasantness, harmfulness, and the like, a property which is moral seems to

have authority. The authority it has is such that it defines what agents (like us) ought to do. A moral property is theoretically there to dictate our behaviors, intentions, actions, mental states, or whatever we are trying to attribute the property to. This seems fine in language, but conceptually I have a lot of trouble wrapping my mind around what this means. Think about a red book vs. a green book. The color property, even if real, has no effect on our behaviors toward them. It's not as though green things urge agents to stare at them more intently than red objects. It's not as though something which is beautiful requires any change in action or behavior on the part of an agent who perceives something beautiful. So let us say that I am right in believing harm is bad and pleasure is good, so what? Why should these two so-called "moral properties" have effects that no other property possesses? It appears like special pleading to me with no adequate justification or explanation. In other words, there seems to be some logical fallacies going on here. I don't believe that from "x is harmful or has the property of harmfulness" it logically follows that "an agent should avoid x." This is the is-ought gap, and I think it poses a serious problem for moral theories. What is it about moral properties that give rise to this "oughtness"? It won't do to simply say that moral properties have the property of authoritativeness. Firstly, what other properties possess properties themselves? And for that matter, the problem still isn't resolved, just pushed back by one step. What is it about the property of authoritativeness which gives rise to asserting itself on our actions and behaviors? Maybe it's just a brute fact that we must accept. This is suspicious to me. It appears that attributing moral properties sneaks in this "oughtness." If that's the case, then morality doesn't exist in the way our talk about morality would suggest.

Instead of thinking about moral properties, which I think leads to an undesirable outcome of either crossing one's arms in unjustified foundationalism or a theory-breaking issue of how such properties of external things could possibly assert themselves and be unique as properties against all other types of properties, I suggest we reevaluate what we mean by morality. Instead of thinking of morality in terms of things like actions, consequences, intentions, rules, etc., I believe morality is nothing more than a set of our desires for ourselves and others. So the moral claim of "it is immoral to torture babies for pleasure" isn't immoral by virtue of the action itself but by virtue of our idea that we do not wish to torture babies and disapprove of others to do so. "It is moral to give to charity" is not saying that charity-giving possesses some moral property, but that we think we

should give to charity and others should too. Moral claims are assertions in my view. I'm not a non-cognitivist. But I am a moral-relativist and a moral-subjectivist.

I'm a moral subjectivist because I don't believe moral authority can be had in anything external to our very ideas of the moral claims we make. Moral subjectivism permits morality to be non-objective and non-external. It allows for someone like me to look at harm and pleasure and arrive at conclusions of how to comport myself in such a way as to satisfy desires regarding my well-being and the well-being of others as affected by my actions. It also permits for me to say that harm has more weight than pleasure, but at the same time others can claim that pleasure has more weight. And it is not a contradiction, because we aren't talking about the world as it is. We're talking about our preferences.

Earlier I noted how moral theory disagreement wasn't relevant in whether morality is mind-dependent, which I still believe. However, I do believe it is important when discussing the merit of what we believe to be moral and immoral. Humans don't seem to be able to agree. It could be that some or all humans are wrong, but I don't think this is the best line of reasoning. I'm very skeptical the more global the level of analysis. I have a lot of doubts concerning moral reasoning and moral justifications. I think they run into epistemological issues which are unsolved or unsolvable (such as the problem of regress in justification). Moreover, moral knowledge seems to rest on claims of moral properties which are iffy at best. But if morality is subjective, if it is just some fabrication of the individual's brain, then there needn't be worry about justifying moral claims. At least, it would be just as necessary as justifying why we have the thoughts we do.

Moral subjectivism also solves the issues of failures of moral theories. Moral theories of normative ethics all have some extremely unfavorable problems. I presented some extreme issues with utilitarianism and consequentialism. But moral subjectivism allows for not needing a coherent theory. Our desires and preferences don't need to be coherent, because our emotions are not always coherent. Recall how in the last section, I said I would accept the moral truths of the consequences of negative utilitarianism if it turned out to be the correct moral theory and then went on to say that I wasn't fine with being hypothetically fine with that? Moral subjectivism permits this because I can have the desire to not harm people at the expense of losing out on pleasures but in extreme cases not have the preference to stick to that analysis. My emotions aren't perfect. They

can be illogical and they are sometimes inconsistent. So too are the nature of moral theories, as I see them.

One major objection to moral subjectivism is the idea that we do tend to all agree on certain moral claims. Almost every human being and any creature with the psychological capacities for empathy and sympathy are against torturing babies for example. I have an explanation for this. Just as in chapter 3 regarding perception, I think we should look at morality as human beings. We are all the same species and have very similar neurologies. Why shouldn't we expect to have a lot of commonly held subjective beliefs? Most of us also agree that chocolate is delicious, but I would reject the objectivity of such a statement. Morality is relative to the individual, that's true, but since individuals come in groups, such as species, morality can also be said to be relative based on the type of creature. Consider the unhealthiness of tumors. We can say that tumors are "objectively" unhealthy when talking about humans. But there might be creatures at least conceptually for which tumors would be healthy. Healthiness is relative and indeed subjective for each individual, but objectiveness needn't be dismissed out of hand so long as it's intersubjectively objective. This permits for the possibility of a society of creatures wherein harm is moral and pleasure is immoral, should they have intersubjective agreement based on their commonly shared neurology which has pleasure as bad and harm as good. It also permits for human beings to be consequentialist but also have theories revolving around rights, rules, intentions, etc. to accompany the desires for such things guiding our actions.

If you believe that moral subjectivism and the moral skepticism I have laid out means we shouldn't hold others morally responsible or accountable, I have some defenses. Because we live in groups as societies, we are put in situations where we interact with one another. English rules are not objective, but intersubjective. And by holding each other to these rules generally (with leeway for dialects, accents, registers, lexicon differences, etc.), we have a highly effective means of communicating using each of our subjective language rules and words with another in such a way as to have meaningful discourse and exchanges of ideas. Similarly, I believe when put together, subjective moralities form intersubjectively objective moralities with leeway for room to disagree. At the end of the day, I find morality to be a tool just like language. But whereas language is a tool for communication, morality is a tool for interpersonal interactions concerning behaviors, actions, intentions, how we think toward one another, etc. We can

still talk about some objective moral claims, but only insofar as that objectivity is intersubjective in nature.

The fear of people being allowed to act however they please is ill-placed. From a naturalistic understanding of human nature and desire, the Marquis de Sade promoted through characters in his works the beliefs that for those who are not naturally dispositioned to behave in the interests of others such as by being benevolent, nobody has the right to stop them and that all actions were moral so long as someone naturally desired them including incest, rape, murder, theft, etc. He also supported these actions by arguing against religion (which was used to support these moral antitheses) as well as some logical argumentation for selfishness, but the crux of his arguments I find are based on naturalistic attitudes (Sade 1795). At first glance, moral subjectivism supports even the most horrific of Sadian personas. But at second glance, morality is to be had intersubjectively when involving multiple agents. Thus people can still take action against those who do acts often deemed immoral. Not to mention the existence of legality in the form of laws, rights, prohibitions, punishments, etc. I don't think laws reflect morality, but even if moral nihilism were true (the notion that morality doesn't exist in any sense whatsoever), a person still could be deterred from certain actions and pushed toward others on a social level.

Morality being subjective doesn't mean that we can't argue and try to persuade others either. I would say our beliefs are subjective and unchosen similar to morality, yet I think discussions and demonstrations are very important nonetheless. I may not be able to will myself to hold the same moral beliefs as another person, but by demonstrating weaknesses in my arguments and advantages in others' arguments, I am as a human being able to be persuaded into changing my mind. If someone doesn't know about consequentialism but it is in their dispositional nature to be consequentialist after learning about it, then it would be helpful for that person to be told about consequentialism by someone else, at least I would say so. Thus even if moral subjectivism is correct, moral discussion needn't be dismissed as irrelevant or unnecessary.

To end this chapter, I would like to put forth some personal doubts I have toward morality (it is after all a section on moral skepticism). These are not philosophical or at least will not be analyzed rigorously. I merely wish to provide you the reader with some

insight into the struggles I have when confronted with moral issues. (And yes, moral subjectivism does permit for a person to be unsure of herself morally, since one can introspect with uncertainty and not understand the incoherence of one's emotions).

In addition to the issues of moral reasoning presented in earlier sections of this chapter, I fail to even make some everyday choices. Once I went on a date with a guy who was working in a group project. One of the members didn't do his share and expected the other members to pick up the slack. My date asked me what I thought was moral: do the work for him or tell the professor and have him fail the class (this project would have failed him if he didn't do his share which by that time he couldn't alone in the time frame). Just looking at the harm alone, I still to this day don't know which side would cause more harm. The first leads to harm for the members who have to do extra work, knowing that they have been swindled as well as the potential harm done to the lazy member who might later need those skills learned by doing the project in a future class or in a job situation (it was a computer science project which teaches important skills). But the other option would lead to financial stress, the harm of failing the class, the harm of resentment (even if he deserved to be punished for trying to swindle his classmates), and potentially the harm of guilt on the members who told the professor. The point is that I feel inadequate to make good moral decisions even under my own subjective theory!

I also confess that even if my theory of mind is correct, there is a strong potential for me to be wrong regarding subjectivism of moral weight, which I worry about. I want to say that some brains naturally put more weight into pleasure than harm, and some put more weight into harm than pleasure. This would account for how I could have a moral theory that takes reducing harm more into account than promoting pleasure as well as how someone else might have a moral theory that takes promoting pleasure more into account than reducing harm. But if we understood how the brain produces certain ideas, it could be discovered that no brain is such that it actually produces a preference for harm. Currently, I say I do on introspection, but my reserves against the extreme consequences of negative utilitarianism make me doubt whether I can incorrigibly claim this idea of my moral preferences. It concerns me that I might be deceiving myself. But if I were, wouldn't I be doing so because I really did desire to prefer reduction of harm? I just don't know.

And if I ever do become an eliminativist in the philosophy of mind, I couldn't hold to my meta-ethical moral theory of moral subjectivism. I believe in the fabrications of the mind having some sort of existence in reality, but if I truly believed the illusions weren't even there at all, then I couldn't. I have little assurance that my philosophy of mind is correct, so I also am highly suspicious of my moral theories.

Lastly, I would like to sometimes think about what an "ideal moral agent" would choose, but I never get far. While it sounds good, I instantly ask what the ideal agent would look for in the options. But this is the very notion of wondering what the basis of a good normative ethical theory is! I don't see how the ideal agent way of thinking is supposed to help with moral decisions. Such reasoning never seems to help me. Maybe instead one should think about what the ideal self (that is, of oneself) would do, but I still don't know. Moreover, I fail at even picturing a utopia (some discussion of this in chapter 5). I don't know what moral theories would be had in a utopia. I don't know if there would be one single theory or a plurality, if theories would be consequentialist, deontological, or otherwise, if morality would be in particulars or universals, etc. I may think that the way humans are as creatures, consequentialism is the most neurologically synchronized to the nature of human beings, but I can't say that consequentialism would be the most perfect normative ethical theory. Morality seems to break down for me whenever I try to put into a utopia setting. Maybe there's something incoherent about our human nature (maybe psychological egoism) and morality (which I believe is an interactive tool). I simply know that the idea of perfection is an incoherent and even inconceivable on my part.



## Chapter 5

### God

#### 5.1 Atheism

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate my beliefs with regard to god. I am an atheist, in that I do not believe in a god. This doesn't mean that I claim no god exists, merely that I don't believe in one. Similarly, I honestly couldn't tell you all that exists, but I would bet there are many things that do which I don't believe in out of pure ignorance (for example, particular animals, atoms, planets, people, etc.). Broadly speaking, I am agnostic as to whether a god exists, because there is much that I don't know, and much about which I am wrong. But there are ideas of gods people propose which I do believe are mistaken or at the very least, are not epistemically worthy of being believed in.

To become clear on what it means to be an atheist, think back to chapter two and Tom and Sally asserting the number of water molecules in a cup to be even and odd, respectively. In that chapter, I stated how neither knew the answer despite one of them being right. In this chapter, I place you alongside them. They ask you what you believe, and you say you don't believe the number of molecules is even, nor do you believe the number is odd. This doesn't mean that you believe the actual answer wouldn't be even or odd, but merely that you in your ignorance don't believe one answer over the other. You recognize your limited understanding and instead of believing something for which you have little to no reason in believing, you state a non-belief in both. But even though you don't believe in the number being odd or being even, you don't necessarily disbelieve the number is odd or even. This is called a null hypothesis, when one neither believes nor disbelieves. With regards to theism, an atheist is one who looks at claims of a god and doesn't believe out of not being convinced. The atheist needn't disbelieve in a god (though some do, and I do for many but not all gods as do most people) in order to not

believe in a god. Atheism is not a disbelief in god, but the mere absence of a belief in god. This includes those who do hold a disbelief in god but also those who make no claim either way. And as Matt Dilahunty has stated, if you're not sure if you believe or not, then you're an atheist, because if you don't know whether or not you believe in a god, how can you believe in one?

Turning to the burden of proof, who is responsible for providing evidence? Instead of looking directly at god claims, let's look at something more mundane. If I tell you I just got a new dog, do I need to provide you with evidence before you believe me? Probably not unless I'm in a no dog residency, allergic to dogs, or otherwise unlikely to get one. The reason why is because this is something which is easily feasible and there's a lot of inductive evidence for it. You are aware that a lot of people have dogs as pets, and me becoming a dog owner myself doesn't take much to accept. But there are cases in which evidence would be required in addition to those already mentioned. If you come over and see no dog, no toys, no food or water bowl or anything, you might begin to doubt I have a dog. You question me on where it is. I reply by saying it's an outside dog, that's why you don't see it or its things inside. You go outside and see no evidence of a dog. You ask why, but I tell you that you need to disprove that I have a dog and it's not my responsibility to provide evidence. It might be the case that I do have a dog, and I let a friend take it out hunting or some other possibility. But in your position, you should not be the one to disprove that I don't have a dog in the absence of evidence. I was wrong to claim that you should believe me until you're certain that I don't have a dog and have exhausted all the possibilities first. After all, if I didn't have a dog, how else aside from lack of evidence could you disprove its existence? I would like to quickly put in here that absence of evidence can actually be evidence of absence. It is why people don't believe in unicorns after all. However, if you come in my house and find my dog eating its food and then playing with its toy on its bed and then claim that I don't have a dog, in the presence of evidence in my favor it would be on your shoulders to disprove that it's not my dog or that it isn't a dog at all.

To make this example more interesting, let's change the dog into a dragon that talks to me and helps me with my life problems. If I tell you that this dragon exists, you are not inclined to believe me on my word because dragons are not a regularity and are considered mythical. You tell me you don't believe I have a dragon. I say that if you disbelieve me, then where's your proof? You tell me that you don't claim that I don't have

a dragon, but you simply don't believe I do based on having no good reason to do so, and ask me for a reason why you should. I invite you over to my home only for you to find no evidence of the dragon. I say that it's invisible, which explains why you don't see it. You feel around for it, but I say it's intangible. You recall that I said it talks and ask for it to speak so you could hear it, but I say it only talks if you already believe in it. But how are you supposed to believe in something reasonably without good reason? It talking is supposed to be evidence for its existence to help me believe. To say that I must believe first is to turn around how evidence and reason work.

In my favor though, people are split. Quite a few of our friends believe the dragon exists and make similar claims about what it can do and how it helps them in life. Some friends are like you and aren't convinced. But surely so many people who agree it exists can't all be wrong (this is a logical fallacy). To investigate, you talk to each of the dragon believers what the dragon talks about and its views on things. You find that between any two believers, there are numerous similar alleged statements made by the dragon. For all that though, there are serious differences. Some people believe the dragon eats people, others do not. Some people say the dragon speaks literally, others say it speaks figuratively. Some people say that it tells them to leave people alone, others claim it says to spread the word of its existence. Indeed, no two believers agree on what the dragon thinks, wants, says, or is like. But you go around asking them about a mutual friend, what that friend thinks, wants, says, and is like. When it comes to the friend, the differences are much fewer and likely because the friend doesn't say everything exactly the same way to everybody, just as you don't tell all your friends all of your opinions, secrets, hopes, fears, etc. But when it comes to opinions on politics, philosophy, life goals, and the like, everybody agrees. Nobody makes radically different claims about what you look like or how your personality is.

God is much more like the popular dragon than the dog. It's not a mundane claim, yet the majority of people throughout history claim there is a god, or many. However, they don't agree on what god is like, thinks, says, looks like (if at all), where god is, what god wants, etc. Nonbelievers who try to believe based on evidence, reason, logic, honest inquiry, and rationality are faced with people claiming that there is a god but each person or group tells you that all the other versions of a god are mistaken or just flat out wrong but that theirs is the correct one. The amount of evidence for any of the various gods is varied, but none meet the standards of claiming such an extraordinary entity.

And the evidences provided even if accurate and valid could be used to justify a great number of versions of god. The believers claim god to talk to them, yet nobody seems smarter for it. So the things such as an intelligent being says aren't intellectual in nature to help with mathematics, but are wisdom in morality, aesthetics, and other kinds of knowledge for living a good life. However, one doesn't seem any better for talking to their god over many others in these respects either. You can find wise people in these aspects of any religion or of no religion. Likewise, you can find very unwise teachings in any religious group or looking at the non-religious as a whole. This demonstrates that the wisdom of living well doesn't come from any particular religion but something else (ethics, values, emotions, useful laws for societies, etc.).

All right, but if I'm critiquing religion on the basis that people don't agree, then why should anybody do philosophy? After all, philosophers disagree with other philosophers in extremely radical ways. Some say that knowledge is impossible, while others say that knowledge is necessarily achievable based on the contradiction of asserting that knowledge is impossible. Some say that only ideas exist, and others say that ideas are just illusions. How is someone supposed to deal with this?

I continue to say that if one cares about what is true (regarding how to accurately predict the world), how the world is, and other philosophical inquiries, then one must come about answers using a system. My system, put simply, is to try and make accurate predictions based on empirical inquiry and to abstract concepts from my experiences and available and known evidences by use of logic and reason, revising myself when needed and not being satisfied with what I know out of curiosity and understanding that I might be wrong. But here's the difference between philosophers like me (I don't think I'm all that good at philosophy mind you, but let's pretend I am a philosopher for now) and believers in religious doctrine. Many philosophers are keen on knowing that their knowledge is at least limited and that they are prone to error, unable to be absolutely certain about most things if not everything. But religion is different. Most people believe that their religion is the highest truth of human inquiry. There is little to no room for questioning and revising in religion, less the religion not be absolute as one hopes and believes it to be. Philosophers accept that other philosophies not only exist, but are reasonable to various degrees and in some respects answer questions better than their own philosophies, but the pros of their own philosophies are just overall more convincing, reasonable, logical, more explanatory, simpler, etc. and so they stick by

theirs. With religion, there are indeed some which admit other religions have partial truth, but I'd be very surprised indeed to come across somebody who admits a religion other than theirs has a better god, just worse morals, or has better traditions, but is less epistemically convincing.

But whether god exists and how one could know it and what it would take to be justified in believing it are philosophical questions. And the answers, whether correct or incorrect, have implications for other questions. For example, can life have meaning without the existence or even with the existence of a god (see chapter 7)? If we can justify belief in god with faith, what else can be justified by faith? If one says that dragons cannot be justified by faith because dragons don't exist but god can because god exists begs the question of how to know if god exists. One knows god exists because of faith because god exists. One doesn't know dragons exist because of faith because dragons don't exist. If faith can only justify existence of things which exist, then it seems like you must already have other reasons to show that something exists before faith could even be used. In other words, faith is not a justification for knowledge of existence, and is only available after the question of existence is settled. Of course, one might instead say that people can use faith to justify belief in things which also don't exist. But then, faith doesn't seem reliable at all and isn't a useful justification.

In the end, one will either believe in god x, or not. One might believe in god y or god z, but regardless, everybody will either believe in god x or not even if some people never hear about god x (in which case they don't believe in god x). Pascal's wager is commonly used to argue in favor of believing in one's own god(s). The argument goes along the lines of (for the average Christian): If the believer in Christianity is correct, then after dying, the believer gets to live in heaven and is rewarded for eternity. If the atheist is correct, then the believer loses nothing after death. If the atheist is correct, then after death (despite the fact that atheists can believe in reincarnation or an afterlife), the atheist loses nothing. If the atheist is wrong, after death the atheist loses everything and is not rewarded with heaven for eternity (regardless of punishment of hell). So it is better to put one's belief in Christianity because the outcome of being right and wrong on the part of the Christian are infinitely better than the outcome of being right and wrong on the part of the atheist. I'm not so sure I would say living a Christian life, spending one's time, money, and resources on Christian life isn't necessarily a no loss situation if there is no afterlife (if, for example, life is intrinsically better spent otherwise). But even

granting all the premises, the conclusion doesn't follow. It might be better for one's afterlife's sake to believe in Christianity, but epistemically speaking, if one only believes out of the unjustified belief in an afterlife, then one doesn't believe reasonably. Also, this argument fails in practice because if you replace "atheist" with "Muslim" and "atheism" with "Islam" and adjust the outcomes appropriately in the atheist premises, then the wager is ambivalent. And when you take into account all of the religions and various denominations within any given religion which state that nonmembers or nonbelievers lose out on heaven or good afterlives, one is in a position where the wager cannot justify belief over non-belief. The way to get around the various claims again is easiest through evidence which promotes one and not others. I have not found any good evidence that promotes one particular religion over others on religious claims.

## 5.2 Argumentation and god's existence

I originally intended to have the bulk of this chapter review and retort arguments philosophical arguments for the existence of god. However, I will forego that analysis for a few reasons. Primarily, there is already so much written and put into videos for and against the arguments. I personally suggest the youtubers AnticitizenX and TMM, but they are on the refutation side. For the pro side, I would suggest philosophers as they are keener on taking previously made criticisms into account when revising the arguments. I will show one issue regarding the argumentation often employed to prove god's existence though.

There are also some problems with the logical arguments overall. Logical argumentation doesn't adequately demonstrate existence. Empirical evidence is needed. Let me try to logically prove that fairies exist:

P1. Deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall. (Empirical observation)

P2. Leaves fall from the branches due to numerous factors like biochemical changes to store energy for the winter, gravity, weight of the dying leaves, etc. (Empirical evidence)

P3. Leaves can fall at any time during the process of resource recession in the tree cells, and P2 is not sufficient in predicting when.

P4. Leaves which fall fall at specific times x, y, and z... (for those leaves which fall at times x, y, and z... ) (Empirical observation)

P5. Let fairies be defined as the entities which make the leaves fall when they do. (Apriori truth)

P6. Fairies have the ability to choose when to make the leaves fall.

P7. From P6, fairies must have minds and be intelligent in order to make choices.

C. Because leaves fall at unpredictable times (P3, P4), and fairies are defined as the entities which make the leaves fall (P6), fairies must necessarily exist to make the leaves fall when they do.

The argument sketched above is simplistic and full of little errors. For example, P3 asserts that the physical processes are not sufficient in accurately predicting when the leaves will fall. I don't know if we have the technology to even check the weight of a leaf, the amount of resources left in it, etc., without first breaking it off of the branch in addition to being able to mathematically know how wind speed and gravity are going to affect when leaves fall. Nevertheless, if one did have all the factors and the mathematical algorithms, I personally think one would be able to predict when any given leaf would fall with incredible (but still not perfect) accuracy. P6 is an assertion of what fairies are like without evidence and it is not given in its definition but is needed so that "fairies" doesn't refer to the sum physical processes which govern how leaves die and how objects fall. P7 brings up minds and intelligence because of a decision making capacity, but logically speaking, decisions could be made without either or perhaps even both; it's just that so far some form of what we might call a mind and intelligence seems to be needed for making decisions. There are other little errors, but let us look past them for now and instead grapple the bigger ones.

Perhaps the biggest one is that it just isn't convincing. Even if you accept the premises (I wouldn't), conclusion, and that the argument is logically valid (debatable), are you going to believe in fairies now? Of course not! And for good reason. I defined fairies as the entities which make leaves fall when they do, but this is misleading. The word 'fairy' has the connotation of a little humanoid with wings with magical powers. Here, I'm using it to explain a natural phenomenon to tie it in with nature without explicitly talking about its supernatural qualities and doing so only tacitly (and

mischievously) with the connotation. But here is another issue, it doesn't actually explain anything. It makes the claim that there is a lack of knowledge about when leaves fall precisely and posits an entity to explain when they fall, but even if you accepted that fairies must exist, you're no wiser for it. You still can't explain when the leaves will fall. It's a non-explanation built off of the fallacy of an argument from ignorance. And what's more, with no empirical data of fairies themselves as entities, the empirical observations of their effects aren't enough because then the word 'fairy' could refer to the mere process of leaves falling! Likewise, God being the fine tuner, creator, initiator, moral arbiter, etc. doesn't provide an entity but perhaps just the process of universes, their contents, and natural (not supernatural) morality formation. I understand not all the arguments out there attempt to prove god through logical argumentation alone through things like definitions, but those which do, fail like my sketched argument fails at proving fairies' existences. Existences need to be empirically demonstrable if they are to be convincing. And even if the arguments succeeded, people don't believe in god because of arguments, their belief is based on other things like faith. Plus, these arguments show deism at best, not gods of religions.

### 5.3 Rejecting logically incoherent gods

The next thing I want to do in this chapter is to expel the idea that any god, if one exists, should not be believed if such a god is claimed to be omniscient or omnipotent as best as I can. As I will show, these two "properties" are prone to contradictions and even if a god had them, one wouldn't be justified in believing in such a god. Let me start with one of my favorite arguments against a kind of god many people purport to believe in, the problem of evil.

P1. Evil exists. (Regardless of how one might define evil, undesirable things and events which are referred to as evil exist. Even an anti-realist of values like me will permit this premise, but more importantly, theists accept this premise.)

P2. If God exists and is omniscient, God knows that evil exists and exactly how to prevent it, even from existing in the first place.

P3. If God exists and is omnipotent, God can prevent evil, even from existing in the first place.



P4. If God exists and is omnibenevolent, God would want to prevent evil.

P5. From P2-P4, if God exists and is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, then God would know how to prevent evil, would be able to prevent evil, and would want to prevent evil.

C. From P5 and P1, there is a contradiction from the existence and nature of God and the fact that evil exists.

There are some theists who wouldn't agree to at least one of the premises, for example a Hellenist who believes the gods are imperfect. But for those who agree with the premises, I find the conclusion to follow. Of course, there are attempts to deny this. Let's look at a couple prominent objections.

1. Evil is just the absence of God, just as darkness is the absence of light and cold is the absence of heat (and atheism is the absence of a belief in a god haha). Putting aside the claimant's belief that this absence of God is just as bad as whatever somebody is calling evil, this correction at best tweaks the contradiction. An omnipotent God could be omnipresent, an omniscient God would know how to be omnipresent, and an omnibenevolent God would want to be omnipresent to avoid absence of its presence.

2. Evil is necessary for good just like pain is necessary for pleasure and sadness for happiness. I do wonder what the claimant thinks a perfect world like heaven would be like. Would there be pleasure, happiness, and goodness there? If we accept that the negative opposite of these good things (pain, sadness, evil) are required for their existences, then surely heaven would also include these bad things as well. Perhaps one might retort by saying that after living on Earth where there is evil, pain, and sadness, by the time one gets to heaven, there is no longer any need for them to have the good things. But to be honest, I think we can agree that the amount of evil that exists is gratuitous in this sense, as if there is a threshold for how much evil is necessary for good, how much pain for pleasure, and sadness for happiness, then the amount of the bad in the real world probably surpasses this. But even if so, in order for this to work, one would need to be able to remember the evil in heaven, or else the lesson wouldn't truly be appreciated and understood by heaven dwellers. But to remember pain and sadness involves being pained or saddened during the recollection. So pain and sadness (probably evil, too) would persist in heaven through recollection. Also I am not convinced that an omniscient

God wouldn't know of any other way to allow humans to understand, know, and appreciate these good things without the bad.

3. Evil is necessary for free will. And a world with free will is better than a world without free will. If I can't choose between hugging someone and hurting someone, that's worse than helping someone without the option at all. As I lean more toward consequentialism and utilitarianism with regards to normative ethics, I find this fairly flawed on a moral basis, but I'll ignore this. Again, I think an omniscient and omnipotent God could probably come up with a better system that includes free will. But maybe God can't because free will does necessitate evil. Along the problem given in number two, does free will exist in heaven (such that one has the option of hugging or hurting someone)? If so, then evil must exist in heaven. And one can't say that once in heaven one could do evil but never would. In order to have a choice, the chance of doing each option must be higher than 0%. But during an eternity in heaven, even a chance of one over infinity would be inevitable mathematically speaking. This means that an eternity in heaven would produce evil without question. Does God have free will? If so, then God also is evil or does evil sometimes. Unless the claimant wants these consequences, evil being necessitated by free will is not a premise one should assert. This defense also states that free will is essentially the root of all evil! How can free will possibly be good if by all practical application (such that an omniscient and omnipotent God would even apply it thusly), it brings about evil (evil, being the lack of good or the opposite of good)? In addition to all of this, one would have to demonstrate free will exists in the sense intended by this defense (usually a libertarian free will).

Moving on to talking strictly about omniscience, such an attribute leads to some interesting problems. In this book, I am guilty of talking on occasion what an omniscient being would maybe know. I do this to show that if certain facts are known, certain things which we currently take to be unknowable or random might be knowable or predictable and using the phrase 'omniscient being' or 'ideal observer' is just an easy way to let the reader understand my points faster. However, I believe omniscience breaks the law of non-contradiction and thus shouldn't be believed in. So let us delve into the issues. Could an omniscient being know what it is like to not know something? To show that this is logically possible, think about yourself, surely you can know what it is like to not something, even if that something is not knowing how someone like me could possibly not believe in a god, haha! But this knowledge seems impossible for an omniscient being.

It's strange because an omniscient being ought to know whatever you and I could know plus some, yet the knowledge of what it's like to not know something cannot be known by a being which knows everything. This is a contradiction. Perhaps one can reply by saying that the omniscient being wasn't always omniscient but now is, but because of it not knowing everything before, it now can reflect back and know what it was like to not know. A problem therewith: it could only know what it *was* like, but I can know what it *is* like. This is a nitpick, I'll admit, and maybe even erroneous as the two might be equal, but is knowing what it's like to not know how to do long division really the same as knowing what it used to be like to not know how to do long division? I honestly don't know!

Another problem is what would happen if I made a computer program which processed a one or a zero on the screen. The program is made such that the user inputs what the user thinks the program is going to show on the screen, but the program always shows whatever the user doesn't input. This program is run on a computer which reads one's mind. The input is whatever I think will show, not what I type. This way I can't type a zero and know the program will show a one. If I think that, the program will know what I'm thinking and show a zero instead. But if I know the program will do that, then... As a being that is not omniscient, I can safely say that I don't know what the computer screen will show. But an omniscient being is in much more of a predicament. Can the omniscient being know what the program will show? Perhaps in the face of it, the omniscient being will be in a never ending loop, never giving an answer so as to not be incorrect. But this isn't knowledge. I think a truly omniscient being should know the answer, not merely be unable to come up with one. Yet the program would be such that even an omniscient being couldn't know! This does fall prey to the defense of omniscience not including logically impossible knowledge, though such a defense doesn't seem good to me, because if that's the omniscience of person A's god, then person B's god which can know logically impossible things is more omniscient. At any rate here are two problems for omniscience. I wonder how people's omniscient gods would fare.

I talked about an omniscient computer in a deterministic in section 3.5. But even that computer in a determined universe might fail this program's test. Consider that since both are machines, both will eventually break down. If the computer with the 1-0 program dies first, the omniscient computer will have the final say and know what will be the final input on the program's screen. But if the omniscient computer breaks first, the omniscient computer fails the test which should be impossible in a determined universe.

In fact even though the computer would know the final answer by knowing when the program would break, by hooking the two up, the program would read that prediction and change it! The omniscient computer's prediction would change. Now I would say the omniscient computer would have already predicted the precise number of fluctuations between 1 and 0 with the program, and maybe thus will be able to make a final accurate prediction before even being hooked up to the program but merely changes its readings up until the point of the program finally breaking. Still, I don't think an omniscient being ought to ever need to change its predictions especially in a deterministic universe! Such a computer would be infallible maybe, but not omniscient. Besides, this solution only works if the computer doesn't break down first, which is conceivable in a deterministic universe. Lastly, the computer also would struggle I think with my first contention of not knowing what it's like to not know something. All in all, I find that even in a deterministic universe, it might be impossible to know everything even if everything is already set in stone in a predictable way.

Personally, I find omnipotence to be even more problematic. I'll start with a tweaked classic; can God throw a rock so fast and far that he cannot run past it and catch it midair? It's a contradiction if he can, because an omnipotent being should be able to run fast enough to run past and catch rocks going at any speed. I asked this to a preacher who replied with the notion that omnipotence doesn't mean that one can do the logically impossible. But this is not logically impossible, because I can do it and so can anybody! I can go outside pick up a rock and throw it so fast that I cannot run past it and catch it midair. But a so-called omnipotent god can't.

To salvage god's omnipotence, one might say that god can only do what is in god's nature. So god cannot throw a rock faster than he can catch it, because it's not in his nature to do so, but it is in my nature to do so whereas it is in his nature to create universes and worlds and life, but not in mine. While I can admire the attempt to harmonize omnipotence and limitations, this fails crucially. If god can only do what is in his nature and is omnipotent, then I am also omnipotent in that I can do everything in my nature, too. I may not be able to fly, but I can paint a picture or rip up a piece of paper. Whatever I can do, it's in my nature and what I cannot do is out of my nature. God according to this defense can do everything in his nature and cannot do what is out of his nature. Regardless, putting limits on omnipotence isn't really omnipotence anyway, because if person A's god can only do the logically impossible or whatever is in its nature,

person B's god is more powerful and more truly omnipotent in being able to do what is impossible and anything at all. While replacing omniscient and omnipotent with maximally knowledgeable and maximally powerful may seem to be solutions, they run into similar problems.

All in all, though, I'm open to the possibility of a god. The best philosophical arguments for the existence of a god point toward deism, and even though they can be well reasoned, I don't think they warrant belief. However, if I were to ever believe in a god, my belief would be based on reason and evidence enough so that the same reasons and evidence are specific enough to what is meant by the god that is to be proven and believed in. But as it stands, no argument, supposed evidence, anecdote, personal experience of another, etc. has convinced me that any god exists or that I would be adequately justified in believing in one.

## Chapter 6

### Death

If you are reading this, you are alive. If you are alive, you will die. Death is one of the surest instances of knowledge, for induction has it that up until now everyone who has lived has died. Human bodies simply do not last forever. In this chapter I will discuss some topics I find interesting related to death as a philosophical topic. I hope to demonstrate the irrationality of fear and contempt toward death. I will delve into the plausibility of various forms of an afterlife and pinpoint where I believe they aren't reasonable to believe in or desirable, even if true. In fact, I shall present arguments against immortality, for I believe immortality is a fate worse than death so to speak.

#### 6.1 What is death?

What is death? If a cell divides into two, is the original cell dead? The individual molecules making up the original are in both, so I would say that one couldn't say that the original cell lives, and there's merely a new cell. What about when two separate cells become a singular cell? Is the identity of the individuals dead now that they no longer exist? What about you? You aren't the same person you were ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. Did that person die when their identity ceased to exist as it was? What if you're constantly in a state of change? These kind of definitional problems arise if death refers to the non-existence of a once existent identity (2011, DeGrazia). For our purposes, we'll stick with the cessation of vital biological processes after which the body is no longer functional. And considering the brain's crucial role in our ability to function, I will say that even if the cells and tissue still function, we'll say, in the digestive track, so long as the central nervous system, particularly the brain, is dead, that constitutes death for a human being. I couldn't say if there's a specific point at which the brain is dead just before which it wasn't, but I'm not really concerned about that. Even without a specific moment to point to, death does occur. I personally believe that there can be two deaths

at the end of one's life: the death of the body, and the death of the personhood. Now, I do think personhood comes from the physical body, but that doesn't mean interesting conversation can't be made from talking just of personhood. Besides, when death is discussed, even in everyday talk, I find these two have their place (and can be unfortunately easily conflated for that reason).

Even still, there are issues to mention. First, must death be irreversible? If someone ever created a machine to bring the dead back to life, assuming the human has been well preserved and thus resumes mental functions as if just having slept, would that human be said to not have truly died at all? Or what if the physical blueprint of your body including all the intricacies of your neurology were used to recreate a new you? Perhaps one could say yes because there was still prolonged time of brain death. But what about someone who is medically brain dead for just a few seconds? One way to exclude such occurrences as instances of death is to invoke the irreversibility aspect, but I for one would call someone resurrected as having died. So maybe more rigorous a definition should require that death be inartificially permanent. This is just one revision of possible others, such as one to allow for death to refer to the time between the cessation of vital processes and the reactivation thereof.

## 6.2 Surviving physical death

Having an idea of what death is, one might question if it's possible for one's psychological life to survive the death of the body. In chapter 3, I discussed that the notion of a soul doesn't seem correct to me due to its various problematic implications and lack of sufficient reason and evidence to believe in its existence. And for a physicalist such as myself, the mind, one's personality, the self, and all mental faculties are dependent on the workings of the body, specifically the brain. Therefore I don't believe survival of one's physical death is possible without resurrection of the body. Members of the LDS faith do believe in a physical resurrection, kind of. They think there is a soul which doesn't need a body to exist, but those who ascend to the highest kingdom of heaven will be resurrected with their bodies. If that is the case, then perhaps there is hope of surviving death. Of course, bodily resurrection is as of now a thing of fiction, excluding the religious beliefs about Jesus. Even still, bodily resurrection for average people is regarded as fictional, though it may be scientifically achievable one day. But we'll return to resurrection later regarding its desirability. As for its plausibility, I accept

it as a possibility, given that I don't know much about neurology, the biology of life, and preservation of cells.

But let's grant that souls do exist and one can survive one's death in that one's psychological life is not damaged. One popular idea of what happens after death is reincarnation. There are numerous claims about people recalling information from past lives and being able to verify them. For instance, knowing a dead person's name, where they last were, their relationships, etc. As far as I'm aware, there haven't been any reliable scientific studies which can be or have been retested to demonstrate accuracy and validity. But even disregarding the absence of such data that goes beyond mere anecdotes, there are some serious problems for reincarnation. Primarily, I don't think I've ever heard an account of monotonous previous lives. This may seem like a pseudo-problem, but I find it odd that people only seem to remember past lives which are significant. It's always that they were famous, a hero of sorts, maybe a significant villain, but never just an average Joe. And it is dangerous to claim to have been a specific person from history, for there might be multiple reincarnationists who claim the same thing. I'd be fascinated to see how two conflicting past life claims would get settled by proponents, especially if both opposing parties had similar amounts of testimony to back their claims in the reincarnationist way (mostly anecdotes, some historical knowledge). Even the seemingly monotonous lives are still not monotonous. Someone might proclaim to have been a doctor of someone from history. So in any case, it's still not a humdrum life. But statistically, there are far more ordinary people than otherwise. A potential explanation is that you are simply more likely to remember a life which had more significance than a monotonous one.

Unfortunately, this explanation makes a general problem for reincarnation more demanding. It doesn't really make sense to be reincarnated if you cannot recall your past lives. I'm not trying to say that reincarnation needs to be how I would have it, but proponents of reincarnation tend to claim that reincarnation helps people develop over the lifetimes to grow spiritually. More importantly, I'm discussing reincarnation as an afterlife. But what kind of survival of death is the oblivion of one's selfhood? The whole explanation of reincarnation is to demonstrate that death isn't the end of one's self. But personally, if everything I am in this life, my desires, my experiences, my memories, my relationships, my interests, my fears, my passions, etc. get erased and I start a new life with a blank slate, then I'm hardly still alive, am I? What I just said isn't unproblematic.



I've just basically proposed that in cases of total amnesia or brain damage which completely changes one's personality, a person is essentially dead with regard to their personhood. I'm okay with taking this position, but I don't hold it very strongly. It is nonetheless something reincarnationists ought to consider.

The next issue regarding reincarnation is the sheer numbers of humans. There are currently over 7.5 billion people alive. So how might the growing population be explained? Here are a couple of responses. 1. New souls can come into existence. Just because souls are eternal, it doesn't follow logically that they cannot still have a beginning of existence. 2. Reincarnation needn't be just between humans. A person may have been an animal in a previous life. All right, but if we are including all life forms in the analysis of reincarnation, then wouldn't all current living things need to have been alive before? And scientifically, life hasn't always been so abundant. There may be too many living things to count nowadays, but if you go back in time far enough, the very first living cells would have been in a much smaller number, potentially even one. 3. So we arrive to a mixture of the first two, which if we're being honest means that only the first one counted anyway, because without it, the second explanation wouldn't make any sense. I should mention that pseudoscience fanatics might claim that with an infinite multiverse, reincarnation transcends the limits of this universe, and thus numbers in this universe don't matter, but I'm going to dismiss them out of hand because such an explanation is purely fabricated to invite more unnecessary mysticism in an already dubious endeavor. I think reincarnationists would need to provide some sort of coherent and justified explanation of how souls begin to exist or get created. Otherwise I have no qualms about suspending my belief.

Moving on to another very popular prospect for an afterlife, we have the heaven and hell dichotomy. Now there are many different versions of both. Some believe that hell is a spiritual absence of god, others a mental torment, still others a very physical torture. Some think hell is permanent, others not. Some believe heaven is a literal place, some an enlightened spiritual state of mind. Some think in heaven there is nothing to do but just bask in all its greatness as well as that of god's, others think there is much heavenly work to be done. I cannot go through all, nor will I even many, of the various accounts of these two post-mortem fates. But I do want to discuss each one as they are expressed in a widespread manner. So for hell, I'll discuss the problem of torture and especially eternal torture as well as how it's used to persuade and control people. For

heaven, I'll discuss why it isn't as great as it may seem at first glance, as well as immortality in general.

So if only a soul goes to hell, how can there be physical pain inflicted, I wonder. Saying pain is all in one's head isn't enough, because pain, even psychological pain, still requires neurons and hormones and the like. But maybe I'm nitpicking here. I would say the same for memories, but if we accept souls which can maintain non-physical memories, why not souls which can undergo non-physical pain? But another factor isn't taken into account, that being desensitization. Eventually, I'd get desensitized to any given form of pain, if exposed to it enough. But maybe that's a corporeal thing, and souls don't get desensitized. It seems a bit arbitrary to disregard desensitization after accepting the capacity for pain, though. But I'll leave it aside. The whole eternity aspect kind of bothers me, regarding survival of death. Eventually, the time spent in endless torture will, ratio-wise, make my experience of a life here on Earth unfathomably insignificant. And during the whole time, I doubt that a person could reflect on one's life because they'd be in a perpetual state of shock and pain. It wouldn't be absolute torture if there were fleeting thoughts of joy in nostalgia of one's Earthly life, after all. In fact, if one is doomed to a single state of mind for the rest of eternity, then for all intents and purposes, the self is kind of dead, right? So again, this doesn't seem to be survival of one's death at all. But maybe it's not meant to be. Maybe hell is the true metaphysical death, which is why the gift of heaven is often called eternal life. But if that's the case, I don't see why anyone should fear hell. It's not me who'd be in hell, but a "soul-robot" set in the pain state of mind. All of who I am would be no more. "I" wouldn't be suffering, that shadow of me would. There wouldn't be any more "me."

Hell certainly seems to lose its luster of persuasion if given this treatment of actually thinking about what kind of philosophical theory of selfhood is demanded just to talk of hell coherently. But I think that's what hell is, actually, a persuasion tactic. Heaven and hell is a very extreme case of carrot and stick. Someone who fears going to hell will do just about anything you tell them to do so long as you have them convinced that action x will prevent hell but action y will lead to it, supposing their fear is great enough. I don't want to get into a whole discussion on justice, but I also find eternal punishment of any kind unjustified. I imagine most of you have heard some sort of analogy about how capital punishment for littering is excessive and unjust, thus so too is eternal hell for any finite number of sins. The usual response is that it is only excessive to

give capital punishment for small crimes like litter because humans don't possess the authority to take such judgements into their own hands as it were. God, on the other hand, is infinite in his wisdom and justice and thus can punish righteously for eternity for the smallest of transgressions. But my contention is that any infinite punishment or award is unmerited for finite actions. God can have whatever authority your faith gives him, but rationally speaking, I don't see how a finite being can do any finite number of actions to deserve infinite anything. But maybe my contention gets the same response that god simply has the authority to grant infinite rewards and punishments even when it is not merited. But I must say that that doesn't sound like justice as much as "might makes right." Another possible response is that it isn't your corporeal self that does the action, but your eternal soul, because of libertarian free will of the soul. So you aren't committing finite sins, but infinite sins. That would be fair, I suppose. Nobody has ever countered me this way. I have made it up to help apologists, because I like playing devil's advocate even (especially) against myself. But I am not convinced of souls or the Christian notions of god in the first place, so it's not too much of a problem for me, epistemologically speaking.

I have been relatively dismissive of reincarnation and of hell, but heaven is a far richer source of intriguing discussion, in my opinion. To start, let me discuss the unimportance worrying about where one ends up or anyone else one might care about, should the heaven/hell dichotomy turn out to be accurate. If you end up in hell, you'll be too busy being in endless pain to be upset that you're not in heaven, unless of course hell is a state of psychological torture. Even less probable is you having the time to worry yourself over others you cared about being in hell. Besides, there's no reason to believe you'd even be aware of anyone else in hell with you, much less someone you personally knew from Earth. On the other end in heaven, you shouldn't need to worry about any form of negative emotion. This would categorically include remorse for anyone you wanted to meet again who ended up in hell. So either way, there's no reason worry about anyone's sake besides your own, even if it were reasonable to worry about your own, which as I have contested, is not so self-evident. It never ceases to amaze me how Christians grieve for loved ones. They hope for the best, sometimes even claiming knowledge that the loved one in question is in heaven. So whether or not you go there to meet them it won't matter to you once you've been placed into one of the two places. And in the case that they go to hell, you still will be in no position to worry about their fate regardless of where you end up.

Another reason why grieving is not a rational response given an infinite afterlife has to deal with ratios again. A day's time is significant compared to a month, slightly to a year, hardly to a decade, insignificant compared to a century's time, negligible compared to a millennium, and so on. So even a century of not being with someone you love compared to an eternity together afterwards will practically be nothing more than walking outside and coming right back into one's life, metaphorically speaking. Certainly nothing to be upset about. A way to justify grieving would be to not take the overarching grand-scheme point of view. A decade apart compared to only a few decades of life experience is very significant, and therefore remorse is much more reasonable. But if someone wishes to be happy, then it isn't very practical for the sake of happiness to not take the grand-scheme point of view. To be honest, I think humans grieve, not because of philosophical justifications and reasons so much as it is in our biology to feel sad when apart from a loved one, especially if we fear never seeing them again and them us. It's sad to realize that any good we do, any accomplishment we achieve, they won't be around to experience it with you. And during hard times, they won't be available to help comfort you. Nevertheless, if faith is so strong as to combat the ever so probable death of ourselves, then it should be strong enough to combat the biological urges to mourn the dead. I find it inconsistent, and I can't understand that Christians who push forward happiness as an ideal, as heaven is ideal and filled with happiness, why they wouldn't do everything in their rational power to combat sadness which isn't even reasonable after granting Christian metaphysics. I don't mean to sound so heartless, but I understand how painful loss can be, and I think that reasoning would help Christians through such rough mental situations.

Regarding heaven itself, I don't believe people give it as much thought as it deserves. It's supposedly paradise. But I have problems imagining what utopia could possibly even be like. I would imagine that in heaven, people don't ever feel any negative emotion. But would I be even remotely the same "me" without my spectrum of emotions? Would any human still be human after the loss of capacity to experience what humans experience every day? And if there isn't any negative feeling, does that limit what one can do? I personally am very fond of games such as chess. But chess involves a winner and a loser, unless in cases of a stalemate. So perhaps to avoid there being no losers in heaven, chess must always end in a stalemate, but that doesn't seem perfect. Winning is better. Maybe everybody always wins. Logic needn't be the same in heaven as here on Earth. But a game of chess with two winners hardly seems like chess. Maybe

losing can exist, but if you lose, you feel just as good (perfect really) as you do when you win. But then what's the point of playing? Maybe there is no chess. But that's not much of a perfect place if I can't even play a game I enjoy. Although, my desire is worldly and might be an imperfect, corrupted desire, one might say. Thus a perfect world needn't cater to my imperfect wishes. Indeed, I am portraying chess as necessarily imperfect by bringing up the general requirement of a loser per match. (I also presuppose pleasure as being a criterion for good in a perfect world, but I'm a human, and I discussed this in chapter 4).

That question, "What's the point of playing chess?" is important. If one is always in a state of absolute bliss, then whether or not one plays chess, one would feel the same. I play chess because I enjoy it. It brings me pleasure. But if it gave me no extra pleasure than sitting around doing nothing, then to decide to play chess would be a baseless decision. I don't know if there'd be a reason to do anything in heaven, if no matter what you do, you feel the same. And I also wonder whether there exists free will in heaven? What if I wanted to freely will to harm someone up there? Maybe free will only exists such that choices can be made within the parameters of what can be done in heaven. At best, our actions might be erratic in heaven, where we just do things for no reason whatsoever, not even for the sake of doing something. After all, it's not like not doing anything would lead to boredom.

Boredom is actually a very interesting prospect for an eternal afterlife. Given infinite time, one could theoretically do everything there is to do, provided that one has the means to do everything. Well, not necessarily true, actually. Not all infinities are equal. An infinite set of all positive integers (1, 2, 3, etc.) is only half the size of the infinite set of all integers (negative and positive). So the set of all activities done given infinite time might be the infinite array of activities itself, but it doesn't have to be. I could imagine rereading the same book an infinite amount of times to pass the time of an eternity. It might be that the set of all activities is actually a greater infinite set than that of infinite time, meaning it would literally be impossible to do everything, even if one had forever to do it. This is probable. Just imagine a book with infinite a's and another with infinite b's, and one with mixed sequences of a's and b's, then another and another, and so on. Even with infinite time, you'd never finish one book, let alone all of the infinite books. Then there are all the activities that aren't reading books. I think the likelihood of there being more possible ways to spend an eternity are greater than can be done in an

eternity's time. And so the following issue I'll present might be avoided if there were a greater infinite set of things to do than can be done in an infinite amount of time. But please note that I don't believe in infinities, let alone of this sort. To me infinities are shortcut conceptions, but to talk of infinite activities is nonsensical can only, I think, be talked about, but never actually done.

Nevertheless, let's grant that one can do literally everything there is to do. After one is finished, there is still an infinite amount of time left to spend. So one repeats the process. Eventually, one might very well do everything there is to do an infinite amount of times as time continues on into infinity. Now, the way humans are is that we do eventually get desensitized to what we do. I love reading certain books, playing certain games, etc. but if I did those activities repeatedly thousands, millions, trillions, etc. of times, I'd get sick of them. But that is essentially what would happen given infinite time to spend. Ennui would arise in each and every activity. Maybe. There are a couple ways that this might not happen. Firstly, in order to be desensitized, the brain needs to already have done the activity. Or at the very least, it would need to have recollection of doing the activity before. In other words, desensitization might be avoided if after doing everything, one forgets ever having done it all. Another way would be that we, as heavenly souls, wouldn't be subject to desensitization at all. I'll even ignore the whole questioning about whether one would still be oneself without memory or the ability to be desensitized. At any rate, doesn't the idea of doing things over and over again in a circular pattern forever just seem lackluster? I don't think that's a very perfect system. It's a glorified 9 to 5 life that goes nowhere but in an endless circle. And this would be the case with a finite set of activities one would want to do.

What's more is that the above problem about doing things over and over again is most ideal, I think, in a heaven setting. Imagine spending infinite time just living in our universe. Sure, at first it seems like a good idea, but then you would certainly have all the ennui issues, but you wouldn't be enjoying every moment of it like you would in heaven where you're always blissful. But here in the universe, you'd still be you with all your imperfections and biological necessities. Even granting perfect health and youth for eternity, trying to spend one's time would be maddening. Most people worry about losing friends and family who are mortal along the immortal life journey, but even if everyone were immortal, the problem of spending time would eventually become one of, if not the, biggest issues for people.

Another unlooked factor of an afterlife is the actual continuation of the self. I am not who I was when I was five, or ten, or fifteen, or even twenty. I imagine I will be a different person in ten, twenty, thirty years down the road. Why should an afterlife be any different in this regard? Eventually, the little changes over time would sum together to be very significant changes from one century to the next. Between millennia, I might be entirely different people all together. Given infinite time, I would either cycle through personality changes infinitely or just settle on a single and final “me” which would persist forever. Neither particularly sounds ideal. The former means that my personality is just one circular cycle of inevitable “me’s.” The latter means that no matter what comes my way, I wouldn’t adapt. I wouldn’t be able to change. I wouldn’t be the kind of me I am now. I’m someone who changes with new experiences. But the whole survival of death seems pointless in the first place if who I am now will one day completely cease to exist given enough time anyway. Sure, there will have been a persistent transition just as there is between my five year-old self and my current self. But part of that little kid is still in me now. It’s very possible that given enough time, no part of the current me would remain, except maybe the memories (but that’s also doubtful considering how memories change over time and weaken, psychologically speaking).

And I don’t think people give enough thought to try to fathom the unfathomable span of infinite time. Immortality seems nice because people think life is too short without even considering that life could ever be too long. But after millions of years, billions of years, a googolplex of years (one followed by a hundred zero’s), you will not have even spent a single fraction of a percentage of your whole time alive. You never will, because there are no fractions, no percentages, no numerical approach toward completing infinity since such is the nature of infinity. Perhaps I am odd to believe so, but an infinite life just seems so daunting, undesirable, and frightful to me that I cling to my mortality with gratitude and reassurance. I don’t believe in an afterlife, but even if there is one, I hope I won’t be conscious forever. Because no matter which way an infinite life plays out, it all seems like hell to me!

Many of my criticisms of immortality deal with making incredulous the idea of survival of the self. But if my criticisms hold up, my reasons for detesting immortality also weaken. After all, if I change into something I currently am not, and that future self appreciates immortality, I have little reason to fear that fate for the sake of “future me.” Fear might be unreasonable, but not so much scorn. I can still reasonably scorn such

drastic changes since I do so from the standpoint of my current self that doesn't want to change in such a way. Nevertheless, I don't fret much of immortality, for I don't believe it's a probable outcome whatsoever.

I have been talking a lot about how these afterlives don't seem desirable. I don't mean to imply that what is desirable is true and what isn't desirable is false. The state of affairs do not bend to my or anyone else's desires. But I included my disdain because I have heard so many people hope for eternal life, as though it were something to be hoped for. Many find it sad to think that death could be the end. And throughout history, there have been stories as well as attempts to find a means to become immortal (fountain of youth, alchemy, etc.). I admit, I used to be a believer of reincarnation, and I wanted to live so many lives. But even then, even in my most life-loving years, I never wanted to live forever. I always figured that I would eventually do everything I'd want to do as many times to my heart's content, after which I'd be ready to forsake my consciousness. So I have decided to include my reasons why I find such eternal life something not to be wished for, but feared and hated.

I think the best defense in favor of an afterlife being reasonably believed in comes from Near Death Experiences (NDE's). However, even then I don't find them very convincing. It relies so heavily on anecdotes for one thing, but considering the nature of the claims, I can't fault it for that too much. My main issue is the fact that cross-cultural accounts show that people can experience NDE's which reflect their expectations of what is to come after death based on cultural and/or religious doctrine. To my knowledge there aren't really accounts of Christians experiencing a Hindu-relevant NDE, for example. There are quite secular NDE's or non-denominational but still "spiritual" NDE's, but even this isn't enough for me. Moreover, NDE's can trigger in non-life-threatening situations which may (but not necessarily) imply that NDE's are triggered out of expectation of death and not the natural imminence thereof (2014, Charland-Verville). An argument for its credibility is how dramatically it changes people. There are examples of atheists becoming believers (as if atheist means to not believe in an afterlife, but there are some atheists who become deists or theists afterwards as well as changing disbelief or non-belief in an afterlife to believing in one). Beyond that, many people lose their fear of death and find a new love of living life which they in turn aim to live to its fullest. From what I've looked into the matter, most (but not all) do express generally positive emotions (perhaps a rush of serotonin?) regarding their NDE. As for the loss of



fear of death, if NDE's occur out of an expectation of death, and the person formerly fears death, then perhaps having a positive experience so close to (what one perceives as) death helps dissolve the fear. I would suggest as a possibility that sometimes familiarization can be an aid against fear of the unknown. The new love of life aspect happens quite often enough. If one is in any way disillusioned, tired, jaded, ungrateful or otherwise malcontent with what one has or a situation one is on, something drastic which makes one realize that what one has might be lost can be enough to revitalize passion. Think of boring jobs almost lost, a ragged friendship almost torn, a car you complain about almost breaking beyond repair, a lackluster marriage almost failed, etc. You needn't (always) lose something to realize its value it has for you, sometimes almost losing it is sufficient, and I think life can be the same. The fact that people change their belief systems due to NDE's might be good reason for them to believe there's more to life than all this here. But I don't feel persuaded myself. While the science thus investigated in this matter isn't complete, I find the fact that many symptoms of NDE's being replicable artificially enough to convince me that NDE's are largely explainable with neurology. Alas, maybe one has to have one to know the "truth," in which case who could reproach me, not having had one myself, for not believing?

### 6.3 The badness of death

\*\*\*From here on out in this book, I will be working under the premise that biological death is the total annihilation of oneself. So even if you do not agree, I hope you can still appreciate my arguments as at least "would-be-reasonable" if death truly is the end. You don't have to agree with any of them, I am merely explaining my views. Furthermore, you can still agree with my arguments under this view of death but deny them overall because you disagree about death being the end of one's self. \*\*\*

That said, the next thing to discuss is how death is often perceived. I have touched on why the death of a loved one can be saddening. But what about one's own death? What makes death bad for you? This question is worded such that it's a bit of a loaded question. A more basic question might be "Is death bad, and why?" Of course, one could say that this question is also loaded and ought to be parsed in consideration of death being bad for (insert subject here).

Considering my disdain for immortality, I don't think death is bad if only because it helps evade such a dismal dénouement. But in addition to this, I would still disagree that death is bad by nature for a few reasons which I will explain now.

Firstly, I don't believe things are good or bad inherently by nature. I will argue this in the next chapter further. Here, I will just say my conclusions which will support the reasons why death isn't bad by nature. I find that talk of good and evil are really talk of attributes we humans ascribe to things. That is, for death to be bad, it would need to be perceived as bad *by* something, like a human or another sentient creature. If all the living organisms around were just bacteria, they could still die, but without a creature capable of feeling bad about it, any death among the bacteria is neither bad nor good nor even neutral, since it simple isn't perceived. Thus any talk of the goodness or badness of death is out of the question when speaking on a non-subjective level. To summarize, this critique attacks the very notion of subjective qualities like good or bad being treated as objective, inherent qualities. (Again, more on this with justifications in the next chapter.)

Secondly, what does it mean for something to be bad by nature? I think when someone says that, what's going on is that the speaker is saying that they find death to be bad. It is their subjective opinion on the matter that death is bad. In other words, saying, "Death is bad," might be akin to something like, "I don't like death," or, "I believe death is bad," etc. Of course, maybe we should take them more literally. This means that even if I think death isn't bad, I am objectively (virtually speaking, from my skeptic perspective) wrong just as I would be if I said that I believe  $1+1=3$  or that Tom (who isn't selfish) is selfish. In other words, death being bad is a fact about death. Still though, one must wonder what it means to have such an inherent quality as badness. In fact, someone who believes my claims about death not being bad,  $1+1=3$ , and Tom being selfish could theoretically disagree that in each case I am wrong in the same way or to the same extent. Perhaps, such a person might say,  $1+1=2$  is an inherent fact about the universe whereas Tom's being selfish or not is contingent upon who Tom is and the choices he makes (under a libertarian free will system (see 3.5)). And maybe my belief that death isn't bad is incorrect more like my false belief about Tom's selfishness. But in that case, my false belief about death is contingent, which means it's not inherently bad by nature.

What if someone thinks that my belief about death is wrong just as my belief about  $1+1=3$ . In that case, my contention would be something like: Is it? Is that fair to

say? It seems as likely for death to be inherently bad as it is for a rock or lactose intolerance to be bad. I doubt anyone would point to a rock and claim that it is inherently bad. But rocks are objects, whereas death is a concept or maybe a process. Fair enough. But what about lactose intolerance (which could be considered a concept or a process)? I also doubt that people would say that it is inherently bad. Maybe there are some, but most would find that unreasonable or at least unfounded. So where's the difference?

It boils down to what I think is the most common justification for the badness of death, i.e. that life is inherently good, and death ends that goodness. Few people would say that milk is inherently good, but that it is good for us because our bodies are such that milk can be enjoyable for us. But life is universally good. Milk wouldn't be good for us (to consume) if humans evolved to not like its taste. Furthermore, milk wouldn't be good if we were lactose intolerant! But life isn't like that, some say. Life would be good regardless of what kind of creatures we are. One might go as far as to claim that life would even be good for anything that isn't even alive! So a rock would be better off if only it were alive. Now, I don't believe that this is a good line of thinking. Lots (virtually infinity) of babies don't get born because of the fact that not every sperm combines with every egg in every possible genetic combination to form a novel human. To think that it would be better for my sperm to combine with every other egg just so more humans would be alive is ridiculous (Kagan, 217-224), and it is unlikely that someone would be considered reasonable for thinking otherwise. Maybe that someone is right, but I doubt it, and since I'm fairly certain you do, too, I won't go further down that road, fully aware that I haven't disproven such an extreme position. (I don't think it matters, though, since I'll try to disprove less extreme positions).

In the following chapters, I will talk against the idea of human life being inherently good. I believe that life can be atrocious and bad (but not inherently so, since I don't believe in inherent qualities). So I won't attack that idea straight on here. Instead, let me try to attack the idea that death being bad follows from life being inherently good.

Even if life is inherently good, the cessation thereof (death) being bad doesn't necessarily follow. If we are talking about inherent qualities, then how does cessation of life take away its goodness? I'm very unsure that it could. If a table is inherently brown, burning the table doesn't take away from its brownness. Why? Well because even if

burning the table makes it so there is no longer a brown table, the table itself is no less brown, because there is no more table. True, there is no more brownness to be had by the table, but that's because there is no more table. The ashes aren't brown, but I didn't affect the brownness of the table. Essentially, I'm saying that an object  $x$  with quality  $y$  doesn't lose quality  $y$  when  $x$  no longer exists. (This assumes that qualities and identities of things or even existences themselves are eternal, which is why I wouldn't use this argument. Remember, I don't even believe in inherent qualities as explained in section 3.1. I'm just presenting reasons why even if I did, I might still not need to think that death must be bad if life is inherently good.)

Regarding life, if life is good, by life ending that goodness hasn't changed. The goodness is still just as much a quality of that life as it had been during the lifetime. Isaac Newton is now dead, but if his life was inherently good, then his life hasn't lost that inherent quality even though he's no longer alive. At the very least, this line of reasoning would have us say that his life is no better or worse today as it was the moment before his brain died. All of his life experiences and his perceptions thereof haven't changed after all. So why then say that his life has lost its good quality? It's just that now that his life has ended, no more goodness can come from it (which we'll discuss later). But that doesn't necessarily take away from the life he once had, at least not according to the assumptions spelled out above

. Here's another example. Your childhood has ended, yet as an adult, is your childhood worse now than on your last day of being a child? (By childhood I mean first 18 years minus one day of life, for those wondering or those who call themselves 'children at heart.')

You might say your childhood is better or worse nowadays depending on how you currently perceive it. So if during your childhood you struggled but now looking back can appreciate all that you went through, you might say that your childhood has indeed become better after ending. But notice that in such a case, it is not the actual value of your childhood that has changed, but your perception of and feelings toward your childhood that have changed. And if you insist that the value of your childhood is in fact the thing that has changed along with your perception, I invite you to consider that value then is not inherent. If the goodness or badness of childhood can change after its cessation, then I am unsure of whether those things were really so inherently embedded in the childhood in the first place. Or maybe what you mean is that you used to perceive it being bad but now your perception allows you to realize that it was good all along. In

that case, I raise back the original issue in this paragraph that the end of your childhood hasn't changed the inherent value of your childhood.

Another contention to the childhood argument is that after childhood, one can still look back and remember one's childhood. One can still be aware of it. But with life, that isn't the case. After death, there are no more perceptions, memories, or awareness of any sort. Therefore, death being the end of life is non-analogous to adulthood being the end of childhood. Again, I fail to see why inherent qualities need to be perceived if they're inherent. A green emerald inside a cave never before witnessed would still be green if we should accept greenness as an inherent quality of emeralds (I wouldn't). But how about this counter then? Some people go into comas and have amnesia upon waking up. I even met a doctor at the University of Wyoming who claimed she didn't remember her life before her coma. She lost her childhood. You needn't believe this anecdote (I myself am somewhat skeptical), but let's pretend some people do have similar experiences, including this woman whose name I can't recall. In such a (at least hypothetical) case, is their childhood goodness or badness lost or altered because of the coma? I am asking here whether or not the inherent good or bad of the experiences during the person's childhood was affected by the person losing all memory and perception thereof. If such qualities as goodness or badness are indeed inherent, I think not. Therefore the cessation of a good is not itself a bad. Or at the very least, it doesn't take away from the good, in which case why call it bad?

Here's one reason we might still call death bad: because it prevents accumulating further good. If life is just the sum of experiences our body collects throughout a given period of time and death is the cessation of life, then after death no more experiences may be had. Thus if in life we aim to gather as many good experiences as possible and avoid as many bad experiences as possible (I don't mean to assume that such a hedonistic or utilitarian life is necessarily what we should aim for but since this is generally my view, I'll focus on this analysis, see chapter 4), then death is bad because it prevents more good than at the end of life.

Note that now I am not talking about life being inherently good any more. Even if we accept that life has a mixture of good and bad, so long as life can be said to at least be overall good, this argument can be relevant for the badness of death. This reasoning does open itself up to the contention that if life is more bad than good, death could be even

good. Truth be told, I think these kinds of arguments are widely inconsequential because the premises are too uncertain. I know of no reliable method by which to determine the accurate proportion of good-to-bad experiences in life. But let us look anyway into the badness of death in cases of life being overall good.

I am someone who loves movies and T.V. shows. When one of my beloved series ends, I feel sad. There is a kind of hole in my heart so to speak left behind. I feel misfortunate that I can't witness any more fun, exciting adventures with my favorite characters. I imagine many people have felt this sentiment, perhaps with books or some other kind of narrative. There might even be some entitlement mixed in; we feel that we deserve more or that our desire warrants more to be had. But I can't help but wonder if the end of a good thing even though it prevents more good, truly is necessarily bad.

I have watched my favorite series well over twenty times throughout the last decade. It's short and often was background noise during homework in high school. But the end was always sad for me, because it was over. I had so much fun each and every time that by the end, even after the twentieth or so time, I still felt the emptiness and longing for more. And eventually a sequel series came out four years later which I do love, though not as much. This means that it was reasonable to believe that more of the original series could have been made and that if more had been made, it would have continued to be a great show. So I ask myself nowadays at the end of the first series whether the ending is bad. It did after all inhibit me from more good from the show. It stopped something great.

To say that something which prevents a continuation of something good isn't bad appears at first glance to be ridiculous. It's not an absurd assumption to make that a continuation of something good is good. Thus, the cessation of something good being bad would be a corollary, would it not? And if not, why?

Well, I must admit that my analogy is far from perfect. T.V. shows ending might be said to be good because then you can return to it and rewatch it and enjoy it once again. But for life, that isn't the case. We're assuming (I mean, I think I supported the idea well enough) here no reincarnation, let alone the ability to relive the best parts of life. Moreover, a show can be replaced with something better. As for life, there is no replacement, just absence, a void. But at the very least, there are reasons for the discontinuation of things like T.V. series being regarded as good. So we do have a reason

to sometimes deny that the discontinuation of something good is bad. But is death one such case?

Some people would say death is still good despite the discontinuation of life which is good. Some people (usually existentialists in my experience) say something along the lines of something being good or meaningful only when it is finite. If life were infinite, then we couldn't talk of its goodness, because it hasn't ended yet. How could you talk about life as a whole if you haven't had it all? Maybe what's to come is bad, so we shouldn't make hasty judgements. But if life is finite, then we can meaningfully talk about it as a whole. I would contest that we might reasonably predict what is to come based on induction, even if it's an imperfect way of knowing. I would also argue that we could at least say something about life so far being good without it ending. So maybe if life never ends, I might be able to talk about the finite segment thus far in totality. But my greatest contention against this reasoning lies in the psychoanalysis of such a defense of death. Death is inevitable so far as we can tell and aspire for present day. In light of this inevitability (which I will discuss again later), some might rationalize it as being good even if it is bad so as not to have to deal with facing the judgements of an inevitable life event as bad. For anyone who uses this kind of justification of death for this reason isn't being honest with themselves and hasn't demonstrated why finiteness of something good is better than an infinite good.

To answer whether the discontinuation of life is good or not, we must now move past talk of life being inherently good. Television shows ending can be good or bad depending on what follows, and such contingency is important when discussing the end of life. I think it really does depend on the life. Supposing that after death, life would have continued to be (overall) good, then death can be reasonably said to be bad. But if after death, life would have had an overall negative value, then we might call that death good. It prevented more badness after all. So we've come to the idea that death is bad when it prevents life from accruing more good than bad and death is good when it prevents life from accruing more bad than good. This is a very simplistic welfare account of death.

#### 6.4 The harmfulness of death

Turning back to the question, "Is death bad for (insert subject here)?" let us fill in the parentheses with "the one who dies." So when you die, death is bad for you. After all,

if death is bad when it prevents life from accruing more good than bad, it seems to make little sense to say that a bad death that happens to someone in France named Luc is bad for me. Much more likely is that Luc's bad death is bad for him. He's the one missing out on the goodness of life, not me.

Alas, there seems to me a very big problem in saying that Luc is harmed by the badness of his own death. I can look at Luc's life and his current state of death and think to myself what a pity it is that he can't go on living a good life. But he doesn't have that capability, because he's dead. He's not around to feel sorry for himself. He can't be sad about not living because he's not aware of anything anymore. He's like a rock now in regards to mental and observational capacity, and rocks don't get harmed. If you slice a rock, it's not harmed. You could shatter it, and it won't be hurt, physically or psychologically. So, too, would I say is the case for Luc or anyone dead. I believe that in order to be affected negatively by something, there must be a subject which is affected. But in the case of death, there is no more subject to be affected. Thus I conclude that death cannot affect negatively the one who is dead.

Of course, I might be wrong in saying that in order to be affected negatively there must be a subject which is affected. But I've noticed that most attempts to deny that one needn't exist as a subject to be harmed have a bias. That bias is talking only about harm. If I am alive right now, and I have a good, long life ahead of me but die instantly right now, I might be said to be losing out on life for some metaphysical reason or another. Maybe the past, present, and future are all real at all times happening simultaneously forever (what a nightmare if you ask me). In such a case, my death is bad at all times, but so is my stubbing toe that one evening when I go up to drink water in the dark, and that time I slipped on the ice, etc. Equally, I have been and forever will be accruing the goodness of my tenth birthday party, of my time at the zoo, etc. In the end, death is a minor infinitely accruing bad in light of every single life event infinitely accruing their respective goods and bads. Maybe my death is bad only after I die, since that's when I'm missing out. But that means death is also good when considering all the bad I'll be missing out on. And whilst we can talk about overall good and overall bad, many readers I'm sure would take issue with my previous statement: death is good when it prevents life from accruing more bad than good. Since there would still be good things, most people don't want to discredit them outright even if overall life is bad. But then why discredit all the bad? Indeed, if during a coma the subject is completely lost at least in some cases



(but not in all cases), then it's biased to only discuss how bad the coma is without even mentioning the goodness of it.

I apologize to sweep aside all the various interesting arguments in favor of death being harmful. (I invite you to look them up. There's eternalism, subsequentialism, priorism, concurrentism, and indefinitism (2016, Luper).) But I find a greater issue at hand when discussing harm in the comparativist way, which is being done here. That is to say, I am harmed when I am deprived of something good, even if nothing bad is happening to me. (Does this also mean that I am benefited when something bad doesn't happen to me even if nothing good is happening to me?) The contention I have in mind is that to talk of harm in this "could-have-been-better" way is absurd.

There are lots of goods and harms which don't happen to me but could. Improbable events like me not having the pleasure of living in the 1980's or even 1680's aside, under the comparativism account of harms and goods, I should be full of gratitude and remorse all the time. When I cross the street and don't get hit by a car, I am benefited and should feel so lucky. But I should equally feel bad about not finding money on the ground. I am benefited by not being punched when I meet someone I'm attracted to but harmed by not getting a kiss. And I am harmed by not being alive even when I'm not around to feel bad about it but equally benefitted by not being harmed by things in life even when I'm not conscious to feel good about it. I could even dare to go so far as to say that in death, even if I am being harmed by not accruing more goodness in my life, I am being benefitted by not being aware of the harm I'm accruing from my death! More simply put, death hurts me but since I can't experience the hurt, I am benefitted, even though I also can't experience the benefit. I find this whole paragraph utterly silly. Death is now seen as good and bad regardless of whether the rest of life is good or bad (which then tells us whether death is bad or good, respectively). Thus I deny this whole comparativist analysis.

So now we're back to the idea that in order to be affected negatively (or positively!) affected, there must be a subject to be affected. To be quite honest with you, my readers, I've only ever read comparativist attempts against this kind of Epicurian presumption (see Kagan, 206-224). There might be others, but I don't know of them, so I very well cannot argue against them. And I myself can't come up with any, because I only have come across harms and benefits while I have been a subject. But even if there were

better arguments against my presumption, I might be able to put up some defense. My defense is naturally inductive reasoning, as I so often enjoy using. I have to come to the conclusion that a subject is needed because I can't think of any harm or benefit I've incurred unconsciously. When I am asleep, in between consciousness and dreaming, not thinking at all (or at least not significantly), I don't feel like I'm being hurt by missing out on being awake. And it's not simply because I prefer to be awake after having a good night's sleep. I don't feel hurt because there's an absence of me to get hurt. But when I stub my toe or slip on ice, I get hurt because I'm aware of the pain I feel. When a prospective romantic interest rejects me, I feel hurt because I'm aware of the rejection and lack of romance between us. And I'm going to have a lot of painful experiences in the future before I die, but I don't feel hurt by them now. And I don't feel benefitted by all the future goods I'll be receiving either. I don't feel better off because next month, I'll eat something tasty. I don't feel worse off because next month I'm going to hear bad news. I worry about future bad events, and I look forward to future good events with excitement and hope, but any harm or benefit there is caused by my emotional outlook not by the future events themselves. I will grant that knowing about good and bad future events can cause me pleasure and harm, but the events themselves haven't affected me, at least not yet. And I would say that we can and maybe even should concern ourselves with those future events. By concerning myself over the prospect of being in a happy relationship motivates me to make choices which will likely lead into good things like courting, being romantically involved, sex, and a relationship. Concerning myself over future poverty helps motivate me to avoid unemployment and avoid poor economic decisions. But it's not the relationship or poverty themselves which are affecting me, just the prospects thereof, my thoughts, my beliefs, and my emotional reactions. But what about the toe stub or the rejection? Can I say that those really harm me? Isn't it just my emotional reaction at work again? In a sense, yes, but I'm more lenient to meaningfully talk about a rejection harming me that actually happened than a future one which, as far as I am aware, may or may not even happen. (Even if the future is real and determined, I still might be best not acting like it.) And at any rate, all of these events will or have harmed me while I am subject. And should they harm me in absence of me as a subject, I won't be around to care.

The final subject of death's badness I want to discuss is the survivors of death. Death is harmful to them because there is a loss which they are aware of. The loss is that of the deceased. The emptiness of not being able to communicate any longer is a harm.

But that needn't be the end of it. A friend might be able to accept more easily a friend's decision to become a hermit and live alone in the wilderness. In that scenario, all further communication and contact in life are lost but the friend doesn't feel like they've lost their friend quite as much as they would if say after the hermit friend abandons society, the forest burns down and the hermit is found to be dead. There seems to be something worse about someone dying as opposed to living in such a way that someone is out of one's life (Kagan, 208). To be honest, I'm not so sure there actually is a difference which should make a significant change in how we feel about the person in question. But for all that, let me try to give a possible reason for why death of a loved one is worse than just a loss. Perhaps the reason behind the death of a loved one being worse than the loss of a loved one lies in sympathy. We feel disheartened by the fact that all of that person's personality, all their goals, dreams, and aspirations are now gone once they're dead. When someone's out of our lives but still alive, we can rest easy in believing (and to some extent, knowing) that the person we cherished is out there doing something with their life that they want to do, even if it doesn't involve us anymore. At least, we might think, they are happy or fulfilling their life in their own way. So much for accepting the life of someone whom we've lost but who is still alive. But if someone's dead, a similar problem as just previously mentioned arises again in regard to concern for the person who has died. For whom are we feeling upset? For them? Well, they aren't any worse off dead. Or if they are, at least they can't experience being in a worse off state. It's not all too reasonable to be upset for their sake. They certainly aren't, since there is no more "them." But we can be upset for ourselves. We can be upset that we can no longer refuge in peace of mind of their well-being and life fulfillment. Moreover, even if hope of seeing the lost but not dead person is slim, with a dead person hope is lost entirely (in case hope is a factor in the first case at all, though it needn't be). At any rate, I do believe one can reasonably mourn the loss of someone to death more so than when mourning the loss of someone who still lives. Thus death is harmful, for it affects those left behind negatively.

## 6.5 Living with death

The next thing I want to discuss is whether we can or should fear or otherwise be upset about death. I previously mentioned concerning oneself over future events for pragmatic reasons as they lead to rational decision making to achieve desires and avoid that which one wishes to avoid. But the event of death is inevitable. Even if one doesn't want to die, it seems unreasonable to fret over something one cannot control. To some

extent on the other hand, death isn't inevitable. The event is indeed certain, but not the manner by which one dies, nor the time (excluding determinism. Recall that even if determinism is true, I don't think we should act like it.). So by worrying about certain kinds of deaths, one takes actions to avoid them. By worrying about dying prematurely, one takes actions to live longer. I personally don't want a painful death, so I will do what I can to escape a fire or a bear attack, etc. And I don't want to die before I've written down my basic philosophies, thus I look both ways before crossing the street.

But some people fear dying in their sleep. Some people are afraid to not exist. The fear is not of dying, which I believe is to be feared so long as one is aware of it (which is common), but of death itself. If the fear is to lose out on life, to bring back the comparative deprivation of life analysis, I would reiterate my previous objections. But if the fear is to not think, to not be aware to just not be, then worry no longer. I believe you do this every night. When you sleep, there are periods of time when you aren't conscious. And even if your brain is conscious, *you* aren't. The personhood that is reading this book isn't around during the periods between falling asleep and dreaming. There might be some consciousness, some self, but it isn't you or me. If it is, we are never aware of it, or at least never remember it. So virtually it might as well not be. Yet anyone who fears sleeping because of those few hours of absence of having a conscious self would be deemed unreasonable. Of course, with sleep, there's the expectation of waking up again, of resuming consciousness and selfhood. Death is permanent though. However, since there is no "you" to be upset about being dead, I see no good reason to concern yourself despite it being permanent. It's not as though the permanency of death changes the state of non-selfhood itself. The permanency is a mere duration. But my main point is that since you can't experience death, it shouldn't worry you.

For all that, I do believe there's a good reason to fear death. The reason is our natural emotional reaction to death. I believe that someone who doesn't fear death out of any reason other than a natural repulsion has an understandable fear. Just as some people are naturally afraid of spiders, even ones that cannot bite or poison humans, even just a picture or a video of spiders, and those people can be said to have reasonable fears, so too do I find people reasonable who fear death out of pure biological reaction. But that doesn't need to be the end of the story. We humans can use reasoning to overcome certain natural urges and repulsions. And in light of the inevitability of death, I believe that might be the better thing to do. At least, if one has the desire to not fear death or to

not let one's fears hinder the goodness of death, such actions might be in one's best interests.

This is one of the most important aspects of death; living in light of it. If death is bad because it takes away from more life which is good, then I don't see the use in letting it also take away from the goodness of life before it even happens. Instead of being upset about not being alive for thousands of years to come, take pleasure in living for the time being. Why taint the goodness of life now with thoughts of mortality? If you fear or oppose the thought of one day no longer existing, rejoice! You still are conscious and still exist.

Conversely, you might find it beneficial to familiarize yourself more with this topic. And by doing so, you can rid yourself of your anxieties of the unknown through a fuller understanding of death and its consequences. I'm no therapist, but think of it as a form of cognitive-behavioral therapy. You might train yourself to realize that as you fall asleep at night you won't be around for a few hours, and that's okay. You can consider what it means to die, and think of how it might possibly be harmful to you. You can think about what it means to fear something reasonably and use your analysis to understand if death is something to reasonably fear, and so on and so forth.

As far as I can tell, none of us came into existence with a promise of living forever or for a thousand years, or a hundred years or even twenty years to come. Most parents have hope and do their best to keep their children alive so long as they live, but there's no promise. We are born and we will die at an unspecified time. The lack of promise of amount of life means that we shouldn't feel so entitled to live longer than we do. Maybe life would be even better if humans lived for a few hundred or a few thousand years. Maybe life would be better if everyone died at forty years, not a day sooner or later. But it shouldn't concern us. Because we are alive now, and we might as well make the most of it, if that is what we wish.

Now, throughout history people have attempted to lengthen lifespans, even achieve immortality. If they wish to do so, so be it. Those people are reasonable in concerning themselves over the shortness of life because they're trying to do something about it. But if you are not doing anything about it yourself, you're worrying about something you actively aren't seeking to have any control over whatsoever. If this describes you, then you should give death as little of your time and effort as possible. You

might need to think about it enough to avoid it too prematurely and to make preparations like a final will or life insurance, but otherwise, just enjoy your life. Don't worry about something that is almost certainly inevitable that won't even hurt *you*.

And as for surviving another's death, mourning is a natural behavior which helps us to handle the situation at hand. As I stated earlier, I believe mourning to be reasonable in response to the death of someone we care about. However, I think it should be tempered. Coping with the situation is different from fixating on it. To mourn incessantly is to be unreasonable. One is upset that one cannot rest easy that the person in question is well. But if one gets stuck in mourning, one loses out on life oneself. I don't know if we should move on because the deceased would want us to do so. But if we would want the deceased to be able to live a fulfilling life and be well, I think we should implement our desires for them unto ourselves. If we are upset that they are not well, we should be concerned for our own well-being, too.

I unfortunately left so very much out of this chapter. Death is one of the most fascinating topics in philosophy that I have studied. I very, very strongly recommend looking into Shelly Kagan's free online video lectures from a semester' course on death for more information. He also wrote a book based on those lectures, which I cited in the bibliography. Besides Kagan, many philosophers have written on death, from its definition to its badness to its implications for living. The literature is vast. I could have written whole books on death, but I hope this chapter served as a nice, compact introduction. I should mention, that here on out, this book does proceed in topics of death like the value of life and suicide. This is just the first chapter of death and the only chapter which focuses on death as its own subject matter.

## Chapter 7

### Value and Existence

#### 7.1 Constitution of value

Each person values many things. And that which is valued differs from person to person. Yet many values are shared among multiple people, perhaps even by everybody, or at least, everybody who has the capacity to hold value and doesn't have any impediments (psychopathy might be a contender). But why do we have any values at all? What are they and what is the relation between us and them?

First I want to be clear on what I mean by saying that x has value without actually saying what it means to have value. When x has value, it's meaningful, or has meaning. It has meaning, not in the sense of definition or semantical meaning (though semantic meaning will also take part in my value theory) but in that it is precious; it matters. Henceforth, words and phrases like 'precious,' 'matters,' 'has meaning,' 'meaningful,' and the like express the same kind of value which will be dealt with in this chapter.

Looking on to what constitutes value, let us use an example, money. Currency has monetary value. But why? One answer might be that money is intrinsically value, in that its value exists by virtue of its inherent nature. Money is necessarily valuable regardless of anything else. It doesn't matter then, if nobody uses it, or even if nobody is around to use it, such as would be the case if all life on Earth ceased to be but somehow money could still be found scattered around the world.

This seems odd, considering the fact that money is a human invention of sorts. There was a time in history before money as we know it today existed. One might reply that money such as dollars and euros are not intrinsically valuable, but what they represent is. There are two possible representations of money I will discuss. The first is that, at least in the U.S., dollars are supposed to or were originally intended to be a

representational placeholder for gold. If this is what is meant, then gold is what is intrinsically valuable. Then even before humans discovered it, it was valuable. So we could think of a hypothetical world wherein gold and humans exist, but humans never once discover it, or at least they never view it as valuable. In either case, gold is not the standard for backing up currency and thus to those humans, has little to no value. Note how I said ‘to those humans.’ Someone who believes gold is inherently valuable might say that even if humans never think it’s valuable, it still is. Indeed, a solid chunk of gold floating in space where no mind has ever perceived it still has value.

It seems implausible that this adequately describes money’s value. The reason why is because we can look at what valuing money can do. It allows for trade without trading physical entities (not to imply that money isn’t physical) of goods. For example, I can do a service for you by giving you a massage (an action which you like but is not a physical thing by normal language standards), and you can give me money in exchange which I can then go and use it to purchase food. Money seems superfluous here, because you could just give me your food for the massage, but then the food would be the currency in our transaction. Now it seems like money is a functional tool which can be used in lieu of or better yet, as an indirect medium for physical goods or services. It allows people to not give up material items for services or other items directly.

However, if money is valuable because it is functional, then its value is contingent upon its functionality, which then means that money itself is not intrinsically valuable so long as it is not useful. This is my view, but there is another place where intrinsic value might exist, that being in the functionality itself. If money is valued because it helps people in a community have a more efficient economy, then perhaps the intrinsic value is the benefit of efficiency. Money itself is valueless if never discovered, but the good of having an efficient economy would be valuable even if the economy never existed. To put it more clearly, the very fact that money does have some instrumental function is valuable in and of itself intrinsically. After all, what makes something instrumental valuable must have some trait that makes it instrumental to its end, making these traits whatever they are inherently valuable to those ends. To use another kind of example, a rock is instrumentally valuable for the end of breaking up clams to an otter. But the fact that that rock has the potential of breaking a clam is itself valuable, whether or not it ever gets used to do so. To avoid getting into too much detail about properties, dispositions, manifestations, etc. let me just say that this notion of instrumental value containing



intrinsic value seems to be a conflation of x having the disposition for y and x being valuable. I believe x is valuable because of y, not because x can get y. So in the two examples, a rock is valuable because of the cracked oyster, not because it could crack an oyster, and money is valuable because of what we get from it, not because currency allows for the obtainment of goods. The difference is nuanced but one last thing I want to say about intrinsic instrumental value is that if such is the case, then my computer is inherently valuable as a nutcracker, a paper weight, a bookmark, and tons of other things simply by virtue of it being able to be used as such. Under this analysis, instrumentality is almost useless as it doesn't describe results anymore, but simply possible dispositions, which I find to not be instrumentalism at all.

Let's suppose you accept everything in this chapter so far. So now you believe that money is valuable because of its extrinsic benefits. But there seem to be things which aren't valuable because of their results such as altruism, kindness, eating dessert, playing a game with friends, dreaming, telling a joke, having a crush on someone you'll never talk to, etc. To be frank, I disagree that these have no beneficial results. Let us look closely at a couple of these examples.

On altruism and kindness, by acting upon these one brings about good consequences to those one helps. Beyond that, one feels good about having been altruistic or kind. Eating an unhealthy treat may have some negative consequences, but it also brings about having a happy, tasty experience. Playing a game with others or telling jokes produces social interaction and promotes bonding which in turn can lead to future instances of helping each other and feeling good about having friends among other benefits. Dreams help inspire actions and goals to achieve as well as lead to memories of them, conversations about them sometimes, jobs pertaining to researching dreams which then helps to understand the psyche. Even having a crush can help mature a person which allows for healthy relationships later on.

One might still argue that intrinsic values exist. Even under my analysis that friendship gives pleasurable experiences, then what about those pleasurable experiences? What are they good for? It seems that since we go act for the sake of things like pleasure, then at the very least, pleasure might be intrinsically good. I reject this as well. It may be the case that we as human beings act for pleasure without the intention of something beyond pleasure, but I would only call this intrinsic in the sense of being its

own end. It is not intrinsic or inherent in the sense that it is not mind-independent. After all, now we're just saying that pleasure is good because we seek pleasure for itself. But if there were no minds to seek the pleasure, then the pleasure would lose this reason for being supposedly inherently or intrinsically valuable. See chapters 3 and 4 for more understanding of why I don't believe in inherent properties such as inherent value which exists regardless of mental activity. For all that, I do think that even our so-called intrinsically valuable things like pleasurable experiences have consequences and are instrumental for those consequences. It is common in philosophy to stop the line of instrumentality, but I think this is done prematurely.

Activities we do, virtues we hold, and abstract things we value do in fact have consequences, it would seem. Yet there is a flaw in this reasoning of mine. All of the things I listed and a great many more may have some instrumental value to something or another in our lives, but what about our lives themselves? Are they instrumental to anything, and if so, what?

## 7.2 Following instrumental value

One could respond by stating that of course our lives have instrumental value. The consequences of our lives are how they impact others' lives, both here and now as well as in the future. Even people who aren't famous are your ancestors. Without them, you wouldn't be here right now. What about people who don't have kids? Those people still interacted with and therefore shaped others' lives around them which in turn impacted their children, and so on and so forth. This seems like a very optimistic picture I'm portraying, and of course, this harmony of person A impacting person B who had descendants such that the descendants' lives were in some way such as they were because of person A's impact on person B is gratuitous, but let us take for the sake of argument (for now) that every human life up until this point has had some form of impact on the world such that the world as we know it wouldn't be quite the same had even a single person not existed who did or vice versa.

All right, so now lives matter because of the impact on other lives down the line. But there will likely come a time when there are no more lives to be had. Even if humans somehow survive the death of the earth, it is unlikely that they will survive the death of the universe when all the energy is spent, and there are no more stars, no more chemical conversions, no more movement of any kind. Assuming that there will come a time when

humans cease to exist, does the life of the last human, and let us extend that to the life of the last sentient creature, have value?

Here my analysis takes a very sharp turn. No, I do not think that those lives have value then. This means that human life in entirety doesn't have value. This has some serious implications. If x has value because y, and y has value because of z, if z has no value, then y having value due to z loses its value if z has no value. And if y has no value, then x has no value because of y. Why doesn't z have value? Because in order for z to have value, it must have a successor just as y is to x and z is to y, but z doesn't have this. Z leads to nothing and therefore z has no value. Thus if the last humans lives have no value and value is based on instrumentality, then current lives cannot have value because of their impact on those future lives. And if a person's life doesn't have value, how could anything that person does or has have value if those values depend on the life itself having value? Put simply, they cannot; thus if value is instrumental in nature and all that we take to have value ultimately is non-instrumental, then value doesn't inherently or objectively exist.

Supposing that this analysis of value does in fact lead to this conclusion accurately, many people then find that value ought not or cannot be analyzed simply through instrumentalism. But to disregard the analysis because one doesn't like the conclusion doesn't demonstrate the analysis is incorrect, it's a mere dismissal based on discomfort. Of course, they might claim this is a *reductio ad absurdum*. I recommend however that one continues reading before claiming that this conclusion is too absurd to accept. For the time being, I am open to a looking into potential flaws in the validity of the analysis though.

One interesting flaw seems fatal to this idea. If we take value to be external and then discover that value doesn't exist at all, then it seems erroneous to talk about value in the first place. In other words, how could we initially even bring up talk about instrumental value if value doesn't exist whatsoever? (By then end of this chapter you will see that I don't think value doesn't exist "whatsoever" but just that it doesn't exist the way many would like to believe.) There are two problems with this criticism that the conclusion destroys the premises. The first is that anti-realism doesn't retract from language use. Let safely assume that unicorns do not exist objectively (see 3.2 for more clarification). That doesn't mean we can't talk about unicorns, even to demonstrate

evidence of their non-existence. After all, we need to talk about what would a unicorn be, say a horse with a horn growing out of its skull, and then observe that no such thing exists out in the real world. (I will not discuss here the argument that saying what a unicorn is entails its real existence. Needless to say, I disagree that fiction, if put in words, demonstrates reality.)

The second is more interesting. This analysis was to seek out what kind of value exists, if any. It was an open inquiry. I posited a few ways in which one might say value exists and found flaws in a couple intrinsic value notions. Then I rejected them and went with the best plausible (in my view) way to talk about value as external through instrumentalism. The fact that the conclusion results in value not existing at all doesn't necessarily mean that instrumentalism isn't the best way to describe value. On the contrary, instrumentalism is how human brains process value. This is why I talked about it. To give credence to this, I shall use two demonstrations.

I want you to think of anything or perhaps any activity which is meaningless, pointless, devoid of value. Do you have something in mind? Now ask yourself, what makes it meaningless? What is the essential difference between something meaningful and something meaningless? To find the answer, let's look at some examples I have heard others use. Maybe it's counting blades of grass. Maybe it's a tiny pebble on Mercury. Or perhaps it's something you did as a child. Whatever it is, consider that what constitutes meaninglessness is lack of consequence.

To ensure that these three examples are devoid of meaning, I shall tweak them. After counting grass, Susan gives herself a concussion, forgetting the number and even the desire which led to counting the grass in the first place. Even if she remembers she will never use the data she gathered and let it sit in her mind unused. Let's suppose the pebble on Mercury wouldn't make any difference if it didn't exist aside from it not existing. The childhood act here shall be a mistake made in second grade which you didn't learn from and continued to make. And even if you didn't make it that particular time, the last time you did make it wouldn't have been changed.

One might contest that none of these are truly inconsequential. After all, I am using them to make a philosophical point which I will then use to make more points to influence the actions and positions of those who accept or deny these points! How could I say that if that pebble didn't exist the only difference is its nonexistence? If it didn't

exist, I couldn't use it as an example. That is a very interesting counter, but one that fails. Susan counting blades of grass is, as far as I know, merely hypothetical. Instead of a real pebble, let's place in a pebble which actually doesn't exist but would be found on Mercury if it did. And the mistake is something you didn't really do in second grade but in third, and we're talking about the second grade act. Retorting that these are still meaningful because I'm still using them as examples won't do either, since there are many examples which could be said but never will be. Of course, aren't they useful for the purpose of referring to them as unused?

I will concede this, but it's in my favor. You see, if nothing is meaningless by virtue of it being usable in human thoughts and speech, then the one who has made the refutation of these examples does so on the basis of instrumentalism. Furthermore meaningfulness becomes contingent on humans existing to think and talk about them. Once human extinction occurs, meaninglessness ensues. Indeed, then human life ceases to have meaning, and everything in it cannot have meaning. In trying to deny that one could use an example of meaningless to counter instrumentalism as the basis for value leads to using instrumentalism as the basis for value!

Now for the second demonstration. Why do you do anything? To make this easier to answer, why did you, as a child do your homework? To get good grades so that you could continue on with your schooling, culminating in you receiving an education? But why receive an education? To know things and to help you get a good job so you can accumulate money and live financially well so that you can have life experiences, perhaps be able to raise and sustain a family of your own so as to have a rich and fulfilling life? But then why live? Everything previous was done in order to achieve something further. It seems to stop at life (unless one talks about impacting other lives, but one already knows where that leads). Of course, the line I wrote isn't exhaustive and each step has multiple reasons and consequences, but overall I think this line is suitable, despite its oversimplification.

Perhaps this example was cherry picked and only demonstrates that some actions are good for further purposes like homework, grades, and jobs. How about a more mundane action like eating an ice-cream cone? Why do you eat an ice-cream cone? Well, let's say to satisfy your hunger. But you could eat a sandwich, or a hotdog, or a candy bar, or ... You eat the ice-cream cone because that's what you're hungry for. So now your

reason for eating the ice-cream cone is because that is what you desire and because you are hungry and believe that the ice-cream cone will satisfy your hunger. Why do you want to satisfy your hunger? Just to get rid of it? I'm dubious that's the end of it. You want it because you also believe it'll produce a memory of you having it, a memory that will make it cease your craving of it for a while. I say this because if you didn't, you might eat one, and then another, and another, until you have no more due to continually craving one and having no memory of acting upon that craving. Your eating of the ice-cream cone is also important in shaping your future actions. And those actions shape other actions. Eating ice-cream all day prevents you from going to work, spending time with friends, exercising, and other activities that if you didn't do them, tomorrow may be significantly different. If not tomorrow, your relationships or health in general will be altered by your inactivity today by eating ice-cream cone after ice-cream cone. I don't want to invoke any butterfly effect, because these changes needn't be major or significant at all, merely holistic and tied to other parts of your life and behavior. It may be that even by eating all of your ice-cream cones today the only difference it directly produces is the tiredness of tomorrow from over eating sweets. Of course, that may likely have some little effect itself, but focusing only on the ice-cream cone, we see that its future consequences are necessary for being worthwhile enough to eat.

Is this argument so convincing? Here's a thought experiment to see. I have created the most delicious ice-cream cone in the world, made specifically to cater to your personal taste preferences. But there's a catch, while your body digests it, its chemical make-up will break down into certain compounds which will nullify any physical effects. In other words, you won't gain weight, you will be just as hungry as you would be not eating anything, you won't make any excretory substance, your taste buds won't adapt to the taste, your throat will lose the creamy texture left by the ice-cream, your sugar level will be put back to how it was, your enzymes will even be replenished, etc. In fact, there were even psychiatric drugs placed within the ice-cream such that you won't even remember being given the ice-cream or told about it for that matter, let alone of eating it. Your brain won't have any physiological changes either; so if I were to give you another one, it would be like having it for the first time on a personal, psychological, and physiological level. Your tongue, brain, digestive track, memory, neural connections, etc. would all react as if it were the first time. You could eat a million ice-cream cones and even on the millionth time, your body wouldn't be desensitized in the slightest, nor would you have gained weight, or memory. (This is impossible, because all those

molecules would go somewhere, and I stated no excretory substance would be produced, but it's a thought experiment, so please go with it for now.) The only differences are that you'd have a million memory gaps, you'd have spent a lot of your time, and I'd have used up a lot of my ice-cream resources. (So there are some physiological effects after all. This thought experiment is physically impossible, but the point I'm trying to demonstrate can still be had, so I will continue.)

Is this ice-cream cone worth eating? Does eating it have any value at all? If so, it cannot be for the experience you will have gained, because you will not have gained any experience. (See the next chapter for my reason why you might still eat the ice-cream cone.) It'll be like the experience between falling asleep and dreaming. Perhaps it's for the experience itself, for those few minutes while eating it and before it makes you forget. Well then congratulations! Rejoice, for I am here to inform you that you already had this amazing ice-cream cone, but you don't remember it. How happy does this make you? Even if it's true, how could your life possibly be any more meaningful by having had that experience for a few minutes? Take your answer seriously and think about how an inconsequential act like eating that ice-cream cone or not adds or subtracts value (this may be unfair since, I'm asking how an inconsequential action could have consequence on your life). Perhaps it is my personal incapacity, but I see no way that it could. To me, it doesn't matter if I ate one already; my life is no different aside from the fact that it did or didn't happen.

The point of the thought experiment is two-fold. It demonstrates that humans do actions because of future consequences, even down to eating an ice-cream cone. It also further takes away the credence of intrinsic value in inconsequential circumstances (if they were possible). The only way I could accept intrinsic value is through a kind of intrinsic instrumental value, which currently I just am not convinced by.

Very quickly, you might be skeptical about why I make the chain of consequences so long. In other words, you don't eat an ice-cream cone because of how it will affect you when you're 90 years-old even if you eat it for short term consequences. While we don't consciously work out how each little action will affect us (if we took the time to do it well, we wouldn't do much at all), it is taken for granted nonetheless. After all, what you eat affects your mood, your appetite, your eating habits, your future behavior with regard to eating. And all of those affect your daily life, where you go, what you talk about, shared

interests you have with others, how you feel and interact with others, your diet and overall health and personal image. These lead to changes in personality which affects who you'll later become. I'm not trying to invoke the butterfly effect here (I do think that instrumental value theory is wrong). Eating an ice-cream cone today or not probably won't drastically change your life. But if you absolutely knew that it would essentially have no impact on your life, you might as well have not eaten it at all. The fact that we can tacitly believe there are small consequences and those small consequences can result in more significant consequences give weight to minimal activities like choosing a dessert.

### 7.3 The existence of value

Adding to my value theory thus far, here is an important idea that I think most of you will agree with if you believe value is contingent on humans (or sentient creatures). I regret that I cannot give proper credit, and hope this is not plagiarism, but I can't remember who said it and was unable to find it again. Nevertheless, I shall quote another and not take credit for an idea I like. I once heard a quote that said something along the lines of, "It is often said that life has no meaning. But I find that it is only in life that meaning can be found."

I still maintain that value doesn't exist (by which I mean neither instrumental nor intrinsic value exist). Ironically, to some degree I still say that fact doesn't matter though. Unicorns don't exist, but I can enjoy a book or a movie that features them. We can still have conversations about unicorns like how beautiful they are, even if we've never seen one. (To say you can due to movies isn't necessary, because we could have the same conversation in the 1800's. We can talk of their beauty because of the beauty of horses, but also because of the beauty of fantasy and fiction.) If you see a magic act, sometimes you can even know how the tricks work and still be victim to the illusions. If value is an illusion of sorts, knowing that doesn't make value disappear from my life.

Up until now, I have avoided talking about one of the most important aspects to value, because I wanted to get rid of the notion of intrinsic value first. In accounts of intrinsic value this notion is false, but I find it to be fundamental to all values. Value is something humans (or sentient creatures) *attribute* to things, actions, activities, concepts, etc. In a hypothetical situation given in the beginning of this chapter, I brought up a universe in which gold exists but humans never discover it or give it value. I find it



greatly mistaken to think that gold would still be valuable, despite the fact that it could be useful or still would be rare.

In everyday life, one comes across things which one values and doesn't value. Others also value, disvalue, and don't value things. Quite often, there are values which are shared among many. But it is also common that values differ. If value is intrinsic in x's but not y's, people who say, "I believe x is valuable, and so is y" or, "I don't value x or y" are wrong. If you think playing videogames is meaningful but your friend thinks it's meaningless and playing videogames either has intrinsic value or does not, then one of you is factually wrong. I think it is more correct to say that playing videogames has value to those who value it, doesn't to those who don't value it, and is disvalued by those who disvalue it. It's analogous to saying that enjoyment in an activity depends on whether or not you enjoy doing that activity. Enjoyment is not intrinsic in any activity, because someone could come along, do it, and not have enjoyment. Similarly, value is attributed to, not embedded in, things.

I've found that it can be difficult to accept that value can be so relative and contingent on humans, at least when it comes to things that people care about emotionally. But there are values you use every day that you don't take as objective, that being linguistic values. This book is originally typed in English, and the conventions of English are most generally maintained aside from some neologisms. Each word or phrase conveys meaning, which is a kind of value in itself. After all, it seems valuable for my goals of this sentence to use the phrase 'after all' and not 'in spite of that.' But English could have been much different. All the Germanic words in modern English could be French or Latin, and vice versa. The rules of English could have evolved to have kept the case system of German, but a noun and adjective gender system of French. That English which we'll call Onglay would be very different indeed from English, probably enough that if tomorrow you came across somebody who only spoke Onglay, you two wouldn't comprehend each other. Perhaps syntax is not entirely relative if the universal grammar hypothesis is correct, but certainly what phonetic sounds equate to which meanings, and what those phonetic sounds look like when written, are relative.

More importantly, if every person who spoke English had their brain altered to speak Chinese and all English words in other languages were changed somehow, and every single paper, recording, bit of data, etc. of English were erased from existence save

for a single book, let's say this one, this book would be totally meaningless! In fact, English and all of its words and linguistic conventions would be meaningless, too! It would be preposterous to say that English words have so-called objective, intrinsic values when there's no mind to interpret them! English is not an objective language. It exists because there are people like me who use it and know it, and ascribe value to words like 'chair' and 'run' and 'red' and so on and so forth. People are more than happy to admit that after the human extinction, languages, written or spoken (as we might imagine a television is still on showing a film after all the humans are gone), are entirely devoid of meaning and value. Some people might look at this and say it's an equivocation fallacy of meaning of English words and value of English words' but there is a misunderstanding. As I see it, words have two sorts of value, linguistic and instrumental. I'm not just saying that English without English knowing minds is linguistically valueless but also instrumentally valueless. And as I have shown instrumental value to be the kind of value when saying "x has meaning," "x is worthwhile," "x isn't pointless," etc., then this demonstration should be taken to be relevant. My point is that in both the cases of English and in life itself, if there are no sentient creatures to perceive them, there remains no value in them.

Going back to the uncited quote, I see no contradiction in stating that human life has no objective value (value' from 3.2) that extends beyond the humans themselves, but still contains some form of value (namely attributed values). As things are now, humanity continues. Our actions and our lives affect each other, and we're giving each other meaning and attributing value and disvalue left and right. Playing video games does have subjective value because there are people out there right now who value it. At the same time it doesn't have subjective value because of those who disvalue it. There is no contradiction here, because these are matters of personal and subjective opinions, not of objective facts. Again this sounds very optimistic for a philosophical pessimist like me to endorse. But once again, there's a disheartening twist.

The value of anything depends on there being something to attribute that value. If objectivity describes that which remains when there are no more perceptions (no more minds to perceive), then objective value ceases to exist. That being said, any subjective value that exists now is doomed to one day be valueless (not even valueless but out of the question of value or valuelessness). And since value is attributed because of instrumentalism, then value doesn't exist as we think and talk about it existing in

everyday life. What's more is that in light of value being relative to those who value or don't value something, there's no requirement or necessity for one to value a particular thing, no matter how many other people do. The closest to objectivity that values can get is to be intersubjective. But valuing something is not imposed. Value is what is self-imposed through valuing by oneself. So life itself can be valued or not. In the end, it doesn't have objective value and it one day won't have subjective value either, but neither does anything else and we are just as free to value those things or not in that there are no constraints beyond our natural inclinations to value one thing and disvalue another (see 4.5). I don't see why life itself should be different. I'm not saying societies shouldn't or don't uphold people to certain values such as life, possession, business ethics, respect for property, etc. but just that there are no metaphysical requirements of humans. We are free to not value others' lives but there are legal consequences to killing. However, this intersubjectivity should not be mistaken for real objectivity. Respect, property, lives, etc. are useful for our needs, but they are not universally or essentially useful and valuable.

Imagine a world where 99.999% of the human population love the taste of chocolate ice-cream and hate vanilla ice-cream. But there's still the .001% of people who hate chocolate ice-cream and love vanilla ice-cream. What do you imagine the majority say about the opinions of the vanilla lovers? I think they'd say the vanilla lovers are factually wrong. There's something wrong with their brains and taste buds because chocolate ice-cream is obviously intrinsically good and tasty whereas vanilla ice-cream is intrinsically bad and disgusting. Perhaps they accuse the vanilla lovers of lying because it's impossible to not like chocolate. And when they say that chocolate ice-cream is delicious, it's not an opinion, but a fact. It's a quality of chocolate ice-cream; it has the intrinsic value of goodness and deliciousness. Now imagine a world where the mass majority of people think life is intrinsically good and meaningful, but some people think life isn't worth living. What do you think the majority of the people say about the minority? I have very good reason to believe that they say things like, "There's something wrong with your brain chemistry," "That's not healthy," "You're wrong," and "It's not possible to really dislike life; nobody really and authentically wants to die!" And when they say that life is meaningful, it's not an opinion, but a fact. It's a quality of life; it has the intrinsic value of goodness and meaningfulness. I hope that if you reject the ice-cream opinion as being a fact, then you also reject life opinion as being a fact as well. If not, I hope you have a good reason to distinguish the two cases to show they aren't adequately analogous to demonstrate my point.

## 7.4 Absurdism

In the face of my arguments one might ask what it would take for life to be meaningful. It seems that because sentience will end and its end brings about meaninglessness, then if we were to live forever or at least our impacts were somehow remembered and valued forever by something that can perceive, remember, and attribute value, meaning would be restored as many would have it. So let's look at more minimal example in which there is no afterlife, but living does have an infinite impact. This is because there is an immortal monster that eats people when they live to be at least 50 years old. This monster after eating all the humans for over one million years becomes full and satisfied for the rest of time, remembering and being thankful for the lives of those who satisfied its hunger. In this scenario, the value of human lives is eternal. If one lives to serve the monster's desires, one's reasons are still not objective but their eternal nature compensates for that. Interestingly though, there's no need to have these be the reasons for living. We could say this monster actually created humans and did so for the purpose of eating them, but there is still room for one to reject this fate and choose to live a life that is only temporarily meaningful, ultimately a meaningless life. So even if there is a way for value to persist, one could still look at such a life and find it not a life worth living!

What I have sketched above is called existential nihilism. It is the idea that value doesn't objectively exist. Value is not an inherent part of the universe and only exists because there are minds which attribute value. In other words, we might say that value is a sort of artifact, a fabrication of humans and other sentient creatures (I think that there are some animals which value things such as their offspring). Moreover, even if value persisted forever, that wouldn't make it any less of an artifact. Universities only exist because of humans. True, even without minds we can say that the buildings, books, campus layout, desks, and other things which make up universities will remain, but without a mind to abstract the concept of university from the collection of those things, universities will cease to exist, only the physical entities. So, too, is the fate of value. (This means that even books (and the like) wouldn't be 'books' because 'book' is also a word as outlined in more detail in 3.2.)

Even if I'm correct about life being meaningless because it leads to nothing further and because value doesn't exist but in the minds that attribute value, there still

leaves room for discussion on asking, “What is one to do about existing without meaning?” Here I shall borrow from others’ ideas.

The most influential thinker for me regarding value and existence is Albert Camus. He is known for having established absurdism. In my own words taken from my reading of the book long essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” by Camus, absurdism is the idea that humans seek meaning and purpose in their lives ad nauseam, but their lives along with the universe itself are *meaningless*-nevertheless, humans still cling to their desire for meaning, seeking it out, never able to rationally satisfy it. It is like having an almost instinctive drive to fly, and never being able to. The desire can lead one to make a plane or a glider, but those won’t do. One can only fly with the help of tools, but the drive to fly dictates that in order to satisfy the desire, one must fly using only one’s body. Similarly, one can fill one’s life with things one finds meaningful, but ultimately, the kind of meaning one seeks isn’t available. One can even feel satisfied with life, but this is likely caused by submission to the absurd. Someone who supposedly dies fulfilled at the age of 90 would probably take the opportunity to become young again and continue living on for many more years (maybe forever, but maybe just a century or two) if such an opportunity were available, but knowing that their life is soon to end with or without consent, that person accepts defeat and dies “*fulfilled*.”

In the essay Camus lays out three ways to act after becoming aware of the absurdity of life. The options, according to him, are: to make a leap of faith, acceptance and revolt, or suicide (not in that order). I am now going to look at each of these with both his and my own ideas.

Camus claims that leaps of faith can take many forms. For some, the leap of faith is a belief in God. He speaks of Kierkegaard who thought one needed to believe in God in spite of all rationality and reason not to believe so that one can live. But God can also be the absurd itself, such as for Chestov. But even atheists can make a leap of faith such as atheist existentialists. Take Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* for example. To my understanding, he claims that humans, in the absence of a god that gives their lives meanings, can take on that role of a god and give themselves meaning and the meaning they give themselves somehow transcends their own lives and is objective and transcendent (1995, Nietzsche).

In my life, nearly all of the people I’ve spoken with about their views on the meaning of life who believe there is no specific purpose or meaning for all human lives

are existentialists. They believe that one gives oneself meaning, and this meaning is therefore worthwhile enough to live for. So if I live to raise a family and have grandkids, that meaning and purpose is self-given and also worthwhile for myself. But there is a crucial problem. They start with the idea that life has no objective meaning. So raising a family doesn't necessarily give life meaning. After all some people never raise families, and their lives are no less meaningful than those who do. Yet, if one decides to make raising a family one's purpose in life, then one can live for that purpose and find meaning in such a life. So far, so good, but then the existentialist will say that therefore life is meaningful. The existentialist doesn't mean that life is meaningful *to them* but is meaningful in and of itself, because it contains things one values like raising a family. But if that's the case, then what about those who don't think life is worthwhile? The existentialist points out things such a person does value in life and claims therefore the person has a reason to live. A reason perhaps, but this isn't satisfactory. Just because life has some things one likes and values doesn't mean one needs to live for those things. Moreover even if one does live for those things, it doesn't make life valuable in any objective sense. If meaning is self-given, then life is only as meaningful as the one who thinks it's meaningful makes it meaningful, and when one dies and can no longer attribute meaning to life, life is not meaningful and it never really was.

Camus and I find this kind of hope-filled belief in one's own power to give life meaning which makes life meaningful in a non-contingent way philosophical suicide as well as an attempt to escape the absurd. One gives up on reason and awareness of the absurd so that one can live in a make-believe world of meaning. Then after imagining up meaning for oneself, one looks at one's own creation and denies that it's a mere creation and instead is transcendent of the self. One flees from the absurd because living a life one believes to be meaningful is more emotionally comfortable than trudging through a life believing, even correctly, that life is essentially meaningless.

Camus believes the most plausible way to deal with the absurd is to accept it and revolt against it. He thinks that once a person becomes aware of the absurd, one should not try to act like it isn't there like an existentialist. This is accepting the absurd for what it is. But he also denies that suicide is viable, because it too is a way to flee from the absurd and in fact, increases it as one allows the absurdity of life to consume oneself within it. Instead, he suggests that one continue to live so that one may continue to be aware of the absurd and that one revolt against it. He goes so far as to assert, "That revolt

gives life meaning” (35). He famously uses Sisyphus as an example for how to revolt against the absurd.

Sisyphus is a figure in Ancient Greek mythology who was condemned by Zeus to roll a rock up a mountain every day for all eternity which falls back to the bottom once he reaches the top. In spite of his pointless and gruesome life, he doesn't want to die. In fact, he owns his punishment and happily rolls the rock up the mountain again and again just to spite his punisher (even if his punisher doesn't notice). And because of this, he is able to take his fate into his own hands. Camus states that we humans can do the same in our lives by incessantly striving to live and find meaning in life where there is none, shaking our fists at the universe that doesn't care about us and claiming our lives for ourselves.

I honestly think that in this essay, Camus is an existentialist. If you read his later works, he is less and less so, but here is why I think he's an existentialist with regards to Sisyphus. He starts with the understanding that life is meaningless. Yet somehow by pointing at one's life circumstances and declaring them meaningful, one can make them meaningful even if meaning doesn't exist. This is the same kind of contradiction found in existentialism. Moreover he rejects suicide because he believes it is important to remain conscientious of the absurd. In doing so, he is placing value on the act of remaining conscientious of the absurd and disvaluing escape. One could even suggest that he may be deifying it in believing that this option is better than the other two. His quote about revolt giving life meaning is nonsensical if he claims that life can have no meaning and to try and give it meaning like an existentialist would is futile.

And here is where Camus' greatest plunder lies. If life is meaningless, and meaning doesn't exist, then it doesn't matter how one lives. I'm not interested much in whether Camus' suggestion fits into a leap of faith category or not, because if the original premise is correct, then no option can satisfy the absurd. Whether one revolts against it, accepts it, denies it, blinds oneself to it, or escapes it, I don't think anything can satisfy the desire to have objectively meaningful lives because I don't think meaning can be anything but subjective.

## 7.5 Emotions and value

I came to the conclusion that objective meaning doesn't exist by looking at how we make decisions based on our judgements of what is worthwhile and discovering that

our methods ultimately fall apart. To eat an ice-cream cone to taste it. To taste it for the experience and memory. The memory for shaping future decisions and behaviors. Those decisions and behaviors to shape one's personality. One's personality to shape one's life. One's life to impact others. Others' lives for others'. Humanity for \_\_\_\_\_. But if I am to be honest, then I must not only look at why humans do things for future consequences but also for past causes, the most prominent one being desire.

If I ask you why you eat, it is true that you eat to satisfy your hunger and to get the memory (so you don't eat again if you were to forget, and so on into future consequences). But there is another reason. You're hungry! You want to eat! You like to eat! Why did you walk over to a friend's house? To talk to them for certain, but also because you wanted to! The desire was there before the action and indeed caused the action.

David Hume stated, "Reason is and ought only to be a slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (B2.3.3). I disagree with his use of 'ought only to be' here but agree that such is indeed the case. We do things because we want to do those things. People who get a job want to have a job. Of course, one can get a job one doesn't like, but one gets it anyway for some greater desire such as money, to gain social status, to get experience, to please someone, or something else. And of course certain events happen in our lives like a car crash, but you didn't get into a car crash with the intention of doing it. If you did, it would be for some desire. So not everything happens because of desires, but our choices are made by coordinating our actions with our desires. You might try to disprove me by going and doing something you don't *want* to do, but if you did, you'd be doing it for the desire to prove me wrong.

What does this have to do with life being meaningless? Well, how should one act in life? However one wants! In the end, it doesn't matter. This book doesn't matter, yet here I am typing it, because I want to type it. I want to demonstrate that I am of sound mind and can think just as reasonably as any average Joe or perhaps even more so. That doesn't mean I think writing this book is actually or objectively worthwhile. On the contrary, I think it's a waste of my time (but not objectively so!), but I want to write it before I die. And I want others to read it to understand me, even though I believe it's ultimately futile whether everybody does or nobody does. And I will note that it doesn't matter that nothing matters. If you want to love life, do it! Many people don't care if their



life will one day be meaningless if it has meaning to them now. That's fair. I'm not trying to persuade people to care about what they don't care about or to persuade them to not care about what they do care about. I want to show what I think is the most probable state of affairs concerning life and value. But how one reacts to it is up to the individual. I also hope that this chapter permits more acceptances of differences in value assessment pertaining to life.

Going back to Camus and absurdism, I think a more genuine absurdist (and I do think Camus becomes more genuine in his later years) recognizes that it doesn't matter what one does with one's life because it simply doesn't matter. Nothing matters. The universe won't care about a revolution or existentialist ideals or suicides. When humans are all gone, whether humanity survived for one million years or five billion years, it will have ceased to matter completely. But each and every single human being is going to act in accordance with their desires regardless of the absurdity of their own existence because it also doesn't matter that nothing matters. I cannot emphasize that enough. We are free to act (well as free as physically and psychologically capable at any rate, see 3.5 on free will and determinism) and don't need to value the same things. We are even free to act irrationally as we do because any future consequence reason we give is doomed to futility! All actions are irrational. Of course, some are more irrational than others, and so I'm not advocating for rational anarchy. Indeed, in the next few chapters I will strive very hard to demonstrate that in some cases suicide can be generally rational (but not objectively). I desire to be rational and reasonable myself to the extent that I am able. I value reason and rationality, but in doing so I have found all of my (and others') reasons ultimately baseless. That doesn't mean I discard all reasons though, because some are still more fruitful (given certain time parameters and instrumentality parameters) than others. There's no way to not act either. Even sitting still trying not to think until you cease to live and think is an action you take in response to the absurd. Inaction is an action in this case. You have to act somehow, and you can and will act according to your desires.

It's amazing how useful pragmatism can be, because it applies to value theory as well. We do whatever it is that we want. If we live, it's because we want to live. But sometimes again, things happen out of our control such as death for most people. Few people die when and because they want to die. But can this apply to living? Do some people live against their will? I imagine so, but this would be rare. More likely there is

conflict in desires. One may want to die but not want to hurt the lives affected by one's death. One may want to die, but also wants to avoid being capricious or unreasonable. One may want to die but also wants to be able to raise a family. Life is full of these kinds of conflicts of desires. Do you leave the job you want to quit or stay to save money you want to save up? Do you marry someone you love now or do you follow your desire to wait until at least two years, or until you've lived together, or...? Do you choose vanilla, chocolate, mint, or some other flavor of ice-cream, all of which you enjoy virtually equally?

In short, value may not exist outside of subjectivity, but that doesn't mean humans won't act in accordance with what they value and disvalue. I think of myself as an absurdist. I have come to understand that value doesn't exist objectively. Still, I value and disvalue things just like everybody else. However, I believe that this does not satisfy the absurd. The absurd cannot be satisfied, as it would seem. One can hope and believe one's life has value. One can value one's life, as many do. One can even rebel against the universe that doesn't care, but nothing will actually create meaning that will go beyond one's attribution of meaning. And even if there will always be a mind to ascribe meaning to one's life, if one doesn't value that attribution given by that mind, then not even that is satisfactory. Even if life is not objectively meaningful, people are free to give it meaning themselves and to believe their lives are fulfilling as they see fit. However, if I am correct, then I am equally free to not attribute meaning or value to my life as is anybody who naturally does not feel compelled to believe that life is meaningful. Value is subjective after all.

## Chapter 8

### Against Suicide

#### 8.1 Definition of suicide

Before getting into the crux of suicide, let us begin with a definition. As I had shown in 3.2 definitions are tricky to say the least, and defining suicide is no different. In doing so, one must be wary as to not include actions we don't consider to be suicidal such as sitting on an electrocution chair after being sentenced, dying from performing dangerous stunts like climbing Mt. Everest, shooting oneself with a gun thinking incorrectly that it's unloaded but pulling to the trigger as a prank to scare someone, jumping on a grenade to save one's comrades, etc. According to some people, some of these might be cases of suicide, but most wouldn't say so. Also consider cases in which one might attempt to commit suicide by non-lethal means such as by holding one's breath until passing out. Should such an act be deemed as attempted suicide? Before saying no, consider someone taking a bunch of over the counter medicine which would be very unlikely to be lethal, but the swallower doesn't know it. There are many drugs that overdosing isn't lethal just as holding one's breath is highly unlikely to be lethal by itself (it might be, if one takes off an oxygen tank and then does it among other rare situations). The ignorance of lethality then doesn't seem important if you think the overdosing example is a suicide attempt.

In order to come up with a general definition (as I doubt I could come up with a purely uncontroversial one), I shall look at what is true of all suicides. All suicides are uncoerced; placing oneself on an electric chair by legal sentence or jumping off a cliff to avoid getting tortured and killed more gruesomely are coercive situations and thus are not suicides. All suicides are done with the intention of dying; if one dies by accident or by taking a risk with the intention or belief of survival, one does not commit suicide. All suicides are self-administered, by which I mean that the situation in which the suicide

occurs is set up by the person committing suicide. This means that dying by a grenade in order to save others isn't suicidal, not because of altruism, but because one didn't set up the situation of dying or letting others die. This can be problematic, because one doesn't set the world up to be undesirable to live in, but assuming self-administration is limited to the lethal situation, we can look past this. Unfortunately, this also leaves dubious cases of mass suicide in which a cult leader initiates and puts the situation together, since the followers didn't set up the suicide room. I admit this problem openly, but will not try to fix it, for such cases are not the kind of suicide I wish to discuss anyway.

Thus we arrive at a somewhat concise (but still problematic) definition of suicide being any uncoerced, self-administered act done with the intention of killing-oneself. Since intentions are construed from beliefs and beliefs can be stronger or weaker gradually (chapter 2), so, too, can suicidal acts be gradual. The next question to tackle regarding definitions is whether or not suicide is self-murder. To answer this, one must find a distinction between 'kill' and 'murder.' I have little doubt that you can come up with a distinction based on maliciousness, intention, anger, hatred, etc. However, your distinction is likely not universal or even general. There are some who claim that the following killings are murders: self-defense killing, killing in war, hunting, swatting bugs, manslaughter, divine killing (from a god), among other contentious (some more than others) acts of killing. As far as I can tell, people say that acts of killing are murders when they disagree that killing is justified or morally acceptable. Therefore whether suicide is self-murder is based on one's views on whether or not suicide can be justified or morally acceptable. In other words, it differs from person to person. Of course, if you currently think of suicide as always wrong and therefore murder, I do hope that in reading this chapter you at least are open to considering the arguments and refuting or doubting them (if you find them unconvincing) for better reasons than dismissal out of personal distaste.

Why do people commit suicide? Based on the definition given above, the answer is to die. But just as it isn't (always) sufficient to answer the question of why get good grades with simply responding, "to get good grades, of course," dying is rarely, if ever, the only goal in mind. Even if one believes death to be the end of one's total existence and that one will not experience an afterlife of any sort, one can still die for various goals in mind. One could commit suicide to end pain or avoid furthering one's pain as is the case with terminally-ill suicides. One might wish to avoid debt. One could commit

suicide for a cause as a martyr. One might do it for heroisms by entering the military with the intention of being KIA. It might be to carry out orders (suicide bombings) or cultural traditions and values (seppuku). Thus we see that suicide might be for numerous consequential reasons, but I am going to focus on suicides done in responses to the following: a desire to not live simpliciter, a desire to escape the pains of (one's own) life, and a desire to die for the sake of others in a suicidal manner (i.e. no grenade-like situations).

There are many people who think that life is intrinsically good, a divine gift from god, a moral requirement, or otherwise such that to end it purposefully is always unjustifiable. Yet, newer generations in American society (and the Anglophonic sphere) give a lot of more nuanced variation in when suicide might be acceptable. Hence, some are accepting of some or all terminally-ill cases, some believe it's acceptable to die due to mental illnesses and others don't, some ... I will try to start from the least suicide-accepting perspectives and work my way to the most accepting-of-suicide perspectives. Each step, I'll be tackling both pro and con perspectives and will try to be critical in analyzing all of them as best and efficiently as I can. The arguments which follow will not be exhaustive. I understand that I will not discuss all the perspectives, all the criticisms, all the replies out there, but I hope to make at least a strong couple of chapters dealing with the most common and prominent ones throughout history and those held by people today of which I am aware.

## 8.2 Religious arguments

Let us look at what leads some people to believe life should never under any circumstance be terminated by suicide. To start, I'll look at the religious views against suicide. While in Christianity and Judaism, whether suicide is inherently sinful or circumstantially sinful is up to interpretation by different denominations or eras, in Islam it is explicitly written as a sin in the Qur'an. "And do not kill yourselves. Surely, God is most merciful to you." (Qur'an 4:29) "And do not throw yourselves in destruction." (Qur'an 2:195) (Stacey, 2013). This does raise questions regarding Islamic suicide bombers, but I understand that in any religion, not everybody follows all the rules or believes there can be exceptions for the sake of higher-order rules. Also in Christianity and Judaism, one might interpret the law against killing or murder to include reference to suicide. In Hinduism, suicide is generally condemned except for in special religious

death rituals or other cases and under regulations on the basis of the negative consequences regarding karma (Subramuniaswami, 1992). Even Plato stated on the ethics of suicide, “Hence crimes against the state are crimes against the gods, and vice versa. When a man kills himself without good reason... he is committing a crime” (Rist, 1969). I understand Plato had exceptions to the immorality of suicide pertaining to reason and law. I will not discuss these. For now, his belief that suicide goes against the wishes of the gods is relevant.

These are a handful of examples of divine command against suicide itself. It is not necessarily the case that it is wrong because it has negative consequences like hell or future torment, even if according to these religions, negative consequences do follow. Instead, suicide is wrong by virtue of it being said by god(s) or against the desires or commandments of god(s). This fits into the general moral theory of divine command theory, which I didn't go over in chapter 4. To quickly present my position, I think Euthyphro's dilemma puts divine command theory on shaky grounds as is in addition to the availability of much more reasonable theories of morality humans have come up with. Moreover, if a god were to ever command suicide, then suicide for that person becomes morally obligated. But I doubt many would be okay with this, and saying that a god would never do command suicide doesn't take away the fact that if one did, it would become absolutely moral. And saying morality is a matter of god's nature merely replaces god's words with god's nature in the Euthyphro dilemma.

Besides divine command theory, there is the idea that life is a precious gift from god and to refuse such a gift would be an insult or worse to god. (What follows is also generally applicable to the notion that the body is like a temple unto god and must not be destroyed, since to say that god made the body a temple, the body is a heavenly gift.) It may be indecent to refuse a gift, but to go as far as to say that it is unjustifiable or morally wrong is excessive, I think. And even if it were, is a gift really a gift if you must take it or face serious punishment (Kluge, 124)? I wouldn't sue (I couldn't sue!) somebody for taking the gift I give them and smashing it before my eyes. I might be justified in getting upset or even unfriending that person, but if in my anger I physically harmed the ingrate, I would be legally in the wrong. But others who know about the incident might say that even though I was legally punished, I was justified in my actions, or at least they would within parameters. I doubt many would agree with me if I used torture or cut off a limb in response to ingratitude. Still, one might contend that of

course such drastic anger is unjustified for a mere material gift, but life is so much more precious that to deny the gift of life is deserving of more draconian punishments, like hell for example.

I already discussed in chapter 6 my beliefs about heaven and hell, but even if I were to concede that there are some acts deserving of eternal punishment, I don't think it's reasonable and caring for a god to punish a person who wants to stop existing in pain and trying to escape from it by making the person continue on existing in pain with no escape for all eternity. A problem you might see with my doubts is to relate it to an escaped prisoner. Prisoners get put back in prison after trying to escape, why should trying to escape existence be different? But with prisoners, they already did something to get put in prison and unless you hold onto the idea that humans are born sinful, then what did humans do to get put into existence in the first place? This analogy also fails because few religious people would consider existence a prison (except for maybe Buddhists). A religious person might say that existence and pain are not punishments in the beginning, but in doing sinful acts, pain arises even to the point of making life undesirable. This idea also is problematic, because I wonder what people do to deserve being bed-ridden and in endless pain. This opens up a lot of religious apologetics concerning testing, helping others, being victim to a fallen world, etc. which I don't want to dispute here.

Another way to deal with the gift of life notion is to consider when it is acceptable to deny a gift. If I give my friend a phone that shocks him when he presses any button, and over time the shocks get stronger and more painful, who would say that he should use it without question? In a similar fashion, if the gift of life is full of anguish and pain, what is it about life itself that makes it too precious to refuse? Moreover, as Shelly Kagan writes in his book *Death*, if god is giving out lives that are bad and then requiring that people live them or face eternal punishment, we might see god as a kind of bully. Just because something's a gift doesn't mean that one has to accept it or that the gift is good. Another point to make is to ask if there any other gifts like that. Yes or no, the notion of whatever makes a gift too good that even if it's bad, it's still not to be refused under any circumstance doesn't appear to be expressed or defended for that matter. The best defense in my opinion relies on stating that they're gifts from god as opposed to a mere mortal. But in addition to its being similar to divine command theory and having similar problems (imagine god giving a man the shock phone or a bottle of poison), it also

implies that if scientists ever create living robots or biological creatures, those lives are not as precious as our god-given lives. Another would be to say life is a gift which cannot be given up is because life, no matter how bad, is still good and intrinsically so. I discuss this idea in more detail later.

Instead of calling one's life a gift from god by itself which leaves open the door to refuse the gift, one might instead say that our lives are god's property. I believe St. Thomas Aquinas' stating, "Suicide violates our duty to God because God has given us life as a gift and in taking our lives we violate His right to determine the duration of our earthly existence" (1271, part II, Q64, Art 5) as well as the idea that we have the duty to live out god's will for us to live fit more along the lines of this property idea than the gift idea and the remarks I make are more appropriate to these ideas. To commit suicide then is to commit a moral and heavenly crime of vandalism and property damage of god. This claim is much stronger and more demanding than the gift claim. But it is not without its own problems. Let us look critically at what these kinds of claims imply.

Suicide is, under this kind of view, a way to tacitly declare that one knows what's best for oneself better than god and to reject his will. To do so is immoral by virtue of the suicidal person's arrogance and interference with god's plans for the suicidal person. If life is in the hands of god, and we have a duty to live them in whatever way god sees fit, in sickness or in health as it were, then we may concede that to interfere with god's plans is indeed immoral. But then, we must be consistent in our not interfering. So to give medicine or perform a medical procedure on someone dying is to interfere with god's plans to have the person's life end. Indeed, any kind of life preservation such as jumping out of harm's way seems like one is equally declaring that one knows what's best for oneself better than god. It would equally be sinful to willfully die heroically saving others (grenade shielding) because that would be to destroy god's property in a way god did not intend. I wish I could say I came up with such a clever objection myself, but alas, it was David Hume's objection in his essay "Of Suicide" in stating,

"Were the disposal of human life so much reserved as the peculiar province of the almighty that it were an encroachment on his right for men to dispose of their own lives; it would be equally criminal to act for the preservation of life as for its destruction. If I turn aside a stone, which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature, and I



invade the peculiar province of the almighty, by lengthening out my life, beyond the period, which, by the general laws of matter and motion, he had assigned to it.” –Hume

If the response to this idea is that taking care of another’s property presupposes preservation but not destruction, consider the following: I leave you the keys to my house to take care of it for a month while I go out on vacation; I do so hoping that you will not destroy it. That doesn’t mean I don’t want you to call the fire department if the house on fire next door is about to enflame my house. This seems reasonable enough. But what if the house I left in your care was poisonous to you and had other chemicals which would deteriorate your brain and give you all sorts of mental impairments? I may not be happy with you destroying it, and might even sue you for it, but did you really do anything wrong (especially if you burnt it to nullify the chemicals and prevent them from spreading to the neighbors’ homes)? Even if you merely left it and in doing so it collapsed because it needs to be taken care of diligently, I could still hold you accountable but you may not have done anything wrong. If life becomes (seemingly) unbearable, it might go against one’s duties and god’s property and will to commit suicide, but under certain circumstances, it appears reasonable or at least morally acceptable to do so. Beyond that, there is room for skepticism in many religions about what god wants in specific cases. Scripture isn’t always thorough and more often than not is open to subjective interpretation. Prayers to questions about what one should do are even more open to interpretations, and one person who prays about suicide might think the prayer has been answered in the affirmative, another in the negative, and if god exists and answers prayers, both could be correct provided that god allows for suicide based on the situation. The asymmetry of preservation and destruction might be based instead on the consequences. In the analogy, I don’t care if you or the neighbors are okay; I only care about my house being up when I get back. God may not care about what our lives are like; he only expects we live them because we are his property and he can do with us as he wishes. This kind of thinking makes god seem less of a moral being and more of a bully as described above in the life is a gift discussion. If living to follow god’s will and to not hurt his property is worse or less moral than suicide, then suicide would be the better of the two options.

But then again, the claimant would say that god in all his wisdom and benevolence wouldn’t actually give somebody a truly unbearable life. God knows what’s best for each and every person, and to commit suicide prevents us from gaining the good

which he otherwise would have in store for us. But just as we may take medicine to preserve our lives his property is acceptable because we were also given by god the capacity to reason consequences to take actions which we believe are in our interest. So the defense is that we may take medicine or otherwise preserve our lives because god intended us to use our sense of reason in this way. However in the same essay, Hume challenges this idea as well. He asks us to not be dogmatic in our love of the good of life and to use our reason to end our lives if they are such that to continue them would be to make them worse and unworthy of being called a good life. He says that the capacity to assess one's situation was indeed equally a gift from god so as to prevent foolishly living a miserable life which could be prevented. (Hume, "Of Suicide").

Hume also brings up the question of whether or not we ought to be permitted to affect nature. Specifically as philosophical proofs of god's existence as a means to avoid an infinite regress, it was Aquinas' view was that, and I do imagine quite a few religious people today would agree to a fair extent, god was the original unmoved mover, uncaused causer, and arbiter of the laws of nature which initiated all that there is today. But if that is so, says Hume, then he made the laws such that the earth and all its clockwork functions like rivers, rocks, plants, animals, etc. would behave as they do. If you and I do anything to disrupt or change how things would be based off of god's laws of nature which he set in motion, then you would be guilty of tampering with his plans by merely picking up a stone which was on the ground and not meant to be picked up. The objection to this idea of Hume's is to bring in the idea of free will. If humans didn't act, the stone would remain on the ground, but because god endowed us with free will, we are permitted to "tamper" with the earth and utilize the natural laws for our benefits to make things like dams by blocking the rivers. But then why should we also not be able to use that free will to impede on the natural order of dying when the body fails due to illness, external (but not self-given) damage, or old age? If death is to our advantage, as the suicidal person believes it is in her situation, then free will would permit it.

But free will brings up an even greater problem. When the religious person asks why there is sin in the first place, a common answer is to point out that it is for the sake of free will. In chapter five, I criticize this defense, but honestly I do believe it to be a good one for what it's worth. With that said, it means that god has permitted the option of sin, including suicide. Society cannot condemn sin (although many have tried) because some sins are strictly thought crimes such as not believing in god. God has

allowed people the option to sin, and therefore god's followers ought to follow in his methods and also give people the choice. That means that if someone chooses to sin, one should leave it in god's hands. I know this is problematic, because in many cases scripture condones interference which I find odd because god doesn't seem to intervene all that often. However, I do understand that some scriptures do explicitly command to take care of others which may lead to stopping them from sinning (suicide perhaps if it is a sin). On the other hand, if suicide were so much greater a sin than anything else, I imagine god would not have made humans such that suicide were even a possibility. But because he has permitted suicide to exist and the idea to come into people's heads, god allows for the choice to be made freely.

### 8.3 Intrinsic value arguments

Looking past all of the theological arguments of which there are still many more, someone who is of a religion which condemns suicide by commandment and chooses not to do so on those grounds is fine as far as I'm concerned. What about those who aren't of these religious views and secular societies for that matter? Societies which are non-religious and which do not base laws and policies on religious views are in no way moved by this kind of reasoning. If suicide is wrong based on religious standards or even religious consequences, one is not deterred from suicide either legally or morally if one is not religious. So in response to the appropriateness of suicide, religious prohibition is neither convincing nor imposing. I only wrote about them at all, because many of the people whom I hope will read this chapter are religious and I wanted to show that I have taken a look at some of the religious arguments, but have not found them convincing, even if I did believe in a god who cared about human affairs.

I shall now move on to anti-suicidal views which are not religious in nature. Life being sacred or sanctified is generally seen as religious at its core, but I think if we replace these religiously connotative terms with phrasing like 'life is intrinsically good or valuable' and 'life is universally valued as one of the highest of values' we get the same general idea. It is true that secular societies condemn killing except in cases of self-defense and war among others. A great many people, religious or not, do think that life is good in and of itself, regardless of one's circumstances. Whether one's life is difficult or easy, full of pain and hardship or full of peace and joy, beneficial to society and others or

not, life is still preferable to death. Freedom to life is one of the three inalienable rights written in the U.S. constitution, and most people believe that to be rightfully so.

In the last chapter, I laid down an onslaught against value being anything more than a human mental artifact or something that wouldn't exist if humans didn't exist. Later on, I will look at how to view suicide under the position of value anti-realism, but for the time being, that is not necessary. I do not have to invoke an entire value theory to find problems in believing the intrinsic value of life necessitates the absolute prohibition on suicide.

To begin, let us take very seriously the idea that life is always intrinsically valuable. (Also while writing, this, I noticed I make the tacit assumption that dying is therefore intrinsically bad but this doesn't necessarily follow as I wrote in chapter 6.) If this is the case, there seems to be a contradiction in even permitting killing in war, self-defense, capital punishment, etc. If life were truly inalienable, then these seem to be exceptions to an inalienable law. But how could one possibly justify exceptions to life which is allegedly valued above all else? The only idea that comes to mind is to say that in these cases to be pacifistic and not kill is to put oneself or one's nation in a situation of losing life, which is undesirable because of the loss of life. But this objection to suicide on the grounds of life being objectively good is objective and non-contextual (I would say deontological as well). As such, it doesn't really matter that if you don't kill the murderer or the attacking nation, you will lose your life. The immoral act of killing would be on the attacker, not on you. But in preserving life by killing another, you take on the role of the attacker. That means you put yourself in the morally wrong position. If you are okay with this, then shouldn't a suicidal person have the right to put himself in the morally wrong in a similar way to prevent further pain? I think not. In the life for a life scenario, the infinitely good life balances out the infinitely bad killing (maybe), but in the case of suicide, unless the suicidal person would kill another person indefinitely were he to live, the infinitely bad killing cannot be balanced by the finitely bad pain, no matter how bad the pain is, because life is more valued still. (This assumes that absence of pain is not also intrinsically good, but I'm focusing on the idea that life is the highest good of all and nothing else is on the same value level.) Nevertheless, there is still a problem with allowing an innocent person who is about to lose one's life to a murderer commit the ultimate immoral act of taking another's intrinsically good life. It also is not enough to say that when one tries to or does kill another person, one abandon's one's inalienable

right to life. That may be the legal case, but deontologically speaking, we started with the premise that life is objectively and intrinsically good. This means that even a murderer's life is intrinsically good and should not be taken just as an innocent person's life should never be taken. War killing, self-defense killing, and capital punishment are all equally bad (and intrinsically bad) and on the same level as suicide, because in each case there is a loss of an intrinsically good life, regardless of innocence. Therefore, to accept the permissibility of one or two but not all cases is a contradiction, and the position fails.

Of course, one could simply take the position that none of these cases are acceptable, and some do. Some go as far as to say that life of animals, even bugs are intrinsically good. This seems to go too far though. At what point, if ever, does biological life cease to be intrinsically good? Either one needs to make a definite cut-off line (or at least a justified grey area cut-off line) or else one would accept that medicines against bacterial infections ensure mass killings. In fact, by moving around, interacting with the world, you are killing tons of cells in your body and bacteria in your environment. I don't want to get into animal rights, ethics, and such related issues here, so let's focus on having the cut-off line be at human beings, and I'll grant it out of hand without questioning the distinction between a human being's life's worth and that of the life of any other species (though I encourage you, the reader, to do so).

At any rate, the world and its societies disagree that all cases of killing are unacceptable. But the permissibility of suicide is largely rejected, and that isn't stopping me from making a philosophical case for it. So how the majority of people think about all instances of killing isn't important. But if life is indeed intrinsically value, then that value should transcend any non-intrinsic values. So if we value cars for their efficiency and usefulness but recognize the lethal risk of car accidents as well as the prominence thereof, why shouldn't it be morally obligated to forego vehicles for everyday transportation and their values to ensure the preservation of the more ultimate value of life? In 2013 in the U.S., suicide was the cause of 41,149 deaths, and traffic related deaths amounted to 33,804 which is 10.7 out of every 100,000 people, but traffic, unintentional falls, unintentional poisonings, and other unintentional injury deaths accounted for 130,557 deaths (CDC, 2015 and 2016). And although suicide did kill more people in the U.S. in 2013 than traffic, traffic deaths are no less undesirable if life is always intrinsically good. Moreover, traffic death can be avoided by simply choosing not to drive or ride in a vehicle, which would seem prudent so as to ensure one doesn't lose the goodness of life.

After all, life is good no matter how difficult life is, such as living without vehicles. So what should it matter? And values like efficiency should not come before values like life.

Indeed if life is so valuable, any action which significantly heightens the probability of death and losing one's life should be avoided at all cost. But what does 'significantly heightened probability of death' mean? In other words, what's the ratio between action A's probability of lethality and not action A's probability of lethality such that the difference is significant? I don't know, but it doesn't matter, because why stop there? If walking on the street when somebody else is driving a car on that street increases my chances of dying and losing out on the all-time wonder of intrinsically good life by even a measly .0000001% (arbitrary percent so you know), then I should abandon whatever it is that I was doing outside and go to further secure my life. But if I were to try to minimize death at every chance I had, assuming I could even accurately calculate the risks and probabilities, I would probably die, especially if everyone tried to do it. Nobody would go outside for risk of disease, animals, lightning, tripping, murderers, skin cancer etc. but in order to eat and sustain life, one must go out and get food. But gathering food is not without its risks and one would hesitate from going. Perhaps I'm being too hasty. After all, I did grant that one can accurately predict risks. So then there might be a perfect way to live such that the only risks one ever takes are minimal in order to sustain living. One risks dying while getting food, finding shelter, maybe acquiring one friend, and I'll even throw in that women risk dying from childbirth and other pregnancy complications to perpetuate the human race as a free bonus. I imagine that if the only risks are for survival, society wouldn't really exist. Nobody would work, because work would be taking risks not directly necessary for survival.

If this kind of life seems ridiculous, absurd, not worthwhile, not really living, or otherwise undesirable or unpreferable to the kind of life you're living now, then I suggest not accepting that life is intrinsically good and one of the, if not the, highest of goods regardless of its contents. Unless you are willing to bite the bullet and put your actions and behavior into keeping life sacred and not toying around with risks of death like we do every day in the naïve assumption that out of the hundreds of thousands of deaths each year, we won't be one of them, then consider the possibility that you don't really value life over other values. Consider that life may be valuable only in so far as the experiences in life are good enough and those good experiences are often enough that we want to live. Because if life is really the highest value, other values like amusement,

efficiency, friendship, children, shouldn't be held above life even at the cost of giving the lesser values up for the preservation of the greater value of life (maybe all together they could overvalue life, but I'm uncertain. Many who think life is the highest value think it's infinitely valuable, and then you'd have to figure out if other lesser values are also infinite, and if the sum of smaller infinities could override a larger one (probably not). It's a mess I will skip over.)

Up until now, I've looked at the intrinsic value of life objection to suicide by examining the intrinsic value aspect and its implications, but will briefly look at the aspect of life. For those who think being in a vegetative state is living, then they should also be staunchly against any option other than to keep the body biologically functioning. Furthermore, the whole topic of abortion, when does the embryo become living or human at least (to maintain the cut-off of intrinsic value at human life), potentiality of human life, etc. get into the mix. But if one thinks that aborting a potential life is acceptable and deny the living person's choice to ever commit suicide, one should have a good reason for making such a distinction.

Such a distinction might be found well-expressed in Thomas Nagel's "Death." It's noteworthy that he doesn't assume life being objectively good and only looks at the goodness of life with relation to death as what is subjectively good for the person alive and how death affects it (2). One of the aims of the paper is to show reasonability in differentiating between the state of non-existence before birth and the state of non-existence after death with regards to why we view the latter as bad but not the former. He brings up deprivation of something good being replaced with something not bad, specifically an intelligent man who loses his intelligence after injury, but is content in his new unintellectual bliss (5). He says that many would regard the man's blissful state misfortunate, not because he's in any pain or suffering, but because he's missing out on the goodness he would have if only he had kept onto his intelligence. So death is bad not because in non-existence we experience any bad, but because we lose out on more good. He brings up more demonstrations, but this is the general idea he gives. As for pre-existent non-existence, he says that biologically speaking, there's not much room for more good, because being born too early results in dying from complications and missing out on life entirely (7). He does make the claim that not being born isn't readily a bad thing even if one doesn't get the chance to enjoy life, but to live and then not be able to keep on living is a bad thing, as it deprives future good in life (6, 7). However, this kind of

distinction doesn't actually object to suicide if one has reason to believe that the rest of one's life isn't good. We might accept that death is a loss if one loses out on goods in the future, but if pain and suffering lie in the future more so than pleasure and other good experiences, then to die, even by suicide, might very well be not only not a loss, but a gain.

Here's why it might be seen as a gain. Imagine a person who lives to be 100. The first 60 years are full of both good and bad, but overall pretty good and we all agree up until that point, he lives a good life. But for the next 40 years, the man has serious chronic illnesses and pains which get worse and worse. There is no cure and treatment hardly helps. In the essay, Nagel talks about goodness in life being a kind of accumulation throughout experienced living. Supposing that goodness and badness have an equal weight when experienced, then this man after 100 years, still had a 6:4 good-to-bad ratio of life, which is in the favor of good, and we'll say notwithstanding he had a good life. But if he had chosen to die even at 70 years-old, the ratio would be 6:1 of good to bad. The accumulation of good and bad in life overall would have made for a better life if the man had died sooner than later. The best would be if his illnesses killed him at 60, in which case his entire life would have been a good one. So if like Nagel (in this essay at least), one believes life is good because life brings good experiences, one should be open to the possibility of suicide. But the original point was to force consistency onto people who claim that life is intrinsically good in spite of its contents. I went on to show how intrinsic value of life isn't so easy to hold as a belief when put into practice though, especially if one wants to be consistent in applying it.

Another contention to the 'sanctity of life' idea comes from Ronald Dworkin, who invites us to consider that suicide, abortion, assisted-euthanasia, and the like need not be viewed as going against the idea of the sanctity of life. For the rational and reasonable person, life is to be cherished and taken care of, almost like a responsibility (Dworkin, 215). In the face of probable or known demise of life such as a painful terminal illness, being born into a family that can't support you or go through a rough foster care system, and the like, to choose death over life is to uphold life (216). If you value something, even something inanimate like a computer, taking good care of it and accepting when to stop using your computer because of malfunctions or unrepairable damage is to demonstrate genuine care as an owner. If you love your pet, you don't just keep it alive, you want to provide it a good life, and the same is true for yourself, under this line of reasoning. To



honestly recognize that dying would be better for you emotionally and physically than continuing to live because of certain circumstances, some out of anyone's control, is to take responsibility for your well-being as opposed to naively keep living out of thinking that breathing is more important than living well. With pets, some owners under serious circumstances decide to have their pets euthanized to spare them a painful duration of life. It's still sad, and it doesn't mean they don't love their pets or respect the sanctity of their pets' lives. On the contrary, they understand that they can't provide an adequately happy life for their pets and decide to let them go out of love and consideration. I think Dworkin meant love of life and the sanctity thereof in this way.

There are contentions to this reasoning though. Regarding my pet analogy, a dog which loses two of its legs and can't walk may have an insurmountably miserable life because of its circumstances. But one might contest that humans, with our intellect, reflection, and intelligence have the capacity to find joy in our lives no matter what condition our bodies are in or what our lives are like. I can appreciate the distinction and do agree to some degree since many people with disabilities claim (and I believe them) that their lives are not inhibited when it comes to overall goodness and appreciation for what life has to offer them. However, there are conditions such as full body paralysis or mental illnesses (which can't or don't get cured or treated, more on mental health next chapter) in response to which some people do earnestly try but simply cannot find the kind of joy needed to desire to live. One could also reply that Dworkin's idea doesn't regard the sanctity of life but merely the sanctity of a happy or good life (what one calls a good life, even if a very bad life is still intrinsically good). I agree that in his writing, he does certainly seem to only be sanctifying life when it's good, thus taking away the idea of intrinsic goodness in his analysis. But I really do ask myself if anyone really would believe life, regardless of how bad it is, is always one of the greatest of goods. To imagine barely surviving a death camp, or torture, or to be plagued by incurable terminal illnesses, to be only able to blink a single eyelid, to be slowly dying as cancer destroys you painfully from the inside, or to have any other extremely difficult and incurable circumstance, and then to say that if someone in any of these situations doesn't want to live is disrespecting her own life or ignoring its value, I find, to be ignorant and unsympathetic at best, and at worst, inhumane and utterly repulsive.

## 8.4 Non-intrinsic arguments against all suicides

Aside from the sanctity of life, there are some more reasons why one might think suicide should never under any circumstance be acceptable which I'd like to discuss. The first is that one has a duty to oneself or to others not to commit suicide. I already touched on responsibility to oneself above both in response to Aquinas and Dworkin (though I won't be going into examining all of Immanuel Kant's morality on the subject), so I will look specifically at the duty to others. From her actual book, I don't think she makes very good cases for her positions or justifications (and I may be doing the very same thing in mine), but Jennifer Michael Hecht wrote a book entitled *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*. I don't think this is the best argumentation against suicide based on duty, but how she presents it is how I imagine some of the people reading this book might express such perspectives, which is why I chose to talk about her. She talks about various instances of suicide throughout western culture from Socrates to Dante to Shakespeare to Kant. Her goal seems to have been to make a secular case against suicide based on the impact it has on others and on society. She remarks statistics about suicides of people following others' suicides. And while it may be true that sometimes it is coincidental, I won't deny the empirical data she provides, particularly over parents' suicides and the effects on their children. But overall, her idea is that no matter how bad things are, life gets better, and by committing suicide one risks influencing another to commit suicide. On the contrary, she believes that suicidal people who live on are unknowingly preventing the deaths of those who would commit suicide in succession. Moreover, she talks about how suicide personally affects those around oneself.

There is a video I found with her speaking briefly about her ideas, findings, and conclusions. In it after talking about how much suicide hurts others emotionally and talking about how suicide can lead to others' deaths, she rhetorically asks if she's guilted people. She responds by saying it's a responsibility, but as she talks right after her question, she nods her head as if to convey that yes, she is guilted people into living (de Brito, 2014). This opens up the question as to the ethics of using guilt to get people to behave as you want them to, even if what you want them to do is good. I'll leave answering that question up to you, the reader. But I will say that her views about objecting to suicide are essentially such that if I do something and you do it after I do it, I'm responsible for your actions. This might be true if I were your parent, teacher, or otherwise in a position as a role model, but she's implying that we are all each other's

role models all the time. This notion is not unheard of, but to be serious about it leaves doubt as to whether any of us are really responsible for anything we do. If I behave based on others' behavior, and they behave based on others' behavior, and so on, then who's responsible? Am I even a free agent in society if another person's misdoings are because I wasn't good enough as a role model to somebody I may not even know? If we make suicide never an option, there are probably other things we should start banning too, in case others might see us do those things and do them, too. But here's the problem, she takes context out of morality, which is odd, considering her point is that suicide affects others because of our social context among other people. Nevertheless, suicide might be right under some circumstances. But if somebody is to then commit suicide in an inappropriate context, whatever it may be, Hecht wants to prevent all of the suicides, even if there are good contexts for some. Moreover, this unexceptional duty to live falls victim to my criticism of overvaluing self-preservation above. And it wouldn't be enough to say that suicide must be avoided because it makes dying a choice whereas accidentally dying wouldn't give people the idea of dying. By not taking risks, which is a choice, one is an even better role model, I would retort.

Another problem concerns her ideal that no matter how bad things are, life always gets better. To say this is to deny all the people throughout history who have died from something incurable. And yes, something that used to be incurable may become curable, as has been the case with many ailments. But there are still incurable and untreatable maladies and hardships today. Limbs are not regrowable, cancer is not always treatable, and psychiatry can't cure everybody's mental illnesses with what is available today. I admit, out of skepticism of my own views and out of induction of past discoveries, that there is hope that for anybody out there with a medical problem which is incurable right now, that just waiting a year, a month, a week, maybe even a day later, some new medicine or medical procedure will get published or seek out pre-market test volunteers and one will be cured at last. But we don't act on possibilities. I don't bet my savings on gambling or lottery tickets, because even though it's possible that I could win, it's unlikely. So a terminally ill patient may commit suicide a few months before a helpful new medical development comes out, but to expect people in those conditions to stake the probability of long-term suffering for a mere possibility of relief isn't reasonable.

Shelly Kagan in his book *Death* (p. 338) says to imagine two doors. If you walk through one, there's a 99.9% or 99.99% chance you'll have a week being tortured by a

kidnapper. However, that same door provides a .1% or .01% chance of spending a week in a paradise vacation. There's still a chance for paradise. The second door guarantees a 100% chance of being asleep without dreams for a week, as if in a state of death. Would anyone be reasonable for going through the first door? Remember, there's still hope, but he and I doubt most, if anyone, would dare take such a risk, especially if instead of a week, it were for the rest of one's life. In asserting a duty to live for the sake of others' emotions, one must also take into account one's own suffering and weigh it against others'. This is no simple task, but one I'll return to it later. I actually find the duty to others argument the best one against suicide, just not how most people view it. Again, arriving to the same conclusion doesn't mean we agree if our reasons differ.

As for duty to society, there are some interesting points to make. In order to keep it short, as I will return to suicide and society in the next chapter, here are some observations which go against the societal duty to live to contribute, particularly financially. First, some people simply don't contribute to society in a significant way compared to the average worker, such as the elderly, stay at home spouses, or lifelong bedridden patients. Second, it's not required to contribute to society all that much anyway. A lot of people don't do community service or donate gratuitously to charity, but they aren't being condemned for it. Third, there is an option out of society without suicide. It is perfectly legal to renounce citizenship and become a hermit outside of society (so long as one isn't in debt, a criminal, etc.). Fourth, although such cases would be rare indeed, if a person truly had no belongings, no job, no home, no friends, no living relatives, no people with close connections, suicide under this view of duty to not hurt others would be permissible. Fifth, one can imagine suicide as being beneficial by killing oneself to help financially support the inheritors of one's life insurance (as some insurance policies after a certain time do cover suicide). Or if one is in an incurable state with costly medical bills which will fall in the debts of loved ones, suicide can prevent furthering the financial burden one will have on them.

Economically speaking, I find it interesting how in suicidal death statistics, one can sometimes find a note about how costly it is (SIEC Alert #74, 2010). The cost is not only medical and legal to include autopsies, burials, funerals, etc., but also how much money the person would have earned by continuing to work for many years to come. So in the end, the annual cost of suicide is in the billions, but is that fair? Why not force people to have a certain amount of children to ensure more money being made and

circulated when the kids grow up and work? For that matter, if the economy is so distraught by people dying and not being able to work anymore, then it would be better to focus more money on preventing the other top causes of death to keep more people alive and working. Retirement would be especially harmful, because not only is a large portion of the population not working and contributing to society as if they were dead, but social security is being spent on them, taking away from money that could be spent elsewhere than to comfort non-contributing citizens. Apparently, ceasing to work is very damaging to the economy and society as a whole. And for that matter, why is only suicide calculated economically in those statistics? I imagine it's because of the assumption that suicide is easily preventable and nobody should be doing it anyway, that unlike any other cause of death, putting a price on it will stop people from dying in that way. This is ridiculous. I agree that there are likely many people out there who contemplate and/or commit suicide without taking financial concerns into consideration, but I find it rather appalling (if it wasn't clear already) that a means of suicide prevention is to act as if by choosing to die, one not only hurts those around the person, but the entire country's economy by simply not working anymore.

A penultimate remark about duty to society; under the notion of a social contract between oneself and society, I think it's odd that a person is obligated to work and contribute to the society for as long as one is physically able, especially considering that one never entered into the contract with consent. I think a response to this may be to say that through the benefits one gets growing up and living in society, by the time one is of age to work, one owes society and must pay one's debt with labor. But this still doesn't solve the issue about entering into an agreement without consent. A better response is to observe that it is impossible to get someone's consent before they are even born! I agree and therefore one must be put into the social contract without consent in the beginning. However, there should, I think, be a way out, because it doesn't seem reasonable to me at all to have someone be put into a social contract without consent for life with no alternative. But, one might contend, that already exists in the form of renouncing citizenship. Besides, why should society let its people kill themselves using products of the society and in the boundaries thereof where hardworking citizens who actually want to contribute more and do so would have to take care of the aftermath? I can accept this kind of retort, but it sure makes the life situation of humans in such a society seem rather bleak. You're born into a social contract without consent and if at any time you wish to end your contract, you can only do so freely by leaving the country and getting yourself to

unowned territory (good luck!). Conversely, some countries are more open to suicide and allow the citizens a more painless and effective method of getting out of the social contract, which seems more respectable, even if the government doesn't owe its citizens such options.

One must ask oneself for whom one lives. Do you, the reader, live each day out of obligation to your friends, family, or society? I used to tell myself I need to live for the sake of others. But under that view, my life wasn't mine. To live not out of a desire to live or the things one wants out of life (which could include making friends and family happy or to contribute to society), but out of pure obligation is to live inauthentically. When you live for others and not for yourself, you give up your own life to others. It's not your life, but others' life. They own you as it were. Moreover, you lose the desire to live at all. Hecht thinks it is important to push people into living out of duty to others, not realizing that if she succeeds, she will strip them of wanting to live at all. The non-suicidal person lives out of a love of life and desire to keep on living (or fear of hell, sometimes duty, but what I'm describing is most common, I think). If one is put to live not for these kinds of reasons, life loses even its subjective meanings, and suicide becomes more readily desirable to escape the pressure of living a life one doesn't want for others' benefits and advantages. The question which will become very important later on is then, "Does anyone or can anyone reasonably and rationally lack the desire to live or have the desire to not live?" One day, I decided that I was going to own my life. Since then, the difficulty in living up to the expectations I had for myself to keep others happy at my expense of existential pain faded. Life is still hard and hardly worthwhile to me, but now I take responsibility for myself and refuse to live for any reason beyond my desires to do things before I die, such as writing this book to help others understand me and maybe even learn to cope with me as I have become.

Next are the ideas of Camus. Camus starts his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" with claiming that the only truly serious philosophical problem is suicide (3). Although, that's not quite so, because even if one undoubtedly answered that suicide is the best solution, one would still need some epistemology and metaphysics to know of how to commit suicide effectively. Even still, I admire how he turned the tables on how suicide is normally thought of; instead of starting with finding reasons where suicide might be acceptable, he starts with why or how one might validate choosing to live over suicide. Throughout the first part of the essay, he says some pretty interesting and insightful

remarks about suicide and suicidal thinking. He remarks that suicide is a way to confess that life is too much to bear or is too beyond comprehension (4). I found the first part of this to be on a similar note to the quote “Suicide is not chosen; it happens when pain exceeds resources for coping with pain” (Ainsworth, 2012). In both cases, suicide is a demonstration that after having exhausted one’s efforts, one ends. Naturally, not all suicides are done in this matter, as there are many done capriciously or otherwise undesirably for the suicidal person (I’ll come back to this next chapter), but for those to whom these ideas are accurate, I find them useful in expressing one’s circumstances succinctly to those who are not suicidal. I also agree with Camus where he says that it is mistaken, but still quite commonplace, to think that once one believes life has no meaning, one is compelled to put oneself to death (7). One can certainly live without thinking that life has value as the absurdists and the strictly existential nihilists do. One can do quite a lot even while believing it all is futile, such as writing a philosophical book on philosophy and suicide that the author hopes isn’t too tedious to read, haha! On the flipside, one can believe heavily in the meaning of life and still commit suicide perhaps even, as Dworkin might suppose, because of the meaning of one’s life.

Later on after having talked about how one might become aware of the absurdity of living a meaningless life and seeking meaning in it and what one might do in light of such a life, Camus returns to the question of suicide and declares that instead of wondering if life can be worth living if life is meaningless, one comes to understand that only meaningless lives could be worth living (35). I do admit not giving Camus enough credit in the previous chapter, but he really did influence me. This thought of only meaningless lives being worth living, is strikingly brilliant. If humans had a designated purpose in life, but did not want to fulfill that purpose and instead wished to pursue their own dreams and desires, what is to be said of such a life? I believe Camus would agree with me that to resign oneself to the intended purpose in defeat would be to let one’s inner self be as good as dead while living in anguish. But to abandon one’s purpose would be to live in a poor way, and one loses out on metaphysical fulfillment. Either way, one loses. But if life has no purpose, and the universe doesn’t care, one is free to pursue one’s own goals and to create one’s own values and to cherish one’s life without any metaphysical restraints (well, except for the restraints of personal tastes and desires which one doesn’t choose so far as I’m aware). Yet, even if one does this, the meaning one naturally seeks out is still forever out of one’s grasp.

Here, Camus maintains that to live out one's life and to arbitrarily give oneself purpose to no avail is to truly live the human condition in all its absurd glory. He denies suicide on the grounds that to do so is to make an attempt to escape the absurd through destroying one's consciousness, but that is to willingly blind oneself from the absurd, which is undesirable. He does admit though that not only does suicide seem to resolve the absurd, but it is a means of accepting it, just to an excessive extent (35). But I maintain that because it doesn't matter what we do, if a person is such that she finds within herself no desire to continue living and forming goals, desires, purposes, meanings for herself, she has the same opportunity and groundwork for doing so as the one who chooses to live. Camus uses the phrase "in order to keep live" when speaking against suicide (35), but that's just the thing; if one wants to live, there are things one should not do like commit suicide. However, if in the freedom allotted to us by the absence of purpose in our lives we don't have that desire, there is no reason (except based on other desires) to do anything which promotes living. I really do wish Camus had been more open to the idea of suicide being viable in the face of the absurdity of life, but at any rate, I think his objections to suicide were interesting and worth writing in this chapter despite not being convincing to me as good objections to suicide. After all, my current value theory while in its earlier stages was heavily shaped thanks to the ideas of Camus.

## 8.5 Objections to suicidal rationality

Finally in the set of stark arguments against suicide overall, there is the idea that one has certain aspects which guide one's actions, but to commit suicide is contradictory to those reasons. Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill are the two philosophers whose arguments I'll look at on this stance.

The common notion that suicidal ideation is an indicator of mental illness and irrationality might be ascribed to Hobbes (Tierney, 624). Hobbes thought that the greatest mover to all of man's actions lied in the desire to live and fear of death. To forego such a common, basic instinct is not malicious or immoral for Hobbes, but rather is a demonstration of not being of sound mind (1971: 116-117). Suicide is absolutely wrong because of the natural law of self-preservation, or what is referred nowadays as a survival instinct. I actually like the appeal to the natural drive to survive, because even the suicidal person about to kill oneself has it (I have never come across someone who



wrote or stated otherwise in my search for how others look at themselves when suicidal, but am open to there being exceptions). Not even a desire to bring oneself to end one's life is enough to get rid of this instinctive drive. That is how embedded this drive is in our biology.

But there are other extremely powerful drives besides survival like sex, hunger, and procreation. These may not be quite as powerful as the survival drive, but let us look at them a little. Some people never have children, either because they simply don't have any biological desire to procreate, or because throughout life they have never been able to accomplish procreating, or because for some reason they simply decided not to pursue this desire by overriding it with other desires to become successful in a career, perhaps out of distaste for children, or any other reason why might give for not procreating. Hunger is necessary for one's own survival, but it gets overridden all the time whenever someone can't go and eat because of work, school, or other activities and waits to satisfy it. But even more impressive (albeit unhealthy) is how some people can fast for several days for religious, political, spiritual, or other reasons that lead them to overcome the strong desire to eat. Now unless they are fasting to die, they will eat again, but the point is that such a natural urge is surmountable to such an extreme degree. Sex is interesting, since asexuality (the lack of a sexual attraction or even a sex drive) can occur in humans such that asexual people do not have the drive (I'm obviously not talking about demisexuality or grey asexuality). But for those who do have sex drives at various strengths, sex is overridden like no other highly instinctive drive. Because of the sexual prudence of certain religious, throughout the centuries, some devout followers limit themselves to sex only for procreation and thus only have sex (and no masturbation) a few times in life. And then there are some monks, nuns, and other religious people who remain abstinent from sex all one's life even. The question to ask in each of these cases is whether or not disregarding one's drives necessitates them not existing or being a part of one's set of desires. I think the answer is no. If Mike chooses to never have sex or masturbate until he finds a lifelong partner, in not exercising his desire to have sex, it's still there and still a part of his set of desires. Yet, he can override his sex drive. Similarly, a suicidal person may override even the survival instinct, though with much more difficulty, if other desires lead the rational agent to conclude that living is not in one's best interests. Hobbes' appeal to survival instinct may very well explain why most people don't seriously or lengthily contemplate suicide, but it does not out rule suicide as he would like, unless he would also be willing to say that overriding other drives for non-

survival purposes is highly irrational as well. There are other grounds for critiquing Hobbes' opposition such as Dworkin's suicide out of respect for one's life or Tierney's analysis of Foucault, Donne, and Seneca as showing that suicide may be out of desire for life and fear of death (because a long, slow, and painful death might push people into dying sooner and more peacefully) as Hobbes could appreciate (Tierney, 631).

As for Mill, in addition to things like the harm and offense principles which one might use to understand if suicide is acceptable in the context of a society and how it might harm others' lives, he also makes the claim that suicide is self-defeating. If I may make a quip, I do believe that's generally the point of suicide, to be self-defeating. But what he meant was that on the basis of free will which is very important in his ethical theory overall, using one's free will to destroy (as with suicide) or permanently forsake (as with selling oneself into slavery) one's free will is a misuse of free will (Mill, V.11). It would be a contradiction, for him, to use a means in such a way that one can no longer use that means. Granting his version of free will, I still am hesitant to agree that this objects to suicide. If I have money, I am permitted to spend it and even exhaust it. Using something up isn't self-defeating. But suppose things like money are meant to be used up, whereas free will is meant to be there as long as possible.

Let me try a different analogy. What if a neuroscientist who is trying ever so hard to learn how humans understand the world and form beliefs comes across a discovery about how to take away one's desires. In his endless and frustrating quest for knowledge, he decides to build a robot which he will program to perform the surgery necessary to remove his desire to learn about human understanding; the procedure is a success, leaving the scientist content in his ignorance. In effect, his desire to learn about human intelligence brought him to know how to do the procedure, but to do so would be to permanently forsake the very intelligence which allowed him the opportunity to learn of the procedure in the first place. Similarly, to use one's free will to the point of choosing to terminate the one's liberty, one is abandoning the free will which permits the very choice of keeping or forsaking free will. Is the case of the scientist self-defeating? Maybe so, but I want to put forth an alternative interpretation. The scientist had a natural curiosity and taste for inquisition. This thirst for knowledge was left unsatisfied with all the available knowledge; thus, he sought the knowledge he craved by working as a scientist himself. He believed that once he knew the answers to his questions, his mind would be at peace and his craving would no longer push him so fervently. But then he discovered another

route to solving his peace of mind problem by means of getting rid of the drive for knowledge. What I am suggesting here is that it wasn't knowledge he was necessarily after, but a satisfaction to his curiosity. The route he chose may not have been foreseen before his discovery, but he did achieve his goal. As for free will, if one has the desire not to be an agent of free will, but just to be an entity that's overall happy with life and what one does in it, then there is room for alternatives to using free will. Imagine if heaven exists, but so does reincarnation, and at the gates of heaven free will must be relinquished. If one merely wants a life of peace and joy and not a reincarnated life, even if free will helps to achieve that life, it is not a misuse to leave free will behind once it is no longer useful. If, for example, a person wants to avoid a painful life and free will helps to avoid painful situations, but one finds oneself with a terminal illness where no matter what one chooses by living, one will not be able to avoid the painful life one wishes to avoid. But suicide gives an alternative at the expense of relinquishing free will in order to achieve one's desires when free will cannot.

In addition to my reply above, I'd also like to point out that both the Humean route of god, free will, and suicide in reply to Aquinas and the preservation of life to the extreme (in order to preserve free will) critiques would also be somewhat suitable here. But Mill was not at all as against suicide as I may have made him seem. He notes in the same paragraph his skepticism on whether a person consciously willing to end his free will is to be stopped at all cost, but strongly believes prevention should be considered in the inquiry of what action to take (Mill, V.11). However, I have heard this kind of reasoning of contradiction of using free will as an objection to any and all suicides, which is why I put the argument here.

This marks the end of my analysis of arguments used to deny suicide as a starting ground. There are going to be more con arguments in the following chapters, but these will be more responsive to arguments in favor of suicide. Therefore, if a con argument is not in this chapter, it may appear in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 9

### In Favor of Suicide

As was the case in the last chapter, I intend to continue to look at arguments gradually. Here, I will look at various stages in favor of suicide from the weaker forms of pro suicide to the stronger forms of pro suicide. At the end I will present what is my current position on suicide in society. I will not be going past my own perspective. This means that a position such as “We have a moral obligation to commit suicide” will not be covered, though I would like to note in passing that I find more the extreme positions fascinating even if I disagree.

#### 9.1 Terminal medical decisions

I will start with what is the most acceptable form of suicide, if one could even call it that (I wouldn't but some do). In a living will, one is able to form what is called an advance directive (AD), by which one may state clearly the legal medical actions one would prefer in various circumstances wherein one would otherwise be unable to either make an informed decision or express that decision (Draper, 2011). For instance, I could write a will stating that in the event of brain death, a persistent vegetative state (VPS), comatose, or otherwise impaired to the point that my body is unsustainable without the use of machines and it is unreasonable to expect a recover, after a certain amount of time (we'll say three months here), I wish to cease medical treatment. Because in these events I would not be able to express my consent to or even mentally form a dissent to “pulling the plug,” it is in my interest to firmly and clearly state what I would want in such a case now while still healthy. But without an AD or specified proxy or surrogate, it can become very difficult in the matter of choosing to keep a patient physiologically but artificially functioning or not. There are limitations to advance directives. I couldn't ask for euthanasia in any way that is not legal (if I couldn't go through the steps, or if euthanasia is illegal where I am). As for where it is applicable, it is still highly contentious. Just

talking to random people on the street or online, you will find an array of disagreement about whether anyone should have the right to pull the plug, even the patient's former self and if so, under which circumstances. But as things stand right now, legally patients are given this autonomy to a fairly high degree.

The basis for AD's is the right for a competent adult to refuse medical services as an exercise of self-determination and autonomy and as a logical consequence of informed consent (2012: Standler, 3-4). This right is limited (based on state law) when it is in conflict with the following: preservation of life, prevention of suicide, protection of innocent third-party members, and maintenance of the ethical integrity of the medical profession (19-23). These limits may not even really ever be necessary or practical in deciding when to refuse a patient's refusal to treatment (31). Ronald Standler goes as far as to state, "So the law is, and has always been, that competent adults have the right to refuse any treatment for any reason" (31). I would like to make the adage "for oneself" in that quote if it is to be taken seriously. To refuse treatment even if it is vital to survival isn't legally considered suicide because one does not self-arrange one's death (definition in chapter 8). The person about to die may decide to die naturally, let the illness or wound take its course, leave their fate up to god, not wish to pay the costs, live vicariously through machines and a gastronasal tube, etc. At any rate, the person did not initiate her death, but in cases of suicide, she does. Even fatal refusal of treatment may be in accordance with the above four limitations if the patient is not suicidal, there's no third-party infringement, it doesn't breach on physicians' ethics, and if treatment doesn't preserve life, but merely lengthens death and its effects on the patient.

However, it does make for very interesting discussion about what happens when the fatal situation is erected from a suicide attempt. So, if a person attempts to kill oneself by gunshot, and ends up in a coma with little hope of recovery, and had years earlier signed a will with the advance directive to refuse medical support in such a situation, it becomes difficult to decide whether or not to follow the advance directive. Casey Frank gives three real cases in which suicide attempts followed by comas, and wherein the patients' wishes not to receive treatment leading to their deaths were followed (100). But he also cited the case of a man named Ken who after attempting suicide was in an anoxic state such that he wasn't brain dead but couldn't respond and also couldn't reasonably be expected to live a functional life, or at all without a ventilator (100, 101). Because he wasn't brain dead, medical treatment was able to preserve his life,

and because he was suicidal his advance directive was ignored until his sister became his proxy and made an informed decision on his behalf (101). I imagine he was thus considered incompetent (more on this later).

Up until now, I have been giving a quick portrayal of how the legal system works, but what I am interested in is whether this is reasonable or good. Let me start with the right to refuse medication. I think that apart from the corollary given by informed consent, it is important consequentially. If people were required by law to get medically treated, life could be very cumbersome. If a doctor thought surgery or medication for whatever problem you may have is the best solution, you would be legally required to take the advice and pay for it. And not to incite a slippery slope, but if this were so, then it could (not necessarily) be equally legally forced to send someone who might be sick or in need of medical care so as to uphold the value of health to see a doctor and then be legally required to follow the doctor's advice. Now imagine that there are no over the counter medicines (I say this, because in the real life cases concerning mental illnesses, there aren't any). Even the slightest cold would get you sent to the doctor and paying for medication. The medication might be cheap, but think about the doctor visits and how that would affect your insurance. But we can imagine that not everyone has insurance that they can afford which would cover necessary costs. What would they do? This would be a medical nightmare, having to consult a doctor by law and not being able to make any decisions of your health, even about a small headache, because treatment is forced. I think in such a society, people would lie about being sick. They would keep quiet about anything they could hide, like a headache, just to avoid having to go see a doctor. Those who are without insurance and unable to comfortably pay for doctor visits might even lie about being okay and wouldn't feel safe talking to people out of fear. A society which upholds health to such a high degree that people lose their legal autonomy to make their own health decisions leads to an undesirable and absurd social system.

Regarding the kinds of cases of suicide attempts leading to brain death, comas, vegetative states, anoxic states, and the like, I think there's room for disagreement as to whether AD's are to be regarded as competently made. If, for example, at the time the AD is written, the writer is not suicidal or mentally ill whatsoever, but years later due to traumatic experience becomes suicidal, I think it is reasonable that the physician accept the AD (if it is known that while writing it, the writer was competent). But to write an AD right before committing suicide, I can see how the writer might not be competent and the

AD doesn't express what the patient would want if he had survived in such a way that he could express his change of mind. Of course this all depends on what competence means with regards to refusing treatment.

“The definition of “mentally competent” in the context of refusing medical treatment means that the patient can understand the risks and benefits of the proposed treatment, and the patient is able to make an informed choice” (Standler, 6). Mentally ill, in virtue of being mentally ill, are often regarded as being incompetent, though I will get back to this later and analyze this commonplace assumption in detail. Assuming that anyone who is suicidal isn't competent in refusing treatment, if the AD was made at an uncertain stage of competence of the writer, I will grant that it would be in both the patient's and state's best interest to err on the side of deeming the AD to be made incompetently unless a proxy can vouch on the patient's behalf that refusal of treatment is really what the patient would want. I for one have never liked the idea of living artificially and have put in my will as well as have throughout my life since childhood talked with my family about not wishing to be kept alive by such means. Yet, in looking on online forums, more people than I would suspect do want to be kept alive, just in case they might be dreaming a wonderful dream or are conscious despite evidence to the contrary (which leads me to believe they either aren't talking about being brain dead or aren't aware of what brain death, persistent vegetative states, etc. are medically, mistaking them for locked-in syndrome in which case I question their competence regarding informed decisions). But overall, I found that most people agree that to not want to be kept alive in those cases is not suicide, and even if it were, it would be acceptable so long as the decision is made competently.

## 9.2 Terminally-ill and permanently incapacitated

The next step in the favor of suicide deals with terminally ill patients. To make the arguments less grey for now, I will only talk about patients who are able to function at best (so as not to include those who can't) to the point that they are able to work or go about their daily lives by shopping, maintaining hygiene, cleaning, eating, getting around if needed, etc. but who have difficulties and who are reasonably expected to die from their illness or injury within the next year (12 months). The time period is arbitrary, because someone with cancer or AIDS could be expected to die within the next five to ten years (or longer), and I personally would say that they are terminally ill. But by

restricting the time, it gets rid of issues concerning diseases which are likely to be the cause of death in old age but the patient in question is young and can be expected to still live for many more decades (diabetes, genetic disorders, etc.). I will later come back to question the time restriction, but for now it is one year.

The permissibility of suicide in terminally ill cases lies in the availability of options for the patient. The dichotomy (I think it's a true dichotomy or is virtually true at least) of living or dying may be always present for anyone, and the option to live holds much variability. In my case for example, I can continue my college career, go out and find a job or professional career, find a relationship, travel the world, etc. I have lots of options and seemingly a lot of time to carry out my decisions. But in terminally ill cases, the patient has little time. A single year isn't enough to go get a new degree, or travel extensively to really get a feel for the places one visits, to find a new long-term relationship, or get into a career field. And even if one decides one does have the time, one might still not have the will. With the understanding that death is nigh, one may reasonably feel that to do one or several of these activities has little meaning, knowing that one can't cherish the memories for years to come or revel in the fruits of the activities much at all. One can decide that since one can't even finish a new degree, one might as well not take only introductory courses. After all, if it's a field one's interested in, to study the introductory material, gaining even more interest only to end up not being able to continue to learn about it and satisfy one's curiosity would indeed be difficult. Additionally, there's the general feeling of anxiety toward death (see chapter 6) which would cause quite a bit of discouragement from the joys of life as it were. This isn't even considering the actual process of dying itself, which particularly in terminal illnesses can be very debilitating and gruesomely painful and torturous. One may have the ability to sustain a simple daily life, but to do so still wouldn't be without much difficulty and pain. One's body progressively fails over time, a process I can only imagine being so strenuous that even if one could muster the will to do something like travel or study, one wouldn't be in a physical condition to do so.

So in such cases, the options seem to be generally either to die or to live a painful life with little to do which is fulfilling. As was stated in chapter 6, I find the actual state of death to not be harmful, or even if it is, one cannot experience the harm, making any harm during death a moot point. But living a life with a terminal illness certainly contains harm and one is in a position to experience the harm. Between the two options



of no harm vs. serious harm, it is not difficult to see why one can be justified in choosing the former option, even if it entails death. There are of course objections, but I'll try to save the objections once I have given the reasons for suicide in all relevant cases to the objections.

Moving on, I'll combine terminally ill patients whose illness incapacitates them and/or has more than the one-year time to live along with those who have a non-terminal but nonetheless incapacitating disability such as full-body paralysis. In this grouping, one can't use the argument that the patient doesn't have the time to pursue a life fulfilling task. And in this grouping, the physical pain argument also becomes irrelevant for many. That death is not on one's doorstep is to rid oneself of the time constrained choice between the life-death dichotomy. One can't commit suicide with the reason that one is about to die regardless, it's just a matter of how much pain (not necessarily physical pain, mind you) is to be involved in the process. And with the option of life, there are more possibilities. Thus one can say that to live is more prudent than to die.

However, in lieu of the previous arguments I have presented, I have replacements for this new grouping. While physical agony needn't be present in a patient of debilitation or even of a terminal illness for years, there is at least the opportunity for great psychological agony. To be unable to live a life that others can may be very painful indeed. Imagine not being able to work or go outside or even move around. You wouldn't be able to go out and meet people, make friends, or do almost anything, let alone do daily activities that most people point at to express what gives their lives meaning. And if you can't take care of yourself but are still living, then someone else is taking care of you. Few people could peaceably accept such being so dependent. Even toddlers get upset by their parents helping them with something as trivial as opening up a snack for them. How could an adult be so easily content with someone needing to bathe them, feed them, care for their urinary and excretory needs, and so on and so forth? We have natural drives for independence as human beings. Not only would there be the ever constant unfulfillment of the desire to be independent as well as the shame and humiliation of not being able to be independent, but I imagine in many such cases the patients would feel terrible for taking so much from others with so little to give back. I'm not saying that altruism need always be repaid in full due, but to have someone take care of you for so long and never being able to do anything in return since you can't even do things for yourself in the first

place would be very devastating for so many people, especially those who love to give back out of kindness as an expression of gratitude.

The state of death being neutral (well, not even neutral, since neutrality doesn't quite grasp a nonexistent state) hasn't changed. It is still neither bad nor good but out of the question of such labels for the one who is dead. Turning to the option of life, in these cases where the patient is suffering as I have laid out above, then life has a negative value. And we return to the simple math that nothing is comparatively better than something bad.

Here is the first set of objections against my arguments thus far. First, while one may reasonably choose the option of avoidance of pain in a given situation, many people find it noble and admirable to endure hardships regardless of how bad things get. But while that may be true, I don't believe it follows that such should be the expectation of people and that to not endure hardships regardless of the circumstances is to be not only frowned upon and discouraged but also impermissible. It is good to do charity and just be a good person overall, but if a person decides to be rude and miserly, nobody will stop you or try to have that right taken away from you. In my opinion, a rude person is worse for society than a dead one, but that's because I fiercely disdain meanness and cruelty. At any rate, I find that if someone wishes to endure a difficult life, that person may indeed be deemed courageous and worthy of admiration, but that doesn't mean others should be expected to do the same.

Further there is the argument from hope which you can find another argument against in section 8.4. The idea is that new medical advancements are discovered every year. With such progress, it would be better to live as long as one can. After all, what a shame it would be to commit suicide only to have the cure for your problem discovered shortly after. If only you had lived longer, you could have had a better life. Even if it's uncertain that a cure will be found soon, it is prudent and best to live in hope that one will just in case. There is some sensibility in this argument at first glance, but it's not very realistic or all too logical. I find that the way most people give the argument is through an appeal to ignorance. Essentially, since you don't know that a cure won't be found soon, you shouldn't act under the assumption that one won't. But to make actions only permissible if there is certainty about the future such that if you knew the future, you wouldn't act is too strict. If I get a job that I think I'll enjoy but wouldn't apply for if only

I knew that in the future I won't like it, that doesn't mean I shouldn't apply for the job. This is simply because I can't predict whether or not I'll like the job with perfect or even near perfect accuracy. Of course, we can say (and I think we should if we are to take this line of thinking seriously) that the required level of certainty be proportional to the consequences and risks of the action taken. So I don't need as much certainty about the future when making dinner plans as I do about applying for a job. And I don't need as much certainty about the future for a job application as I do for deciding to end my life, since the latter is a permanent decision with everything to lose.

Even still, I doubt the practicality of this argument. Time for a thought experiment: you get kidnapped by a maniac who likes to torture his victims. He does however, give you the option to kill you and end your suffering whenever you'd please. But that's not the only way out. Every day, he rolls 10 dice one at a time. Should all ten land on 6, you will be set free. Up until this point nobody has been set free, and hundreds have died after decades of being tortured hoping that they would one day be set free. But you never know, maybe you'll be the first. And what a shame it would be for you to choose to die only for him to roll 10 6's the next day! Pray tell, my reader, would you lie in agony and torture day after day in hopes of a small chance that you will be released? Remember that should you live a full life never to be released, you will have accrued so much more harm in your life than you would if you were to die sooner. Mathematically speaking, in such a case of never escaping, at best you die the first day so that you never have to go through any torture. And each day, your life's overall good-to-bad ratio grows more in favor of the bad. Now, this analogy isn't perfect, since I haven't the numbers to say what the probability is of a cure being found for each and every terminal or life debilitating condition. Nevertheless the torture scenario should prove similar enough for those who do go through such terrible conditions. Thus my point remains: even if you decide you would endure for the sake of a small, almost negligible hope, that needn't mean that one should. Or at least, that doesn't mean that someone who does choose to die can't be reasonable and permitted to do so.

Next is the idea of gratitude once more. I stated that gratitude can be a source of misery for those who cannot help themselves. But one can argue that it is an affront to gratitude to commit suicide when others have put in so much effort to keep the patient alive. All the invested time, diligence, and kindness become wasted should the recipient throw her life away. I certainly can agree to this objection, but only to some extent. Let's

suppose I haven't the kind of intelligence academia asks from each of its students (I might be intelligent in other ways though). My parents and teachers are very generous and do everything they can to help me, but because I'm not someone who excels whatsoever in a school setting, their help isn't even enough to help me pass fairly. Instead I only go from one grade to the next due to strings being pulled and unmerited extra points given just to boost my grade to passing. When I turn 16, I drop out of school, even though my family and teachers did what they did so kindly and with the expectation that I would receive my high school diploma. I would be guilty of selfishness and ingratitude, even if I do it partly because I am grateful and wish to alleviate my burden on my tutors in an act of partial altruism. But if their help was only given because they held expectations, is that true generosity? Again, to some extent, yes, but probably not entirely. And if the gift they are giving me (i.e. continued education) isn't beneficial to me, I don't see why I should be expected in all entirety to keep myself in the situation. This is along the lines of my contention toward the gift of life argument in 8.1. All in all, if the situation is so bad that the person being helped is still in such a terrible position even in spite of the help received, then the person may still be reasonable in wanting to avoid the situation altogether. This doesn't make such a decision without some amount of ingratitude and selfishness, but that fact doesn't mean the decision still shouldn't be made under any circumstance. And I must say, if any circumstance is to warrant fairness in such a decision, I would staunchly defend the cases sketched thus far to be in this category of circumstance.

### 9.3 For the elderly

Moving onwards, I will argue for the acceptance of suicide for people who can take care of themselves. The easiest group on behalf to argue for is the elderly. I understand this may be treading new water for many readers, but I do ask that you hear me out without dismissal before I even make my case. Many people are already okay with suicide for the terminally ill and permanently debilitated, and many who don't use arguments from the last chapter which I have already put into question. But rarely have I found others who agree that the elderly should merit this right (but not everyone).

In the last chapter I argued against the idea that we owe society for being a part of it. But even if I were to grant that idea along with granting that one repays one's debt by working for a life and contributing in society, then it still should be permissible for the

elderly to choose to die. Once retired, a person has repaid her debt to society (unless needing to keep spending money as a part of the economy is a requirement, in which case frugal people aren't doing their fair share).

And in old age, one isn't necessarily debilitated and can still be very self-sufficient yet still be in a lot of chronic pain or be very sick and/or lethargic. So even if one has the time and money to do something fulfilling, one may no longer have the will or the health to do it. And while death may not be so nearby, it is still very close and the imminence of death becomes more probable with each passing year. The question of options still remains. Either one can continue living a life or one can end it. I'm not suggesting that the elderly choose to die en masse, because I think it should be a well-considered personal decision. Some people are very content in their later years even if they can no longer do the activities they enjoy doing. For these people who still prefer to live, so be it. But for those whose lives lose meaning for them once they can no longer work, or do their hobby's, or don't have the funds to do something like travel, then to force them to live is to force them to live as a shadow of themselves. It can also be said that the elderly have a non-treatable condition, that being old age. Old age might even be a better example of an incurable condition, since for millennia people have sought to make men immortal to no avail.

So once again we see that at least for some elderly, the options are either to die (neutral so to speak) or to live (negative). For those in these cases where their life situation is no longer good, I think they can reasonably choose death for themselves. However, I will admit again that there is still some selfishness in the mix. The elderly can still contribute to society as consumers as well as by telling their stories and sharing their wisdom. But if they are unhappy with their lives, it is equally if not more selfish for others to demand that they live just because they want to get everything they can out of the elderly. Even though the request may be genuinely virtuous, like seeking knowledge and wisdom, I wouldn't feel comfortable with forcing someone to live through an overall painful and tiresome situation just to get what I want out of that person. Besides, if people are so concerned about not getting to learn from the elderly, then those people should seek out that knowledge regularly. If not, then they are being hypocritical as they don't seem to really care, not enough to actually go talk to the elderly at least. This hypocrisy is important because it shows that the objection isn't so sincere. And if the objection isn't sincere, then one doesn't really object, right? Now, this doesn't mean the

objection can't be still good, but it does mean that the claimant doesn't object to the elderly committing suicide on these grounds.

In conclusion for the elderly, since they are near death and have already lived a long (we'll even throw in rich and fulfilling) life, should they no longer be in a state where they can enjoy themselves or their life and they prefer death over a vegetative lifestyle, then I say it is reasonable for them to commit suicide and cruel to prohibit them therefrom. This conclusion can have incremental strengths. For example, if a married couple where both partners are retired don't want to live without one another. They might decide that if one dies, the other will die, too. They may even choose to die together because they wish to spend their last moments with one another, which I personally find kind of sweet and romantic despite the morbidity. If an elderly person has no children or living relatives and most if not all of their life-long friends are dead or otherwise out of their lives, the reasonableness of this person's suicide is even stronger. So suicide needn't be just reasonable or not in the cases of the elderly. It really should depend on the person and their life circumstances as well as desires.

#### 9.4 Rationality and mental competence of the mentally ill

The next level is mental illness patients. This may just be the hardest level to defend, not because of the nature of this group per se, but because the society I live in including the scientific community as well as everyday people almost axiomatically deny this group the right to suicide without so much as a second thought. Initially meant to be its own chapter, I will instead include it here. In order to do this group justice, I will write my ideas on psychiatry, depression, and rationality itself, so I apologize in advance for the length of this chapter and the array of topics it covers.

Many activists for the right to die write off anyone with a mental illness. This also includes philosophers such as Michael Cholbi which I lament for I admire his arguments and his ways of analyzing the complicated issues of suicide to a great extent. It seems an almost unanimous belief that people with mental illnesses ought not commit suicide. This idea goes even so far as to prevent cross sections in other cases where suicide might be okay. So an elderly person shouldn't commit suicide if he has a mental illness. Even the terminally ill can go through the process of physician assisted suicide in the states where it is legal, but only if they don't express a desire to die (Net Industries, n.d.). I'd like to take a moment to show the stupidity of this little fact. So if I am to die in the next

three months and am in a lot of pain, I can apply to die painlessly with euthanasia in Oregon. To do this, I need some referrals from doctors and psychiatrists. I can express that I'd prefer to die by euthanasia over through whatever illness is painfully killing me. I can say things like I want to end the pain. But what I can't do is say that I want to die. But isn't it obvious that anyone who goes through the process does want to die? But if you say that on record, you can get kicked out of the process, because that is an instant qualifier of mental illness for some psychiatrists. Maybe not every psychiatrist, but all but one that I've spoken to (5, so not too big of a sample size, my apologies) have told me that they do instantly classify patients as having a mental illness if they desire to die. So even terminally ill patients can be denied despite the fact that they're terminally ill! They're about to die in a horrible way anyway!

So what gives? Why can't mentally ill patients *ever* reasonably choose to die? The most common answer is that when someone has a mental illness, they aren't themselves (Bonn, 41). They can't think appropriately or rationally. Their desires, feelings, and thoughts all get skewed from the influence of the mental disorder. So even if a depressed person, Dan, expresses the desire to die, it isn't what Dan really wants. He only wants to die because he has depression. And if he didn't have depression, he would want to live. Living is what Dan really wants. So mental illness literally seems to be mutually exclusive with rationality, at least rationality of suicide.

There are many glaring problems with this ever so widespread assumption. First at the strictest level, even if we grant that Dan wouldn't want to die if not depressed, that doesn't mean he can't still reasonably choose to die. Why? Because we could say the same about terminal illness. If someone about to die from cancer didn't have cancer she wouldn't want to die. So the idea is if the desire to die depends on something (x), then one shouldn't die because it's not a real desire, but just a manifestation of x. This could literally be said about anything. You don't really want to live. You only want to live because of your neurology which makes you desire to live. If you didn't have that instinctual drive, then you wouldn't want to live. It's not really your desire to live though. Or how about this? You don't really want a car. You only want it because you have a desire for easy transportation. But if you didn't have that desire, then you wouldn't want a car anymore. So don't get a car. All in all, the idea can be boiled down simply to "If you didn't want to die, you wouldn't want to die, so you can't really want to die." I agree with the first part, but the second conclusion seems to not follow well. And even the first part

is just a tautology. If you didn't have the desire for x, you wouldn't desire x. It's true, but hardly worth mentioning. A person also wouldn't desire death if they loved life and thought their desires could be fulfilled in life. But similarly a person wouldn't want to quit their job if they loved their job and thought that their career goals could be accomplished at their job. Now, I understand that unlike living and buying cars, the desire for death is abnormal. But just because something's abnormal doesn't automatically make it wrong. My point is that you can't talk about people's *actual* desires by pointing at things and saying if x (which leads to desire y) didn't exist, the person wouldn't desire y, therefore the person who has x can't *really* want y.

Those points aside, let's discuss rationality. What is it? Well, in the everyday sense, people are deemed irrational if they act in such a way that doesn't reflect on their beliefs and desires. I would be irrational if I wanted to go to China, knew that I would need a passport to go to China, but never applied for a passport. I would be even more irrational to get upset about never going to China, because I am the one who has the capability and knowledge of how to do it but I refuse to take the appropriate steps. My inaction is irrational because what I'm doing goes against my intended goal. This is a basic instrumental account of rationality to which I hold. I basically think a person is rational when she acts in such a way to achieve her desires and irrational when she acts against her desires.

I need to clarify some issues. A person has many desires, and those desires can be in conflict. A person can desire not to be hurt but desire to be in shape and muscular. In order to achieve the latter desire, there will be some pain in the form of aching muscles throughout the training process. Since not all desires are equal, especially in different aspects (the desire to not be hurt may be so when the pain isn't beneficial, necessary, or excessive), a person can act rationally against some desires for the sake of others. Also, one who takes my position must consider actions taken which are against the desired goal but this fact of inutility is not known by the agent. So in my China case, if I didn't know that I would need a passport to go to China, would I be irrational in not getting one? Honestly, I find myself torn. On the one hand, I am trying to do something in such a way that I won't be able to do it. I'd like to be able to say that that's irrational. I find others irrational when they do things which I perceive as detrimental to their goals, but I do so with my understanding. Perhaps it would be irrational, if they knew what I knew. But without knowing or even believing that the means by which they try to achieve



their goals are doomed to fail, I could also accept that they aren't being irrational per se. I might say that one is irrational for not trying to learn what one can about the subject so as to have good beliefs, but this gets into a Cliffordian expectation as presented in chapter 2. And as I have stated at the end of chapter 2, I think it's fine to let people not care about rationality (so long as caring about rationality isn't antithetical to their goals). What an interesting idea that one could be rational in not caring about rationality! At any rate, let us now return to the issue of suicide and the mentally ill (particularly Dan).

Can someone with a mental illness be rational? I definitely think so. And before you say no, let me ask you, "Can someone with a mental illness, even a severe one, rationally want to see a movie?" I do hope everyone would say yes to this question. Of course someone with a mental disorder could want to watch a movie. If a movie looks interesting, gets good reviews, and one's friends who have seen it recommend it, then naturally it is rational to want to watch it out of a desire to watch good movies. And it is rational to go see it. But what if the person is Dan, who has depression, and the movie is a sad movie? Dan wants to see the movie because he wants to watch a good movie that he can cry to. This movie appeals to him because of its dramatic themes. But if Dan didn't have depression, he wouldn't want to cry this evening, and thus he wouldn't want to go to the movie. Now I reiterate; can Dan rationally want to see this movie? If the answer is yes, I imagine that there is some incoherence in believing that Dan can rationally want to watch a movie because of his depression but not want to die because of his depression without question. If the answer is no, I hope the answer isn't simply to be able to consistently say that Dan can't rationally choose to die. Those who answered yes might have a defense for the distinction.

To be clear, the distinction can't be made from the fact that the desire to die is an effect of depression, whereas the desire to watch movies isn't, since in this case, the movie is desired because of Dan's depression. He didn't like sad movies until he became depressed. But the distinction might be made by the weight of the decision. Watching a movie isn't all too significant in the long run, but death is irreversible and has some very heavy consequences such as never having any more experiences (good or bad). This is probably a good distinction for most people. This way you can defend the rationality of a mentally ill person's decisions about everyday tasks. Unless I am mistaken, few people believe the mentally ill are incapable (or should be treated as if they were) of taking care of themselves in daily activities such as going to work or school, bathing, brushing their

teeth, buying groceries, watching movies, etc. I do understand that mental illnesses do affect these activities. Depression can leave a person without an appetite, can make them so lethargic as to not bathe for days (maybe weeks in some severe cases), neglect responsibilities at work or school, etc. Anxiety disorders can inhibit someone from applying to jobs out of fear of rejection or the interviewing process, even if they're unemployed and need a job. Yet, these are all negative cases. People with mental disorders who actively do these activities aren't deemed irrational for doing so. There are exceptions, such as OCD causing someone to wash their hands and do other hygiene rituals repeatedly to an extent that they don't have time for other activities that they wish they could do. But again, I think it's a matter of abnormality which is why these actions or inactions are deemed irrational and unreasonable. Regardless, returning to the distinction, the weight of the decision can explain why Dan can rationally want to watch a movie or get another fish (for his mini aquarium) but not choose to die, quit his job, or become a hermit.

However, this distinction isn't without problems. If Dan receives the opportunity of a promotion that moves him across the country, can he rationally do it? A person without a mental disorder can be said to make such a choice rationally by comparing the advantages and disadvantages of what it would mean to take or leave the offer. Maybe the promotion would not only make more money, but also make it so one wouldn't be working as often. There might be more benefits regarding health care and vacation time. This could be an opportunity to spend more time with one's family, particularly during the children's breaks to have family trips. And the money could go to future college savings. But one would be leaving one's friends, and forcing the children to leave their friends, too. And what about one's partner's job? All in all, whether or not one decides (hopefully in accordance with one's partner) to take the offer, it can be deemed a rational choice so long as the benefits are believed to outweigh the negatives (if that's what one is seeking).

Now let's put Dan in this situation. Dan has friends but feels bad for always bringing their mood down whenever they hang out. But he can't help it; he's depressed. If he could, he would stop hanging around them so as to no longer upset them, but doing so would upset them. Then one day he gets the job offer. He realizes it's an opportunity to leave his friends without hurting their feelings. And at his new location, he can try not to make new friends so he doesn't upset others close to him anymore. Moreover, he hates

his current state because it's so hot and humid half the year, and where he's going the weather is much milder. He used to like the heat but his depression has changed him into someone who now prefers mild weather. The money he'd be making would also relieve him of some of his financial stress. It appears to me at least, that to take the promotion offer is in the interests of Dan's desires. And even though he wants what he wants because of his depression, I would call him irrational for not taking the promotion. But more importantly is the fact that even though a job offer is a life changing occasion, that doesn't mean that Dan couldn't make a rational decision. I imagine many people would believe it is bad for Dan to isolate himself when he's depressed, even for the sake of not hurting others. Maybe this alone is enough to not let Dan take the offer. But what if that reason weren't there? The weather issue is still a result of his depression, yet I see no reason why that means he shouldn't seek a means to satisfy his current desire for mild weather.

One more example with Dan is that he has heart problems. He needs surgery, but there are fatal risks to the required surgery. Dan isn't in too much pain now, but without the surgery, he soon will be. But because he has depression, he is deemed incompetent to make an informed decision about whether he should go through with the surgery. A family member will have to do it. Should the family member let Dave tell her what he would do so that it is essentially Dan who gets to choose? He may have depression, but his heart problems were present before he got depressed. They have little to do with his depression, except that they may have helped caused it. If you don't think Dan should choose, then I ask you to consider why not. If it's because there's a chance of death in the surgery, then could Dan rationally choose to drive a car? If it's the significant chance of death in the surgery, then what if there were an equal chance of death by not getting the surgery? Does it even matter then? Don't forget other factors like pain, cost, loss of work, etc. The answer doesn't seem so clear to me that Dan's depression prevents him from any kind of informed decision, even one with fatal potential.

As I hope to have just demonstrated, even life changing decisions can still be made rationally with a mental illness. Even still, perhaps death simply isn't a decision one can rationally make when mentally ill. Let's say that in the job promotion scenario, Dan couldn't rationally choose to isolate himself. Maybe the issue is the nature of the action, not in its weight but in its value. If death and isolation are bad, then one can't rationally choose them. Unfortunately, I find both to be neutral. Even if my value theory

turned out to be wrong, I still find it highly unlikely that death would be bad in all cases. The same goes for isolation. It may be that isolation can be a good thing in certain situations and for certain people. And I don't see how the presence or absence of a mental illness should change whether or not one could arrive to the understanding that they are in such a circumstance. So this line of reasoning doesn't get very far.

If you are still unconvinced that people with mental illnesses can reason, then I ask you to find someone who has a mental illness, and the two of you can both take a few logic and reason tests together. I don't think most people are innately good at things like logic and reason (even after my philosophical investigations, I still don't consider myself very good). But I do suspect that on average, people with mental illnesses will tend to do just as poorly as someone without a mental illness, supposing neither does logic puzzles as a hobby or studies philosophy. This should show that mentally ill people can in fact reason just fine, as far as human reasoning is concerned.

Of course, it might be the case that mentally ill people can reason just fine in areas that aren't heavily affected by their mental illness. Let's take someone with schizophrenia, Susan, who has the delusion that her political beliefs if ever spoken on the phone or written online will get her arrested or even killed by the government, should the TSA find out. Susan can function normally with everything else, but sometimes has these persecution-related delusions. She even is very good at logic and reason. In fact, it is because of her skill in logic and reason that she is able to defend her beliefs of persecution so well that many times, others believe what she says without believing she has schizophrenia. Nevertheless, her delusions are a figment of her imagination and her reasons, once looked at with scrutiny, turn out to be false, even though if they were true, her arguments would be logically valid. As it turns out, she accidentally misspeaks on the phone, which she believes to be bugged. After hanging up, she realizes this and in her understanding, she will soon be captured and killed by the government. Not wanting to die by their hands, she considers that between being caught by the government and dying by her own hands she would prefer suicide. Now, Susan can be said to be able to reason just fine about everyday things, but not about suicide in this case. Even if we were to grant suicide to someone who was about to be captured and killed by an evil government, because in Susan's case this scenario is a delusion, she isn't justified to follow the same reasoning.

Or maybe she is justified. After all, her reasoning may be faulty, but we're granting that if her premises are all true, her conclusions follow. That means, she is reasonable in her conclusions on faulty beliefs. To say that someone cannot reason well if one's beliefs aren't true is a very dangerous road to go down. In the first two chapters, I staunchly opposed the idea that one can even have perfectly justified beliefs. I am extremely skeptical on a global level, and don't think absolute certainty is desirable or even plausible. Besides, people make decisions every day without having absolute certainty. In fact, I find a lot of people acting on false beliefs quite often, yet that doesn't mean they shouldn't act. It does however mean that they aren't acting with good reason. But does one have to have unflawed reasoning to be justified? I don't think so, as I sketched in chapter 2. I can have the false belief that it is safe for me to drive today in the rain and that it will take me fifteen minutes to drive to work. In reality, there is a traffic jam on my way to work, making me late. What's more, as I'm driving, the rain causes me to hydroplane and I crash into another car as I was making a turn in the middle of an intersection. I made the rational and reasonable decision based on faulty beliefs. Of course, the beliefs in my case are much more commonplace and much more inductively justified than Susan's extraordinary claims. Besides, we can always say (I do) that the larger the claim, the more evidence should be epistemically required to justify it and that more weighty actions (like suicide) require better justifications than mere everyday assumptions.

Before we put Susan's case aside, let's consider one more thing. She is acting based on her subjective reality. We all do that. Every person acts in accordance to the reality they experience. We must ask ourselves if we can then point at someone else's reality and claim that that person shouldn't act on it. I believe we can, but only if the other person is unable to demonstrate their reality to others. What I mean by that is this: let's say I find a blue turtle on the ground. I experience the turtle in my reality. I take a picture of the turtle and show it to friends. Knowing I am unskilled at editing pictures, they believe me. And even if they didn't, I could just show them where I found it, and we'll say that we all see the blue turtle together. My experience was extraordinary, but it was intersubjectively demonstrable. That means, it wasn't just my experience. But in Susan's case, two government officials enter her house to capture her. But from my perspective, it's just me and our mutual friend who have come over to talk as we had just discussed on the phone. My friend's experience is similar to my own. But Susan's experience is only like her own experience. What she perceives is all in her own head,

because her experience isn't and cannot be shared with others. It's only subjective and not intersubjective. (We must exclude incorrigible experiences and the like (see chapter 1) to avoid this kind of thinking from saying that my hunger isn't rational because you or anyone else can't feel my hunger like I can. We're talking about things that we agree should be demonstrable like the presence of two government officials.)

All in all, I don't think that Susan is justified in taking her life under the circumstances. But it's not because she has schizophrenia. If she killed herself not because she was worried about the government but because she's terminally ill and in a lot of pain with little to no hope of recovery, then her having schizophrenia is not even important or relevant. Yet, she couldn't apply for a physician assisted suicide program because of her schizophrenia even if it isn't a factor, which I find unreasonable and unnecessarily simplistic on the program's part. This is my problem. Of course mental illness could affect one's reasoning such that a person could irrationally and/or unreasonably choose to commit suicide. Even in my examples of Dan I put in little demonstrations of how his depression skewed his goals and reasons for doing things like taking a promotion or watching a movie. But it's not a necessary fact that if one has a mental illness, one cannot reason and act rationally, even with regards to suicide. It's not that simple, as unfortunate as that might seem (since it would appear that many would rather not have to take the time and effort to look at individual cases of mental illness scenarios to determine the level of rationality).

#### 9.4 The authenticity of mental illnesses

The next issue regarding the irrationality of suicide for the mentally ill is the idea of inauthenticity. We return to the notion that a person with a mental illness cannot want something if they only want it because of the mental illness. So Dan can't actually want to watch the movie or want to isolate himself or even want milder weather simply because all of those desires are brought on by his depression. I do wonder how people who say these things differentiate between authentic desires and inauthentic desires. If I want to see a movie because my friend said it was really good, then do I really want to see it? After all, if my friend didn't tell me that it was really good, then I wouldn't go see it. I didn't have the desire all by myself. It was caused by the presence of my friend. Should we then say that I'm being inauthentic by wanting to watch it? I hope not. How many ideas do you have that aren't caused by something that you don't control. I don't

particularly believe in free will, but even if I did, I still don't think there would be many (if any) authentic desires or beliefs at all! Much, if not all, of what we want and believe come from our experiences of the world around us which we don't control. I want to eat delicious foods, but if from the day of my birth I was only given foods that taste bad to me and I never got desensitized to the bad tastes and I never heard of food that tastes good, then I probably wouldn't have the desire to eat delicious things. So even that simple desire would be inauthentic, which is nonsense.

Looking past the utter lack of a coherent and well-developed theory of authentic vs. inauthentic desires (on the part of psychiatry and psychology-I have read philosophical writings on desires and authenticity, but philosophers aren't the (main) ones who call police on people or instruct others to do so), I do know of the common belief that people don't want authentically want to die, because people who do attempt to commit suicide often regret it upon survival (85-95% of suicide attempt survivors stay are alive 15 years after (Greenberg, 1974)). Aside from the fact that people do attempt suicide more than once which shows that a person can still want to die even with a mental illness under this line of reasoning, I find fault in the reasoning anyway. Another movie scenario (because I like movies, sorry for all the examples): I watch a trailer and am interested in watching the movie. I hear good things about it once it comes out, and a lot of my friends tell me it's worth seeing more than once in theaters. I'm really excited about it, not knowing what to expect other than a very enjoyable film. Alas, it turns out that I didn't enjoy the movie and feel like I wasted two hours of my time on an unenjoyable experience. I suppose that means I didn't really want to see the movie at all. Now maybe if I had an expectation of what the movie would be like but the movie didn't meet my expectations, then I did want to see the movie that I was expecting, just not the actual movie. Maybe suicide attempts can be like this latter case, where there's an expectation and the expectation is thwarted, so the desire for the actual thing wasn't real. I can appreciate this idea. People who expect to fall peacefully asleep after overdosing on sleeping pills only to wake up to their liver going in panic mode are certainly entitled to regret their decision. But this isn't what I think people mean by suicide attempters regret attempting. They regret almost dying, as they realize they are still alive and are happy to have survived what they suspected to be the end. Returning to the movie case, I specifically wrote that I didn't have expectations. I just didn't enjoy something I thought I would enjoy. Yet I find it hard to say that before watching it, I didn't *really* want to. This is like when someone says something hurtful and then says that they didn't mean it.

Of course they did. Even if it was a heated moment, at the time of saying it, the person said it with intention and desire to say it. Just because you end up regretting doing something doesn't mean you didn't want to do it beforehand. So I don't see how the presence of regret should mean that people don't really want to commit suicide. Can't they authentically want it, survive, and then regret it? I think so.

Although, I do agree that many people don't really want to commit suicide but do it anyway. Just as with the two movies idea (one was expected, the other the real thing), a person may desire to die out of a false expectation of death, such as reincarnation or heaven. But even someone who believes there is no afterlife may still commit suicide with faulty goals. If the person wants death, the state thereof, inexistence, and they believe death is a means to that end, which I find reasonable enough, especially death being a means of death, then they quite certainly are having an authentic desire, and suicide is a rational method. But if they want to feel relief, then suicide isn't going to help them. In death, there is no relief, for to feel relieved, one must be, but in death one is not. So if a person commits suicide with a goal in mind that death cannot give them such as a state of relief or peace of mind, then the person doesn't really want to die. What about the desire to rid oneself of the pains of one's life? Well, death can grant that, but death needn't be the only option. Let's say I get bitten by a venomous snake, and I reasonably and rationally want the pain to stop. I could kill myself, which would be a rational choice (only looking at this one single desire), but I could also go to the hospital, get an antidote and pain relievers (which would allow me to achieve other desires, too). Both are rational ways to get what one wants, but the latter allows for more fulfillments of desires than the former. So I suppose the best thing to say in this case is that I can rationally want to die but only less so than rationally want to get an antidote and pain relievers.

### 9.5 Treatability of depression (and more authenticity arguments)

Mental illnesses can be treated. Therefore, even if we grant that someone with a mental illness could rationally and reasonably want to die, they would be even more rational and reasonable to take treatment and live than to end their suffering through death. To be quite honest, while I know of the treatments for depression, I am very unfamiliar with treatments for other mental illnesses. So I'm afraid that I'm going to talk only of depression from here on out except when discussing psychiatry as a whole. I apologize, but I don't want to talk about these things without having adequate knowledge



of them and don't want to write about every single treatment for every mental illness in a single chapter. Furthermore, the arguments I will make against the treatments of depression may or may not be true for other mental illnesses, so it is important that I stick to what I am aware of.

Having said that, I find the premise that depression is treatable highly questionable. If you go search online right now, you'll find most sites stating the overall effectiveness of treatment. However, those statistics are more likely than not taken from data gathered through experiments which then get published in scientific journals. Also note that antidepressants specifically are regulated by the FDA. And it just so happens that I found a fascinating article published in the renowned peer-reviewed journal the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM). This article was a meta-study of the publication of FDA findings on the effectiveness of 12 drugs. It looked at 74 studies, 38 of which had positive results, and 36 negative. Of the 38 positive results, all but one was published. As for the negative results, 14 were published, 11 of which were presented in such a way as to appear positive (2008, Turner). This means that either the FDA and/or the journals publishing the findings of the FDA is leading the information to be skewed so as to make antidepressants be viewed as more effective than the actual empirical data would suggest. The effectiveness of a drug is determined by its effectiveness in comparison to a placebo. But as the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) states, the placebo effect has been demonstrated to be on par or slightly less effective than antidepressants in general and antidepressants have proven effective for some people (Insel, 2011). This is much tamer than some of the statistics you'll find on pop psychology websites and suicide prevention websites. I've seen effective statistics as high as in the 80's or 90's which just isn't likely. Even the doctors, psychiatrists, and therapists I've spoken to give effectiveness estimates of antidepressants much closer to 60% than 90%, which I find is far more likely. An analysis was published in *The World Journal of Biological Psychiatry* that 30% or more of treated patients had persistent residual symptoms (Silva and Larach, 2000).

Of course, there are other treatments such as therapy (psychotherapy, cognitive therapy, behavioral therapy, etc.) which usually accompanies drug treatment and in some cases, shock therapy. But since shock therapy is usually reserved for serious cases after drugs have been ineffective, I choose not to discuss it. As for the antidepressants, I have some interesting arguments against prescribing them in some cases. Some

antidepressants, such as TCAs can lead to sexual dysfunction. It's interesting, because let's say someone gets depressed after years of not having a relationship and begins to feel hopeless, down, lethargic, restless, has a loss of appetite and even feels suicidal for a few weeks. This person gets treated but the first few treatments don't work. Eventually after months of trying various drugs, they get put on a TCA which is effective. Meanwhile the person finally finds a partner and gets into a serious long-term relationship. Unfortunately, the TCA leaves them sexually dysfunctional, thereby disrupting a major part of the person's life. In fact, it disrupts the very part of life that led to depression in the first place. Such an ironic circumstance isn't common, I would imagine, but if it does happen even rarely among the many thousands of people taking antidepressants in America alone, I would find that such treatment is not a good idea even if effective. But sexual dysfunction is actually common enough to hear about it from people who are on various antidepressants, so even if it's not the very issue that led to depression, it may be a disruption to an important part of one's life, which you should remember for later.

Another problem is with the antidepressants which have mood stabilization for a general effect. So the problem antidepressants are meant to fix is depression. Just looking at the emotional sides of depression such as feelings of hopelessness, loss of interest or enjoyment in activities, despair, pervasive pessimism, low self-esteem, guilt, etc., I will grant that mood stabilization is effective as a solution. Just as with death being neutral vs a life of pain, neutral emotions may well be deemed better than negative ones. However, the reason why these feelings of depression are viewed negatively in the first place is because they are contrary to the positive ones. When a loved one has depression, you don't hope for the loved one to not feel anything at all, you want them to feel good. But mood stabilizers can in some people make it so that they neither feel good or bad about most things. And the feelings they do have are much weaker. Think of a movie that is neither all that spectacular nor all too bad. It wasn't enjoyable to watch, but it wasn't regretful either. When you ask yourself how you feel about the movie, it is understandable to have very weak opinions on it. But imagine having those kinds of feelings towards your favorite movie. Because I've never taken a drug that stabilized my mood this way and have only heard other people's experiences, I can't say to what extent the stabilization does ever reach. However, if I knew a drug I took would make it so I felt little to nothing at all, I would myself take it. This is because I don't particularly like my emotions, as I will discuss next chapter. But I can't imagine most people would want such a life. It may not be a bad life, but it wouldn't be a good life either. At least, you

couldn't experience and appreciate it as a good life even if it were. It would be a more or less neutral life, which may still be preferable to death depending on the framework of the constitution of a good life. Yet for all that, I remain skeptical as to whether these drugs should be administered without very serious consideration as opposed to just prescribing them like allergy medication as it is currently done in the United States in my view.

I find so much irony with the idea of mood changing antidepressants. The argument that someone with a mental illness can't authentically desire death, therefore can't rationally choose suicide is what pushes people to believe that the mentally ill need to be treated in the first place. But if the mentally ill person is living inauthentically because of the mental illness, then how is it coherent to say that the medicated patient can live authentically in the presence of the medication? It can't. Antidepressants, even when effective, do not bring out the "true" personhood. They have very specific neurological functions regarding neurotransmitters in the brain regarding the amount released, the time during which they can travel between neurons, the inhibition of the reuptake of neurotransmitters, etc. And I find no good reason to believe that you are more authentically yourself when these processes are as they are when being medicated as opposed to how they are without medication. The point remains that the initial reason for treatment contradicts the result of the treatment. If we say that it wasn't Dan's decision to take the job offer, it was depressive Dan's decision, the depression caused him to think and act the way he did, then we should say it wasn't Dan's decision to stay where he was to be with his friends, it was medicated Dan's decision, the medication caused him to think and act the way he did. So if inauthenticity is enough to dictate that a mentally ill person cannot be rational to die (or do much of anything for that matter), then inauthenticity should be enough to claim that a medicated mentally ill person cannot be rational in their decisions, even perhaps the decision to keep living. Of course, almost everyone would disagree with this idea, but I think we should be consistent. You can't claim that someone is being authentic or inauthentic only because they arrive to conclusions you do or don't agree with, respectively. If a medicated person lives, that person is deemed rational, since we agree that the person should live. If a mentally ill person commits suicide, that person is deemed irrational, since we disagree that the person should die. But rationality isn't a matter of the conclusion, but a matter of the goal and means to those goals.

Well, I suppose it does depend on one's views on rationality. There are some who claim that it cannot be rational to desire certain goals, suicide or death being two examples. Mill's argument in the last chapter could be said to follow this kind of thinking by interpreting him as saying that one cannot rationally choose to give up freedom. But I don't see much difference between saying one cannot rationally desire death and one cannot rationally desire ice-cream. If I hate ice-cream with a passion, then it may well be that I myself cannot imagine how someone could desire such an awful tasting thing, yet that doesn't mean people don't rationally desire ice-cream. As for death and suicide, because so many people detest death, with some reason and rationality for what it's worth, that doesn't mean that the few who do cannot be rational and reasonable in doing so. Desirability is a value judgement, so just as in chapter 7, I find there to be no restrictions on how we may attribute values other than the ones imposed on us by our nature (i.e. neurology which causes our desires and feelings which is itself affected by other factors including others around us).

What people want is to have an asymmetry of authenticity between having a mental illness which causes certain beliefs and desires and taking medication which causes certain beliefs and desires such that the former is inauthentic and the latter is authentic. I believe that if the former is inauthentic, then the latter is inauthentic. This isn't necessarily the case, which I'll come back to later in order to describe how this desired asymmetry might be achievable. For now, allow me to actually reverse the asymmetry. Let us suppose that Trixie is someone with a mental illness may have it genetically (it's not so certain this is the case, but mental illnesses have been known to run in families, though this could be environmentally caused and not genetically). We'll also suppose that Trixie is born with the neurology of a depressed brain, and so her entire life she is depressed. In such a hypothetical case, I find it near impossible to talk about an "authentic non-depressed" Trixie. What is the 'real' Trixie like? You might say she's not depressed, but how is that Trixie any realer than the one that's been living this whole time? Trixie with depression is the one everyone knows. That's the Trixie her parents raised and whom her spouse fell in love with. Nobody even knows the non-depressed Trixie. That Trixie has never even existed, so it's hard to see how we might call that Trixie more genuine than the depressed Trixie. That is, unless we axiomatically claim that mental illness cannot be an authentic part of one's self. If that's the case, then Trixie has never been her true self since her depression has prevented her true self from ever manifesting since birth. (As it turns out, after making this argument I found a

similar one. Not wanting to plagiarize in retrospect, I will say that Catherine E. Bonn stated how it might be meaningless to have a “real self” which isn’t suicidal if one has been suicidal all one’s life (Bonn, 45).

Aside from my disdain for these kinds of foundationalist axioms (chapter 1) whereby the axiom isn’t arrived to by inference of induction, abduction, or the like but rather just a presupposed brute fact, I find this to be problematic on a theory of self standpoint. We are all aware that people have varying personalities of many different traits. Yet I find people like to talk about who they really are deep down as opposed to how they behave and are on the outside. The idea is that people have superficial personality traits which aren’t a part of their true selves and deep personality traits which are a part of their true selves. This is very sensible at face value. Imagine someone who is deviant and cunning. In order to use people, he masks himself under a façade of a well-meaning imbecile who messes things up even though he tries to please others. With the disguise of personality, the cunning man is able to trick people into doing things for him and excuse his misbehaviors. And from a perspective such as ours where we can see both sides, the cunning and the imbecilic, we might say the cunning is his true self but the imbecilic isn’t. I find this analysis incomplete. It overlooks the connection between the two sides. It is in his cunning and deviant nature that leads him to create a façade. Therefore he is the kind of person who manipulates people with façades. This means his façade is also a part of his manipulative nature, which means that his so called “inauthentic self” is actually a part of his so called “real” self. The entirety of his personality is real.

Another issue with the general idea of differentiating authentic and inauthentic personalities is that people like to abuse the analyses. Someone who cares a lot and tries to be friendly may have very little patience and a short temper. Indeed this person is prone to yell and blow up on others when helping them if the others do something irritating like not follow instructions. I have found that a lot of people who have undesirable qualities like short tempers have a tendency to say that their good qualities like helpfulness are a part of their true selves whereas negative qualities like having a short temper aren’t. Yet, it’s far rarer to find a positive quality that one acts upon often be denied as a part of one’s personality, except for maybe modesty. Now these qualities must be something that one often acts upon. I wouldn’t say I’m generous because it wouldn’t be easy to point at my behavior and say I’m often generous. Similarly, I would

deny being short tempered because I rarely get angry (especially toward others). But if I denied being respectful because respect is just something I give to others superficially but deep down I hate humanity with a passion, I would be mischaracterizing myself. I am a misanthrope for sure, but because I hate inflicting harm on others, I do my best to be respectful. If I said that my frequent arrogance is just a superficial trait and not authentic of me because I'm skeptical through and through, then that would be another mischaracterization. While I am skeptical, for me to deny my arrogance which is easily visible to those with whom I interact over a long period time simply because I don't want to admit that I'm arrogant is not to actually demonstrate that arrogance isn't a true part of my personhood. Indeed, when you describe yourself, your justifications for your descriptions lie not in how you would ideally like to be, but in how you are in your thoughts as well as behaviors. It baffles me how little people use negatives to describe themselves despite the fact that they readily admit they aren't perfect. (I understand that one can have only good qualities and still be imperfect, since maybe they aren't as good as they can be, but people would just as readily admit to having some bad qualities, though they rarely consider them). It seems to me that people have a bias to attributing good personality traits to their true selves, but not negative ones. I'm not saying that if you get angry a few times a year, that means you're an angry person. Similarly if you only are charitable a few times a year, you are not a charitable person. If we want to have a serious discussion of authentic selves, then regularly occurring behaviors must be taken into account with seriousness. You can't just pick and choose what common behaviors are a part of the authentic you and which ones aren't. One might even say that to do so is inauthentic, haha. Regarding mental illness, people will automatically claim it cannot be an authentic part of you because of the negative values given to the mental illnesses, to my understanding. But I have yet to find any actual defense of saying that a mental illness isn't an actual part of one's self. The closest is to say that other physical problems like blindness aren't part of one's personality. But that's because sight isn't considered a personality trait. If it were, I would say blindness is a part of one's personality. Mental illnesses actually affect personality though, and in so doing I believe they warrant the categorization into personality trait just as much as the effects of psychiatric drugs do.

Going back to Trixie, let us tweak the story. Now Trixie didn't have depression until about the age of 17. No devastating event in particular caused the onset of her depression. It's simply that during puberty as her brain was changing, it changed in such a way that she then had a depressed brain. In this scenario, we can look at the person

Trixie used to be before depression and say that that is the real Trixie as opposed to the current depressed Trixie. Is it though? If instead of depression she learned about genetics and even though her entire life she wanted to be an artist, she now is determined to be a geneticist, I doubt most would say that this new scientific Trixie is any less authentic than the old artistic Trixie. It all comes down to how we want to view personality in people who change, I suppose. Personally, I believe people can change incrementally over time, and small changes eventually lead to large disparities between who one is one decade and who one used to be or will be another decade. But even after large changes, very rarely if ever do I think someone is no longer themselves. This might be more realistic if we lived hundreds, or thousands, or billions of years, but in the average less than a century lifetime we humans have, to change so drastically that you share little to nothing with a previous state of yourself (here this “yourself” refers to the general package of your body that others would point and refer to you by the same name as opposed to who you are since we’re talking about having two different personhoods) is unlikely at best.

Maybe the positive bias is at work here again. We want to accept that a scientific Trixie is authentic but not a depressed Trixie because of the connotations of both. I think this is the case, because I would bet that an anti-science family would look at the scientific Trixie and say things like, “What happened to you? You’re not the same Trixie we know. You aren’t the real Trixie. Etc.” I think this is possible because it happens in religious families when someone becomes agnostic and/or atheistic as well as in anti-LGBT families when someone turns out to be LGBT. So we see that depressed Trixie isn’t the real Trixie because she isn’t a natural continuation of her persisting selfhood but because people are unwilling to attribute any mental illness as authentically a part of one’s self completely out of hand without question. In other words, depressed Trixie is still the real Trixie, people just don’t want to admit it because they are biased in favor of positive personalities and mental illnesses are deemed negative.

Recall that the last few points have all been footnotes to the idea that antidepressants should be deemed as making the person inauthentic. While I will say that mental illnesses are authentic, I still believe in the asymmetry. You see, mental illnesses happen due to natural changes in one’s neurology. Even onsets of a mental illness in response to a life event (PTSD is a mental illness based on such cases) are natural in the same way that traveling to the Amazon Rainforest and enjoying one’s trip

with a sense of a greater enhancement of life can be a natural neurological response. But giving artificially made drugs to alter the way one thinks is not so readily natural. Similarly, a mental illness wouldn't be natural if it were caused by an administered drug given to induce the illness. If I have a depression pill, and you take one every day for weeks and then get depressed, your depression isn't natural. This is of course dependent on how we define natural. In this paragraph, I'm talking about natural meaning inartificial. One might say that a mental illness isn't natural because it's not the way humans are meant to function. Aside from the idea that our bodies have an intended function as if we were designed, I have misgivings of this view. Deafness could also be said to be unnatural in this way, yet I doubt many would claim that deaf people are unnatural. Further, if we accept out of hand that mental illness diagnoses are always 100% accurate and there are no more or no fewer cases of people with a mental illness, then in 2014 18.1% of adults in the United States had some sort of mental illness according to the DSM-IV ([nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)). Is it really fair to say that something almost one in every five people have is unnatural? I think not.

But to be honest, I don't care too much about whether mental illnesses or the effects of antidepressants are natural. I'm not trying to make an appeal to nature here. Even if something is unnatural, that doesn't make it bad. So what is it about mental illnesses, specifically depression that is so bad that it needs to be treated if not for its unnaturalness?

## 9.6 Problems of psychiatry

Well let's use something like blindness again as an analogy. Blindness can be said to be bad because it inhibits sight, which causes struggle in everyday life and is detrimental to survival. As for survivability, just because organisms do reproduce and adapt in response to issues concerning survival, I don't see why anything which hinders survival is automatically bad. More importantly is the fact that blindness can impede on one's life. Something is bad for you if it has a negative impact on you. In the case of blindness, you aren't able to take in and process the information people who see can through sight which is a major way in which most people gather information. As for depression, it is said to be bad because it can take away from the enjoyment of life, it can give excessive and pervasive feelings of hopelessness, guilt, sadness, regret, restlessness,



irritability, lethargy, apathy, loss of appetite, over-appetite, tiredness, etc. These are all things we generally agree on to be bad. So depression is bad and should be treated.

What I just listed above was symptoms of depression, not depression itself. More importantly, treatment only treats the symptoms and not the actual illness. If I take medicine for coughing, congestion, sore throat, and fever while I have the flu, my symptoms may be gone, but my body is no less infected. You didn't fix the problem, just covered it up. The same holds true for depression. In many cases, depression starts after some event which triggers depression. Such an event could be loss of a loved one, a serious illness or injury, moving to a new location, a breakup, a stressful environment like a new job, financial troubles etc. But antidepressants don't treat whatever's causing you to be depressed. The idea behind medication along with therapy is that the medication permits your brain to behave more neuronormally while the therapy helps you to deal with the actual problem. While this does indeed work and helps some people, if the problem isn't one that's just going to away with a new perspective, then the patient isn't getting helped. If financial troubles are causing me stress, spending hundreds of dollars on therapy, psychiatrist visits, and drugs are not going to help me out. The therapy might help me be more frugal, and the drugs might make it so I'm not stressed out anymore, all the while my debt isn't going anywhere, my bills are near due, and I can't find a better paying job. On top of that, I'm still depressed because even with symptoms gone, my depressive brain isn't treated!

But it's not the caregivers' fault. They are doing their best with what they have to work with. That's okay. The problem is that treating symptoms is the only measure that can be taken, because there is no depression, scientifically speaking on a physiological. The way one is supposed to get diagnosed with major depressive disorder according to the DSM-IV is to meet five of the nine criteria which have persisted for two weeks as a difference from one's baseline and have impaired regular functioning in one's life. The nine criteria are as follows: depressed mood or irritability, reduced interest and/or pleasure in activities, significant changes to weight and/or appetite, significant changes to sleep, significant psychomotor agitation or retardation, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or guilt, problems with concentration, and suicidality (APA, 356).

One problem with this is how psychiatrists don't even follow the guidelines of the diagnosis. I was originally diagnosed with only three symptoms. And while suicidal thoughts and ideation are said to not necessarily equate to depression, some psychiatrists do diagnose depression on this one criterion alone! The ridiculousness of this notion hits hard when one considers the following: suicidal thoughts means depression, depression means mental illness, mental illness means incompetence, incompetence means impossibility of rationality, impossibility of rationality means no rational suicide. So essentially, coming to the conclusion of suicide means one is depressed and therefore one can't possibly rationally choose suicide. In other words, suicide is a conclusion which cannot possibly be justified rationally. This idea that no reasoning can justify a conclusion is dogmatic and unreasonable itself. Indeed as Bonn put it, "...therefore, stating that depression and suicide are linked (with depression presumably causing suicide) can be circular logic since they are usually linked by definition...(Bonn, 43)." It also leads to absurdities like preventing terminally ill patients with mental illnesses from being accepted in physician assisted suicide programs, even if the cause of their mental illness is the terminal illness! I for one find it reasonable to feel hopeless, lethargic, irritable, sad, and have a loss of appetite in light of the fact that one's body is literally deteriorating! Yet because of the poor reasoning of psychiatry, a person is deemed incompetent for feeling depressed even while dying in a painful, depressing way.

But there's another larger problem with all of this; even though I agree with the general consensus of the psychiatric community that depression is a neurobiological phenomenon, they don't have any neurobiological definition. This is very problematic indeed. Even if we were to accept that a depressed brain is just a brain with these symptoms, these symptoms are largely not biologically based, but psychologically based. The appetite or weight change criterion is one that does have much scientific literature on how it functions regarding the neurotransmitters which deal with hunger. Otherwise, what is being treated isn't the actual depressed brain but the behaviors the depressed brain leads to. Without any firm basis for the neurology of depression, treating it even effectively simply isn't good enough. Giving pain killers to someone with a ruptured appendix doesn't help them. And because there is no neurological way to verify that someone is depressed, then I wonder how one could ever look at a treated person and claim they are or are no longer depressed. Behaviors are one thing, but you couldn't actually run tests to find out like you could if someone is having an ulcer. The reason this

is such a significant shortcoming on the part of psychiatry is that it isn't treating the supposed illness but behaviors. It's a means to control certain behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts and not a biological malformation. If people wish to undergo treatment knowing this, so be it. But psychiatric medication is forced involuntarily on people.

So it comes down to an issue of paternalism. I believe neurology, psychiatry, and psychology are all very young sciences. And the nature of the human brain and its relation to what we call the mind and personality is still vastly unknown due to the extremely large number of factors involved making controlling for variables in experiments a difficult task indeed. But due to the weaknesses in these sciences, I don't find it appropriate to use their methods so staunchly as if they were as well-known as Newtonian physics. My idea is that if you yourself are not fully justified in your own methods, then to force those methods on others is to do so unjustifiably. Now, I understand that the nature of mental illnesses (if they even deserve to be called illnesses yet under the current diagnoses) can lead to some very large issues such as suicide and harming others as well as oneself. In light of this, perhaps drastic measures are to be taken even with uncertainty to ensure the well-being of the patient and of others. While I agree, I would like to say that the level of uncertainty is enough that while modern psychiatric treatment is permissible in voluntary and even in some non-voluntary cases, I maintain that exceptions should be made with the understanding that since there is so much uncertainty, then should a case come up, the general psychiatric rules which are being treated like dogmas ought not to be followed. For example, since we don't have a good scientific understanding of depression, maybe we shouldn't ban all depressed people with terminal illnesses from undergoing physician assisted suicide programs. And while in general, people with mental illnesses do have illogical and irrational tendencies, should a patient be found not to have these tendencies, the patient should be treated as competent as someone without a mental illness.

But if we are going to prescribe psychiatric medication to fix behaviors and thoughts which we deem negative like having low self-esteem and no longer finding enjoyment in things, then what about other behaviors and thoughts we generally agree are negative? Most people despise cruelty, short-temper, impatience, meanness, and selfishness. So maybe we should give drugs to fix those qualities. Or what about unreasonableness or illogicalness? Wouldn't it be the most reasonable thing to do to give them whatever drugs can treat that? And before you disagree with me on the grounds

that psychiatric drugs are there to treat symptoms which disrupt daily life, I ask you to consider how being a mean, impatient, irrational person could easily be construed as having a significant negative impact on a person's life. Indeed, such a person is harming themselves by not being as good of a person as they could be. Their whole life's net value is diminished by these qualities. Moreover, just as a depressed person loses out on enjoyment, a mean person loses out on the greatness of kindness to others. If we really use the same methodologies as psychiatrists, then everyone should be taking some sort of medication to fix themselves, but that sounds like some sort of science-fiction nightmare to me. I hope to have made it clear that there are some serious problems within the psychiatric method built on young scientific understanding.

Do I think anyone should be treated under the current system? Yes, I do, actually. I am not advocating we ditch psychiatry. I am a strong supporter of the sciences. I respect science enough to treat it as ungrounded when the ideas and methodologies (and ethics) are poorly constructed and applied. I won't however neglect the evidence of the effectiveness of psychiatric medication. I do believe that some people can get the help they need and/or want by having a period of time to think and manage their lives while their symptoms aren't present. I believe therapy can be beneficial depending on the type of therapy and on the situation and people involved. But sometimes the methods aren't enough. A TCA which makes a person who's struggling with depression because of relationship issues isn't going to help. A person who can't afford the very cost-ineffective treatments and processes of getting treated won't be helped by being forced to have such financial burdens.

And I don't believe that psychiatry has the authority (at least not yet) to force someone to get treated who doesn't want it. Most people say that the patient may not want treatment due to stigma or worse, due to the mental illness itself. So what? Psychiatry doesn't even know what's supposedly wrong with the person aside from behaviors which are themselves stigmatized by psychiatry. How could a psychiatrist enforce treatment? But, as I've been told, one wouldn't forego other treatments which aren't related to mental illnesses. Oh yes they do! People refuse treatment for cost, for religious purposes, in order to avoid potential undesirable side-effects, among other reasons. Surgeries can be refused so that the person wouldn't have to miss work. Deaf people can refuse treatment for their deafness and I imagine if blindness had a cure, some blind people would too. One can have a certain kind of pride in themselves for

living in spite of what others declare to be a disadvantage. If I have the right to refuse other medical problems, the presence of a mental illness should not be enough to deem me incompetent to make a similar decision in regards to treating the mental illness. Medical professionals should find a way to more objectively test a person's level of competence before assuming that they aren't competent. Should a well-established test of competency be failed, then I would be more inclined to agree that one may be forced to be treated. As it stands, the dogma that a mentally ill person is incompetent by virtue of having a mental illness is mistaken and needs to be forsaken.

### 9.7 In favor of rational suicide

Up until now I have only fought against reasons why a person with a mental illness shouldn't ever commit suicide. I haven't actually said much on arguments in favor of a mentally ill person committing suicide. I will now continue to make progress in the main goal of this chapter. That is, to give stronger and stronger arguments for the right of suicide.

If we grant my conclusions that at least sometimes a person with a mental illness can make rational choices, can be authentic, and don't always have the necessary treatment options for their specific cases or may reasonably desire to forego treatment altogether, then we are left with treating a person with such circumstances as someone who struggles in life and prefers to die. There are people for whom all available treatments do not work. In these cases, such a person belongs in the group of people with a non-curable illness who reasonably wish to die. Depending on the mental illness, it can either be debilitating or not, which may strengthen or weaken the person's choice for death. And even if they can be treated, they may not want to undergo treatment for various acceptable reasons. All in all, so long as the person has the capacity to demonstrate reason and rationality, such a person should be deemed able to make an informed decision on the matter of suicide, including the ability to compare the advantages and disadvantages between life and death with a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of both.

The next group is everyone. Yes, even those who don't have a persistent illness which detracts from their life may well have the ability to rationally choose to die over living. This can be because even without a serious ailment, life can be bad enough that to die would be preferable. Even without looking at extremely horrible circumstances like

torture, sexual abuse, and slavery, life isn't known for being easy. It's not unimaginable that someone might not desire a life of working, a life of dealing with humans, a life of supporting oneself in isolation outside of society, a life of dealing with the problems in society, etc. It may just be a simple disdain of life. And if this scorn of life is more influential than one's desires which can only be fulfilled in life, then I would suggest one has reason to act on the strongest desire. This kind of person may be even more reasonable and rational if she finds that it is unreasonable to believe that her life has meaning, and between living a meaningless life and not existing, she would prefer the latter. Or perhaps she wants to die simply to become a non-observer of the universe, as she disdains the phenomenological constraints on her ability to understand anything objectively. What I am advocating for here is the idea that there may be people who under their philosophical frameworks can desire death with reason and rationality insofar as they also have the desires to push them in the direction of death. Before dying, I would hope that any person who is willing to die under philosophical pretenses would wait long enough to investigate the relevant subjects and the arguments dealing therewith so as not to act too hastily. And if they are not permitted to commit suicide, I would hope even more that the psychiatrists and/or law enforcements preventing them from taking their lives can best them in argumentation. If not, then it would appear there isn't good enough reason not to let them die. To ban something without sufficient reason is to be unreasonable, and I for one don't think we should be in the business of being unreasonable if we are going to try to force others to live as we would like them to live.

## 9.8 The right to die

For all that, maybe even non-philosophical people and indeed even people who commit suicide with false beliefs and irrationality should still be able to commit suicide. I believe that one has the right to die. In fact, I believe it is a fundamental human right. There are several reasons for this.

To start, let us look at the right to life which most of us agree is a fundamental right. If we have the right to live, then the corollary ought to be true that we have the right not to live. This notion has to do with the understanding of what a right is. Forgive me here, for I am not well-versed in political philosophy, thus my ideas are going to be very simplistic and likely more wrought with problems than my other idea in this book. Nevertheless, it is in my understanding of rights that to have a right is to say that one

may exercise one's will in such a way to choose to act or not act on the promise given by the right. Thus the right to drive gives me the capacity to choose to drive. Or I might choose to not drive. In the United States, I have the right to vote. That gives me the ability to vote as well as the ability to not vote. Here's an interesting comparison. In some countries, voting is obligatory. People in such countries can get fined, go to court, or even go to jail for not voting. I don't think it's accurate to say they have the right to vote so much as the obligation to vote. I believe a right gives people an option. A right to something is not an obligation to that something. Therefore the right to life gives an option to live or not to live. (I should note that I am talking specifically on what I might call "positive rights." Conversely a "negative right" such as the right to not be robbed or killed or have one's rights infringed on do not deal with choices but are still called rights. Or maybe I'm just talking about civil rights. I don't know to be honest.)

But perhaps this is too simplistic. Driving cars and voting might be said to be neutral in moral value, but life is value loaded, as one person once argued against me. Well, I don't think voting is so value empty since it helps govern what kind of laws are to be passed in the future years to come during the elect official's term (even if laws themselves aren't based on morality). But maybe that just means voting, like life, being value loaded, should be obligatory. However, I don't think rights are set in place to dictate morality. I understand some philosophers believe laws are grounded in morality, but I doubt this heavily. Some laws allow for immorality. Some moral activities are illegal. And it really depends on the moral framework under which one is working. Still, we might consider life not morally value loaded but just otherwise value loaded. Though I have already written in chapter 7 how value isn't inherent and life is to be valued based on the individual who attributes value to it, I suppose a right could be written with the intention of forcing the attribution of value to something like life. And indeed, looking at various laws, it would appear that states and laws do uphold certain values.

One such value, however, is freedom. Freedom is interesting, because it isn't obvious that freedom in its greatest form permits all actions. If I act savagely, then I might be deemed less free than one who controls herself with reason. Honestly, I'm not sure what the greatest form of freedom is like or should be like. Though as for legal issues, I do imagine that freedoms permit actions that are undergone in irrationality and unreasonableness. I can vote even if I am uninformed. I can choose to not drive a car even if it is in my interests to drive. As for life and death, it isn't readily clear that

freedom should trump the value of life. After all, one cannot murder. But in the case of murder other values are involved, namely the well-being of another, non-interference, and the right of autonomy (of the other) to name a few. With murder, it's someone else who is legally being harmed. I have the right to drive my own car, but if I drive someone else's without permission, I'm stealing. I have the right to destroy my belongings on my property (so long as I'm not making a public hazard), but destroying others' property is vandalism. This line of reasoning leads to the idea that I own myself and therefore can kill myself, even if I cannot kill another. If I can do with my property as I wish, so too should I have the same right to do away with my body if I so see fit.

There are many theoretical and practical problems with the idea of self-ownership. Having looked at a few of them (but not going into any of them), I must admit that I am discouraged in believing that we should be treated as having full rights to ourselves at all times in all ways such that any infringement should be illegal. But for all that, I find we at least appear to be the owners of our bodies (maybe the appearances are wrong). We have the freedom to where our bodies go, what they do (to a fair extent), what nutrients we feed them (maybe not if we are poisoning ourselves), etc. We determine legally the fate of our bodies to a large extent. Moreover, we can cut and dye our hair, shave, clip our nails, get tattoos, cut off parts of our body (circumcision), etc. without it being vandalism. Pro-choice advocates claim (I think rightly so) that a woman has the right to her own body. It might be a good question to ask who does own us if we do not own ourselves? Maybe nobody. But it's hard to see how we can do so much to our bodies and ourselves without having some sort of ownership. And the very notion of self-determination presupposes some form of self-ownership, I think. How could I determine things for something I do not have rights over? All in all, while I'm not a stark proponent of libertarian self-ownership, I do believe some form of self-ownership correctly describes our relation to ourselves legally and metaphysically.

In addition, I defend the right to die on the grounds of a social contract. As stated in the previous chapter, we enter into society without consent. I therefore demand that we be given a means to exercise our non-consent to life if we so desire. It is unjust to hold someone to a social contract which one was put into without informed consent. It would be unjust to hire someone for a job they did not consent to and prevent them from quitting. Each decade more and more people begin to realize the injustice of forcing a



woman to birth a child, particularly if the pregnancy was caused by non-consensual sex. And so I believe that society owes at the very least the option to choose not to live.

And as it would happen, neither death nor suicide nor self-harm is illegal where I live. Technically even attempted suicide isn't illegal. Yet for some reason, suicide and attempted suicide are treated as though they were indeed crimes. For even having a plan to commit suicide, one can be forcibly taken into custody (though not arrested), put on trial in a court of law, be detained involuntarily at a mental hospital for days or even weeks where one is stripped of one's liberty and other rights, and be put on special watch as if on parole. While not technically a crime since its "civil commitment", the suicidal person is treated like a criminal, except unlike a criminal, the suicidal person is deemed unquestionably incompetent. I might just be ignorant on the matter, but neither I nor anyone else has been able to tell me of another action which isn't illegal but which you can be forced to be reviewed in a court of law. In some states, it is in a person's rights to call the police on someone whom the caller believes to have suicidal thoughts or ideation. To my knowledge, you cannot call the police on me if I tell you that sometimes I feel like stealing when in a store even though I have no plans of stealing anything. Not only is suicide not illegal unlike theft, but even just talking about thinking of suicide is treated like a crime, and a thought crime at that! I haven't the time to go much further into involuntary commitment, but I highly recommend Stephen Morse's "A Preference for Liberty: The Case against Involuntary Commitment of the Mentally Disordered (1982)." It is outdated and makes some very questionable claims and ideas in my opinion, but is a good read for anyone interested in some well-made arguments against involuntary hospitalization and how the mentally ill are socially and legally stigmatized, mistreated, and discriminated against. (you can find a link in the bibliography.)

Then there are mental hospitals. People have claimed rape, abuse, harassment, neglect, and other awful allegations of other patients or even of the staff. Now, I don't imagine every claim is true. It might even be that few are true. But even if we grant that half are true, then when you go or get put into a mental hospital, you can't be sure if you'll be going to one that is safe or extremely harmful to you. As for the costs, mental hospitals tend to cost thousands of dollars per night. So if you are involuntarily detained without proper insurance for two full weeks, you can expect to pay what is more or less a fine of over \$70,000 at around an average price of \$5000 per night. Imagine someone who is suicidal for financial reasons. Giving them that fine is like burning a village to

prevent damage from an oncoming hurricane. Congratulations, you saved their life and gave them a sense of purpose: to pay that huge bill over their entire working life so that someone they care about doesn't have to pay for it themselves!

I've spoken to many suicidal people and have read many suicidal people's comments online. One very common idea in the suicidal person is that they feel unloved. Many times a suicidal person believes that if they were to die, nobody would miss them because nobody cares about them. But unless you have no one with whom you interact regularly and have no friends, family, or even acquaintances, that almost certainly isn't the case. But this misunderstanding can be resolved by talking so that the suicidal person can express themselves, and the listener can demonstrate that they do really care and clear up such misconceptions in a helpful and sympathetic (or even empathetic) manner. This is a nice thought. But how awful would it feel if instead of telling the suicidal person that you do care and demonstrating it, you left saying you'd come back shortly. Once in another room, you call the police on your loved one, getting them essentially arrested and stripped of their rights because they entrusted their feelings to you in confidence. I understand that from your perspective, getting them the help you think they need even forcibly is a way to show you care. But have some sympathy, I beg of you. Doing something like that would understandably lead to feelings of betrayal. And wouldn't it feel as though you don't care enough about me to even talk? Instead it's as if you were pushing me onto someone else to be their problem and not yours. I for one would feel like I made a mistake in confiding in you and would probably lose my trust in you. (Luckily this has never happened to me.) All in all, I don't find that people are acting so reasonably themselves when they call the police on someone in such a fragile state. Sometimes more than talking would be needed, but too often I think people aren't willing to talk enough.

But maybe people have the right or duty to paternalism in stopping someone from dying even at the cost of reason, even at the cost of the person losing their rights and getting into lifelong debt. After all at least they're still alive. But this presupposes that any life is good. More importantly, it goes against a fundamental human right. Yet I do agree that some form of paternalism is appropriate. You do have the right to help others insofar as you don't infringe on any of their rights.

So I do believe you have the right to talk, to ask questions, maybe even yell at someone or try to manipulate them to live. If the suicidal person is in the midst of attempting suicide, then it may be justified to call an ambulance. As for the ambulance team, I don't think they have a right to interfere. However, if the person is unconscious, the ambulance team may be in the right to try and save the person. Then when the person regains consciousness, there should be an objective test for competency as I suggested earlier. If the person fails, then involuntary care is acceptable. But if the person is competent and wishes to refuse treatment, their wishes and self autonomy ought to be respected. This may seem too extreme still, and I think it depends on the case. I'm trying to set a basic groundwork for dealing with suicide as reasonably as we can. If the person intends to commit suicide through a means which would harm others, such as falling off a building onto a busy sidewalk, die in a car crash, die by train, etc. someone can then reasonably interfere, I think. This is because the suicidal person is trying to infringe on others' rights and thus may have their own rights limited.

This leads to the objection against suicide based on the harm it does to others. The idea is that all suicides are necessarily harmful to others. I doubt this is necessarily true. A hermit with no friends, no living relatives, and no human interactions wouldn't be harming anyone and could then permissibly commit suicide. But almost never is this the case. Suicide almost always if not always causes some sort of harm. Suicide does, after all, lead to the loss of a loved one. It can be emotionally damaging and traumatizing. It can cause financial burdens on those left behind who inherit a person's debt. And it can be harmful in the fact that it is offensive. Let's look at these types of harm one at a time.

The harm of suicide may very well be found in how loved ones are hurt by the loss. However, there are many ways in which one can harm one's loved ones without legal authorities having the right to stop one from doing it. I can become a hermit, leave society, and abandon all my loved ones forever. This is a serious harm done to them, but nonetheless permissible. If my entire family were starkly anti-LGBT, I could still be permitted to live in accordance to my sexuality and/or gender identity even though it would gravely hurt my loved ones emotionally. So we see that emotional harm can be done permissibly for one's own sake.

As for finances, loved ones are not obliged to take responsibility of a loved one's debts to my knowledge. If they don't claim the body, funeral costs and unpaid debts aren't forced upon them. And if loved one's do claim the body, it is of their choice and thus such burdens shouldn't be the sole responsibility of the deceased. But if it were the case that one's debt would befall others and not the government, then I would be inclined to accept paternalism to prevent such harm. But this harm isn't always present. If the person is debt-free and/or has insurance which will cover the costs even after suicide, then this harm wouldn't prevent such suicidal cases from being permissibly carried out.

Lastly is the offensiveness of suicide. I actually don't know to what extent offensiveness should be treated as a harm in a moral theory let alone a legal one. But even without a cohesive understanding of how to deal with offensiveness, I do understand that how my society currently is. Offensiveness doesn't ban what is offensive. While we may indeed talk of how suicide can be widely offensive, so can a lot of other things be without being impermissible. Incest is offensive, yet even cousins can marry in a surprising number of states. And marriage aside, romantic incestual relationships aren't illegal (but in some places, intercourse is). Indeed, even after the legalization of sodomy and homosexuality, being homosexual used to be widely offensive up until recent decades but people weren't stripped of their liberties because homosexuals were offensive. (Of course, people were lynched, harassed, and charged heavily for other crimes in order to take homosexuals out of the picture, but my point remains.) So offensiveness isn't enough to prevent suicide as a whole.

So why were the harms in my cases acceptable to interfere with suicide? Crashing cars or falling on top of a person can do some very serious physical injury. You can even murder someone (particularly with car crashes). Dying with poisonous gases can hurt others, too. Burning one's house is arson and can lead to others' property being destroyed. And dying by a train can give the conductor PTSD. These are preventable harms to others which can be avoided without preventing any form of suicide. If suicide is a right, then it must be able to overtake some harms to ensure that it is an option. Similarly freedom of speech permits offensive and harmful things to be said. But just as harassment infringes on others, so too do certain suicidal methods. I believe we should prevent certain suicidal methods, just not suicide as a whole. (I should mention that while gruesome suicides can harm those who have to clean it up and identify the body, it

is a job people are paid for, so I'm willing to overlook that to allow for people to kill themselves how they please in their own private areas. Though, it kind of repulses me that our society is such that anyone has to deal with gruesome scenes.)

## 9.9 My beliefs regarding suicide

I'd like to talk about my personal views on how suicide should ideally be treated in society. You'll likely find them to be radical, maybe even extreme. They are certainly unorthodox. But I hope they will also be found to be sensible and reasonable or at least a good attempt to be so for what it's worth.

Firstly, I think a lot of the stigma regarding mental illnesses, incompetency, and suicide need to be dealt with. Even modern day activists who purport to try and clear away the stigma perpetuate it when they say things like, "Suicidal people aren't themselves," "They can't think clearly or rationally," and "You need to do anything you can to prevent suicide." These kinds of statements enforce the ideas that mentally ill people and suicidal people specifically cannot think as well as others. This is a claim which could be falsifiable and I would very much like to falsify it (see next chapter). Further, by erasing the stigma, we erase harm of offensiveness of suicide. Just as homosexuality is no longer so widely offensive and harmful in this manner due to public acceptance, so too do I hope for a society that can accept suicide as a natural human behavior which has and will continue to be a significant means of death for humanity. Suicide is a part of human culture, of human psychology, and of human behavior. To accept this is to be at peace with how things are.

Secondly, we need to stop treating suicidal people like criminals. They have done nothing illegal and do not deserve to be put in a court of law. They do not deserve to lose all of their rights. They are people going through a very difficult time in their life and don't need to be treated like they are sub-humans who cannot think for themselves or be trusted to have rights. The laws technically understand this by calling suicidal treatments civil commitments and not criminal commitments, yet in practice I see little to no difference. And while we're at it, we should work to change the language of suicidality. We speak of "committing suicide" as if suicide were still a crime. But it's not. The only reason I have used this expression is because it is easily recognizable in the English language. I would much rather say things like, "Those who suicide..." as if suicide were a verb itself. I digress.

Thirdly, I want to make it very clear that I am not in favor of everyone suiciding as soon as they feel like it. I do not think most people who attempt suicide or succeed in it want to die. Very often, they feel they have no other options. They have certain desires that if unfulfilled, they would want to die, which is fine. The problem lies in the misconceptions of not being able to fulfill those desires. For example, after a break up, one may think one will never be in love again and will never be happy again. But with a fair understanding of how probable it is for one person to be attracted and be attractive to numerous potential mates due to the sheer quantity of human beings walking around and the flexibility of compatibility between two people, such fears may be dealt with in order to find a way to live. If one is able to find reason in believing that one can fulfill one's goals in life, then one will want to live. One simple way to determine (generally) if a person does want to die or not is to ask them what it would take for them to want to live. If it's something achievable and realistic, we may safely assume they would want to live, it's just that they are unaware of how to get what they want. If what they want cannot be achieved in life, such as inexistence or a meaningful life beyond the meaning one gives it, then suicide may just be the rational choice.

Fourthly, we need to eliminate the threats of the social consequences of feeling suicidal. I believe many people who commit suicide on a whim don't feel safe talking about it, which may just be the thing which saves their lives. But why would anyone risk talking about it in a society where you can get punished and fined heavily just for having the thoughts and feelings? I imagine if the threats of mental institutions, of bills, of police, of courts, and of involuntary treatments were taken out of the equation, more people would be readily willing to talk and seek out help on their own terms.

Fifthly, I think a society which permits suicide is a better society for everyone therewithin. When you vote in a country that forces you to vote, your vote comes from necessity, not because you actually care per se. But when you vote in a country where you have the liberty not to, you vote because it's what you want. Your vote is therefore more meaningful for you. In a similar fashion, to live where it is compulsory is to live inauthentically. But a society where only people who want to live do live is one where life is more meaningful. You live because you want to live, not because you are forced to live. Your life is in your hands, and you freely make the choice every day to keep living in such a society. Not only that, but you know that everyone else in your society wishes to live too.

None of them are being held alive against their will. You live amongst a community of life lovers. What a beautiful thought indeed.

Sixthly, I haven't talked much about physician assisted suicide. I don't wish to get into all the arguments for and against. So let me just briefly say that for those who cannot commit suicide due to paralysis for example, they should have the right to a means of suicide. Otherwise, anyone who is capable of suicide is not owed a right to euthanasia or a painless means to die. However, I find it repulsive that a society would prefer its citizens to destroy themselves in all manners of painful and ineffective methods instead of offering a safe, nearly painless way where they can say good-bye to loved ones and have closure. In hospitals, their bodies could be donated to science. And if mental illnesses weren't so stigmatized, their organs and blood could be given to those who need them as opposed to being wasted while decaying in a house. And for fear of physicians abusing the system to save money on costly patients, I'm afraid there will always be abuses in systems. But in countries and states where physician assisted suicide is already permitted, I find that those communities and societies have yet to fall apart at the seams with little evidence to suppose abuse is happening.

Finally, I would like to propose what I think is ideal for a suicide process. To begin, I don't think minors should have the right to commit suicide just as they aren't granted the right to vote until they are of age. I do not think parents of minors or anyone with dependents should have the right to commit suicide. Having dependents would be a case where one's rights are limited or in this case, trumped by the rights of one's dependents. Since I do not wish that people who don't want to die kill themselves but I believe suicide is a right, I encourage society, both the government and the people, to consider a suicide program. This program wouldn't be mandatory, but it would be highly recommended so as to prevent unnecessary deaths while also preventing undesired lives. This process would include competency tests, rationality reflections, and evaluations by psychiatrists, therapists, and relevant physicians among potentially other steps (maybe try at least a few treatments (hopefully better than the ones we have today)). Perhaps ideally would be to have someone wait at least a year or so to ensure that the desire for suicide isn't capricious. This program would allow for anyone deemed rational and reasonable to legally put one's affairs in order and die by euthanasia. This program could be insurance covered but I would hope that anyone unable to pay for it wouldn't be required to pay for it. This kind of application process would help keep people from

suiciding hastily without sufficient reason whilst simultaneously providing a safe and secure means for those who do wish to die to end their lives in a comfortable and open way.

This whole chapter has been about arguments in favor of suicide. I mostly looked at how suicide can be rational, reasonable, and legal, but I haven't talked much about the morality of suicide. In the last chapter I said that I found the obligation to others to be the best argument against suicide. Now I will expand on this view.

Whilst I strongly believe that suicide shouldn't be illegal or even remotely treated as such and that paternalism should be kept at a minimum, I must confess that I believe suicide to be immoral in almost all cases. It's funny, because after all that I have written, I feel so very proud to have made my cases for suicide, and yet I will end this chapter with an analysis of why I think it's wrong.

Before I do, I need to make something very clear. I don't think laws are or should be based on morality. Everything I wrote still stands. I still want the society I wrote about in my points. But I also want a society that permits people to be mean, even though I believe being mean is immoral. Similarly, I can hold my beliefs on the permissibility and even the upholding of suicide in a society as well as my beliefs about the rationality and reasonableness of suicide without believing suicide is moral.

So why do I think suicide is almost always immoral? To put it simply, because of the fact that it hurts others. I argued against things like offensiveness and the harm of losing a loved one earlier, but that's because I was arguing on a legal level, not a moral one. Morally, as stated in chapter 4, I find harming others to be immoral, or I would like to claim that such is immoral. This means that suiciding or becoming a hermit is immoral in my view. In fact, acting on one's homosexuality would be immoral if it hurts others, I would like to think. But I'm not entirely sure about how offensiveness should be considered moral, amoral, or immoral. However, I am prudent and am willing to claim that offending others, making them cry, hurting their feelings and such are all immoral to some degree. Thus suicide is immoral in all cases but where one is entirely isolated or where the harm of living would be overall worse than the harm caused by dying (which might only be able to justify terminally ill and permanently incapacitated people). My views on morality are likely incorrect, even if on the right track, as I also mentioned in chapter 4. Also recall that I don't believe morality is real in the sense that it is inherent in



the universe. But even as a creation of sentient creatures such as human beings, I am bound to make moral judgements of my own no matter how mistaken they may be (if one could be mistaken, provided moral subjectivism is true). And I find suicide guilty of immorality. It would be inauthentic of me to say I didn't.

## Chapter 10

### Me and My Suicide

If you're reading this, I am dead. It was never my intention of having anyone read this chapter before I die. I did want people to read other chapters so I could be criticized and be told where I wasn't clear or didn't justify my points well enough. But this chapter is different. What I write in this chapter is enough to incriminate me. A person could present this chapter to a court of law and have me detained against my will in a mental hospital where I could easily accrue a debt larger than going to a university for six years.

But this is in my opinion the most important chapter in the whole book. If you read anything in this book, please let it be this full chapter. Everything I've written, all of my beliefs and philosophical positions, have led to this culminating chapter. But do not think for a second that I only believe things which lead to this "desired" conclusion. My conclusions followed from my arguments. I am not the kind to presuppose a conclusion and solely look for justifications. Throughout my life and even since I've begun to study philosophy, I have rid myself of numerous beliefs and positions once I discovered them to be too flawed to support or too unjustified to warrant my belief. I digress.

I humbly ask that you, the reader, read this chapter with the intention to understand me and not with the expectation that I am trying to convince you that I am right. Up until now I have won every single argument in the book. Now, this is because I'm the author and have the last say in everything. Nevertheless, my winning streak is unacceptable. As a skeptic, I do not think I have adequately argued anything that doesn't warrant a large amount of doubt. I do not believe in myself, not entirely anyway. Yet I, like everyone, am bound to believe whatever convinces me the most. This book has been a collection of what ideas have convinced me thus far. I imagine that were I to continue living, I would change my mind drastically, considering how wrong I have been in the past. But we do not act on what we will one day believe. We act only on the beliefs we hold at the time of acting. Please remember these two previous statements

Having said these things, it is important, I think, to tell you how I came to be suicidal in the first place. I would like to apologize in advance for the gratuitous self-pity you are about to witness. But again, this chapter is where I open myself up, and I unfortunately am someone who pities himself gratuitously. I do not seek your pity. In fact I will later explain why you shouldn't feel bad for me for a few reasons. Also please note that there are some positive notions which I write here, so if you are the kind to not like thinking of negative things, I ask for your patience for the good things sprinkled in this chapter.

### 10.1-How I became depressed (an autobiographical short account)

During my childhood, I was what you might call “philosophically spoiled.” That is to say that I had a more or less ideal childhood. My family was low-income, but thanks to food stamps, I always had food and shelter. Moreover, I wasn't spoiled rotten from wealth. But I had enough toys to satisfy me without having too many to be ungrateful for what I had. And I got to play video games because my eldest sister bought herself a couple consoles and some games. At home, my mother was wise and made sure to have us kids learn various chores, something new each year. That way by the time we'd be adults, we'd know how to take care of ourselves and our homes. And I think preparing one's children for adulthood is the very nature of a parent's job. I wasn't abused whatsoever. I was neither given too many rules nor too much freedom. I hardly ever got punished, because as my mother would testify, I was a little angel. Once in middle school, I was punished, and my punishment was not going to the library! That's the kind of child I was.

My parents were divorced since my infancy, so I never knew my father. On the bright side, since I never knew him, I never missed him. Being fatherless never affected me negatively until puberty during which time I had an outstanding male role model to help me out. And as it turned out, we did eventually get to know each other in the last couple of years. He's a much better person now, one that I am happy to know, as opposed to his past self, whom I would have surely detested, father or not. So that part of my life has been great.

My only job as a kid was to learn, mostly in a school setting. If it wasn't already obvious, I have always been a highly inquisitive person with a strong urge to learn. My mom as well as my oldest siblings can recall that at the age of one, I could read to some

extent. I could find VHS movies outside of their cases by reading the titles, or at least I was able to identify the movies based on the titles as a whole representation. At four I wanted to be a marine biologist. I think I was six when I asked my mom what fun was. I didn't know about definitions at the time, but that's what I wanted. I knew it was important for children to have fun, but I wanted to know what makes something fun so I could understand why it's important. And when she just gave me examples of what kids call fun, I wasn't satisfied. I was philosophically inquisitive even then! In the fifth grade, a college professor gave me a set of math books I asked for on the radio. I studied pre-algebra, algebra, and even some Algebra II before middle school. In middle school, I read the high school science books in biology, chemistry, and physics.

I excelled in school. I probably could have skipped several grades (one school almost let me skip four grades), but I was unable to for various reasons, mostly from moving around too often. But seeing as many kids who skip grades struggle socially, it was probably for the better, even if I'd always gotten along better with people older than me. After all, even if I could better relate to them, they may not have wanted to socialize with me. So no harm done there. Besides, by staying in school all twelve years, I was able to learn from all of my wonderful teachers over the years for whom I am ever so appreciative.

Regarding friends, I had just a few wherever we lived. I was extremely arrogant as a kid especially regarding my intelligence, so I only surrounded myself with the top of my class, out of a desire not to associate myself with stupid people. I do wonder how I would have turned out had I only given others more of a chance and not judged others based on their grades. Alas, such musings are unfalsifiable and thus not worth much time at all. I did get bullied, but who doesn't? And sure, some places were worse than others. I only had one bully who ever physically beat me, and that didn't last long, since I changed my route on the way home. Otherwise the worse was being shoved into a trash can and pushed under a counter so I couldn't easily get out causing me to be late to class. Then a student made a gay joke which everyone laughed at, the teacher included. That was the worst instance of bullying. For all that, I believe bullying is said to build character, so I'm not so sure these kinds of experiences were bad for me all things considered.

Maybe the one thing about my childhood that could be considered negative was the fact that until high school, I never lived in one place for longer than two years

without moving. However, as a child, I enjoyed seeing new places and being able to claim having lived in so many places. It allowed me to learn just how similar Americans are as a whole, and how ignorant humans are. As an example, everyone thinks their city has nothing interesting to do, and aside from a few exceptions, everyone thinks their state has the weirdest weather, worst drivers, and the worst neighboring states. Besides, leaving my friends never really bothered me. Since about five years old, I wanted to live in Japan, so I knew that I would leave my American friends and life eventually anyway. I never missed them in a way that hurt emotionally not having them around. And I understood even as a child that where there are people, there are new friend opportunities.

Let me put it this way, my childhood was perfect if you were me, but the actual situations were not. My father as well as my step-father and step-brother (in my life during the ages 8-14) were abusive. My mom was hurt by financial stress. My siblings all had their own demons to deal with. But me, I managed to not be affected by any of it. I was aware that the situations weren't good, but they never even got to me. I was too optimistic to think the world was bad or that life could be bad even though I was aware of so much suffering around me. I deluded myself. My life was essentially perfect, and I had big dreams and a lot going for me. I could act, almost always getting a lead role in whatever play I auditioned for, I could sing (until puberty), I could learn, I could memorize, I could read and write at a very good level, and I could keep my head high during any rough time with the belief that my intelligence could solve any life problem I ever had.

So what happened? Well, no major life event. Not one that is emotionally scarring anyway. I had no reason to be depressed such as trauma, abuse, loss, or anything like that (I had a realistically ideal childhood after all). It is my belief that depression is naturally instilled in my neurology, in that I was genetically predisposed to it. And it simply manifested itself during the neurological shifting of puberty. Nothing triggered my depression; I merely grew into it as it were. When I was fourteen, in freshman year of high school, I just became sad for no apparent reason. And when there was a reason, the sadness was stronger than usual. I would cry for hours if I ever did something wrong at work (I started working at 14 but was very chipper and eager to finally get a job), hurt someone's feelings, or especially made my mom upset in anyway. I was so grateful to all that she did and so understanding of her difficult situation that even getting into a slight

argument of ideas which would irritate her would break me up for the night. Before then, I trained myself how to “turn off my emotions” for a while so that I could think logically about a situation without the emotions clouding my judgement. This way I could figure out a logical solution. But that year, I realized I was doing that so very often. And I understood that emotions are an important part of a human being’s make up. So I stopped, not wanting to overdo it. I knew the importance of moderation.

My depression started out as just episodes which would last one to three months with about four to six month intervals. Throughout the years, the intervals got shorter, and the episodes lasted longer. Eventually, my depression just stayed during my senior year. I was depressed from November of 2011 to December 2015 (I’ll return to this). I was put into therapy early on when I tried to express what I was feeling to my mother with a picture. From what I recall, I drew myself blindfolded walking up to a closed door behind which a knife was located ready to stab me. The knife was symbolic, a representation of pain, but my mom didn’t care. The picture frightened her, and looking back she did the right thing. Besides, I liked my therapist, and I enjoyed talking to her. I couldn’t make friends in high school all four years, except for my teachers, my therapist, and my role model. So therapy was like talking to a friend.

For all that, I was still happy. Throughout my childhood I was an optimist. Life was good, I thought. And so long as one does one’s best, everything would work out just fine. I saw how my mom could be happy in spite of all the terrible things she went through in her lifetime. Seeing her strength gave me hope that anyone could make it through anything. And I was lucky because in addition to the human nature of perseverance and adaptability, I also had my strong intelligence to help me. I was naïve. Let me tell you the ideas I had which allowed me to be annoyingly optimistic and idealistic even when depressed.

Being the people pleaser I am, I ended up becoming a Mormon, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in order to please that male role model I mentioned earlier. I never liked coffee or tea, and never did anything like swear or had intentions of smoking or drinking or anything, so adopting the rules was nothing to me. And I liked the idea of becoming a god with my own universe to command one day. I wanted to be a living member of my worlds, wherein I could have magical adventures with my favorite fictional characters (I had a vivid imagination + my belief in magic and

reincarnation = a delusion so great that even Mormons would shake their heads in disbelief, haha). I only fell out of the church because of my philosophical position at the time, relativism. Thus religiously, I was a pantheist. I thought every church was true, and so I felt bad for living by only one of them. I didn't leave because I thought they were wrong. I still believed in the power of faith. And I let my faith in the possibility of magic and of my ideal reincarnated lives rule over my mind, regardless of the evidence and unreasonableness.

I eventually picked up new-age ideologies, namely those spit out by Rhonda Byrnes in her "The Secret" series. I wanted my fantasies to come true so badly that I was willing to believe anything which allotted them to be real possibilities. So I believed in the notion that if you believe and focus on what you want, you'll get it effortlessly (i.e. the so-called law of attraction). Byrnes' brand of optimism influenced me to want only positive thoughts so only positive things could happen to me. So even though I was sharing a room with a foreign exchange student who hated me and let me know on several occasions that he hated me, making me cry night after night just longing to make a friend, I was determined to be positive. I was grateful for my shortcomings, for failure would lead me closer to success. I was grateful for my pain, so once I was at peace, I could truly revel in it, knowing what I had conquered to get there. I was grateful for my depression, so as to make the happier times even more meaningful in comparison. I was grateful for my exchange student, for he taught me how to love even someone who despises you.

My relativism was such that I could believe in magic and magical things like the new-age law of attraction. I thought everyone was right and wrong and everything in between all the time and never. Arguing with me was futile, since I would tell myself the person arguing was right and wrong and everything in between. I even had an attempted philosophical system to explain the intersubjective world we all share by saying that all our beliefs affect the world, so what the majority believe in is the world. Therefore, since the consensus is the world as we know it, that explains why the world is that way. If everyone (or the majority at least) truly believed that god existed or didn't exist, so it would actually be. It was what I called intersubjective relativism. I did a lot of double think to feed myself this contradictory nonsense for so many years. Yet I never had cognitive dissonance. That is, I never felt like I was deceiving myself or that my beliefs were in conflict. And I obviously wasn't able to realize that my so-called beliefs were not

really beliefs, just propositions I would spit out repeatedly. As stated in chapter 1, I don't believe people actually have the mental capacity to consciously believe in contradictions. But I certainly did talk like I could.

It wasn't until the summer after my first year of college that I was able to rid myself of this folly. I had taken my first (and only) philosophy course, which gave me tools for finding criticisms in philosophical arguments. I came up with a scenario under my system which would destroy the whole system. Here is the paradox that caused me to realize the stupidity of relativism: Imagine that everyone believes in magic. Now people have magical powers. One super villain builds a device which will destroy the planet but if the device is destroyed, it erases everyone's minds about magic. A hero beats the villain and destroys the device. But because the device was destroyed, nobody believes in magic, which would mean magic doesn't exist and never did. But then, the device never existed, because the villain never existed because the magical world never existed. But without the device, people would believe in magic. Essentially, it's a reversal time paradox, and it was enough to snap me out of relativism.

But I had nothing left. I didn't know what was right or wrong anymore. I learned about Descartes' radical skepticism and didn't know how to know anything with absolute certainty. I couldn't be sure that I wasn't a brain in a vat. I couldn't say I knew nothing, for that would mean I knew that I knew nothing, which is a contradiction.

There was one thing I was fairly sure about. I never wanted to be so wrong again in my life. I sought to build up a philosophy that wouldn't lead me astray, but as I looked more and more into philosophy, I found problems in every idea. I became quickly discouraged. I didn't want to have any assumptions. I didn't want to even assume the proposition "existence exists" because I didn't want to make assumptions which are unfounded and unreasoned.

I did eventually find two promising ideas, pyrrhonian skepticism and pragmatism. Neither made foundationalist assumptions, and neither promised absolute certainty in the first place. Even if I used them provisionally, I wouldn't be putting everything into them, because I wouldn't need all the certainty I once had in my relativism. And they both were able to allow me to make truth claims about the world without me having unchecked conviction. I could justify my everyday beliefs with pragmatic reasoning and still have some level of doubt. I didn't have to concern myself with not knowing if I'm a



brain in a vat, because I could just focus on talking about things I could predict, verify, and falsify.

Concerning my depression, I still felt sad throughout all of this. And it didn't help that the spring of that year was when I fell in love for the first time. It was with some French guy. It was my feelings for him that made me finally admit to myself that I was homosexual. Alas, my love was unrequited. But it was a very strong infatuation and it was a very strong fall that summer on the way down from my emotional high when he stopped talking to me altogether.

With my new tentative philosophical methods which I would edit and build upon for the next few years, I eventually looked at value theory. I asked myself questions like, "Why am I doing all of this? Is there a reason? Does there need to be a reason to do all of this?" Unsure of my own answers to these questions, I asked others. I soon found out that many people lived for no particular reason at all. They did things without even wondering why they do them in the first place. Those that did have a reason for living did so with questionable reasons like god's desires and the fulfillment of their desires. I questioned what the point was in fulfilling one's desires. And any point that was given, I would be skeptical of. I wanted an answer, I really did. I wanted a reason to live. But at the same time, I didn't want to accept an answer that I couldn't reasonably be sure of. I really didn't want to dupe myself like before. In the end, I never did find a reason to live. I just kind of lived without purpose. I wasn't living because I had a reason, but I also didn't stop living because I didn't have a reason for that either. The closest I could get after a couple years was to reason how human beings end up doing anything (see chapter 7). I arrived to the conclusion that our desires push us to do things. In other words, people live not because they live for an end goal, but because they want to live in the first place. The only problem was that by my second year of college, I didn't have that desire.

## 10.2 Emotional arguments

Don't worry, only section 10.1 is in an autobiographical narrative. The rest of this chapter will resume my normal style.

I have many reasons why I would rather die than live. Here is an extensive but non-exhaustive list. I will first begin with the emotions involved for me.

To begin, life is hard. This is almost a brute fact about life. People understand that life isn't easy and life isn't fair. Even rich people have problems, including ones that only come with being rich such as having so much money that they are left with an emotional void and are unsure of how to fill it. And while some lives are definitely harder than others, there is difficulty in every life (exceptions can be made to babies that die before even being able to understand hardships, but we might consider such a demise to an infant a misfortunate life). So already is a well-accepted reason not to like life. Though because I love reasons so much, let me explain what it is about my human life which I despise so much.

If I were to live, my plans are essentially thusly: After graduation, I will work for one or two years and save up as much money as I can. Once I have around \$20,000 to \$30,000 saved up, I will move abroad to Europe, probably in Spain, France, or the Netherlands. Each country would have advantages and disadvantages on things like food, prospects for a romantic life, weather, culture, politeness of people, loudness, cost, healthcare, university options, career options, and so on and so forth. Once moved, I will resume working somewhere and saving until I can afford to do a master's program in translation. Then I'll find a translation career, hopefully in the film/television industry, where I would work between two or three non-English European languages like translating from Dutch to French if I lived in the Netherlands. I may or may not end up finding a partner with whom to share my life or even get new friends (more on these later). I would have money saved up so I could travel every few years to go back to the U.S. and see my family. And I would eventually just keep working until I retire. During retirement I would just read, watch movies, study languages and philosophy, and be the bum I wish I could always be until I die from whatever inartificially kills me. Alas even this dream life I have set up for myself is wrought with problems.

I hate the human condition in society. I don't want to work anymore. When I started working, it was fun, but I only worked about twelve hours a week. Once I started working full-time, I quickly lost interest. And as time went on, I hated working more on more. Every once in a while I would make a mistake, usually at least once a day. This frustrated me to no end. I know I'm not perfect, but working at a fast food industry isn't that complicated. You would think that someone as intelligent as me would be able to go a few hours without getting scolded by management or customers, but that was rarely the case. And when I actually get into an important job, the mistakes I make will have a

negative impact on others' careers and lives. Translations have to be near perfect, and even after eight years of French, translating from English to French I still need an editor to catch the small but ever present mistakes I make as a translator. I fear I'll never be at a level where I can trust my translations. And if I can't then why should I expect the company I'm working to trust them? Besides, working is difficult. I don't want to have to do a stressful activity forty hours a week for the next few decades. I can't handle stress that well. And although translating is interesting now, I can't help but fear that doing it in order to survive will take away much of the pleasure I get from it. But short of winning the lottery or having someone take care of me without expecting me to work, both unlikely events, I'll need to work just to keep myself alive. No thank you.

Winning the lottery wouldn't even be good. Sure, I could be forever free from financial stress, but some lottery winners become suicidal. I already am, so even if I budget my spending money well, I may not survive. I would feel terrible for having a "get out of economy card" without having earned it. The guilt of knowing that there are people who need the money more than I do but someone who doesn't even love life like is the one who has the money would destroy me. And while I would donate regularly to several charities, it wouldn't keep me from feeling the guilt of having something I don't deserve. As for someone taking care of me financially, that won't do either. If it's a parent, I would feel guilty. I already feel guilty. Everything my mom has done, the sacrifices she's made for me, the financial burdens I've given her, I feel so guilty and in debt to her for them all. But I fear I may not be able to pay her back in full due. Even if I paid back every single dollar she ever spent on me and she accepted it (which she told me she wouldn't), I couldn't repay her for the time she gave me or the emotional and social sacrifices she took on my account. Motherhood is so taxing, and I can't get myself out of debt. Now imagine me doing that for someone I fell in love with! What a miserable relationship that would be. And I couldn't do it for someone I didn't love. I couldn't live with someone for years, having sex with someone I wouldn't be attracted to, just for the sake of financial security. For all that, I still don't know which would be worse between working miserably and stressfully all my life or living off of someone like a guilty leech.

Life is also so dreadfully boring. There are things which interest me for sure, but a life of doing the interesting things in this world is still overall boring. I want adventure. And I don't mean the adventures of traveling abroad and living in other cultures or seeing the rare sights of this world. That wouldn't amuse me. The kind of adventure I

want only exists in books and television. I want to fight an evil empire with a group of friends but only have minimal harm done to me in the process. This kind of nonsensical dream of mine is ridiculous, but in comparison to the life which is achievable in this world, at least it's not boring.

Another issue in the human condition is the human body. Firstly, just being born caused a whole lot of pain to my mother. The act of coming into existence harms the one who is responsible for one's existence. How horrible! Further, I hate my body so much. I am a male, and my mother must be into hairy men, because thanks to my genetics, I grow quite a bit of body hair, and it's been getting worse every year. When I was just entering puberty, I was excited to finally get some body hair, until it happened and I soon felt disgusted by my own body. So I started shaving. In the last six months, I even started laser hair removal with a home kit. And it has been working. I imagine a couple of years using it would relieve this issue. So I can't use the hair problem as a reason not to live. But there're other things I hate about my body. I am hemophobic, so I cringe whenever I think about the fact that my body only functions because of blood. It makes me sick to think that the brain which gives me my intellect only works thanks to the large quantities of blood circulating through my head. I hate the fact that without the various species of bacteria, human beings literally would die from sickness. We like to think of ourselves as a single organism, but human beings require millions of bacteria on their skin and in their bodies for the sake of a healthy immune system, and I despise that fact. I hate my excretory system, and for that matter my digestive system. It's disgusting watching someone put something into their mouth and swallow it. And it's disgusting to know that life requires that I do something so vile to survive. I hate sweating as means to keep my body temperature stable and as a sick reaction to stress or anxiety. I hate my nails. My toes often get ingrown toe nails a few times a year. Every once in a while, one gets infected for weeks to months and I'm in pain just walking around. I asked a physician back in high school that a permanent action be taken to remove the nail or toe completely if he had to, but he refused even though he was the one who had asked me if I would want such a surgery!

I also hate sex. It's weird and disgusting, especially oral and anal intercourse. For all that, I desire sex and enjoy thinking about it in spite of its repulsive smells, sights, and feelings. It's very pleasurable, at least in my head it is. It would appear that I am cursed when it comes to sex. When I first experimented, I thought I was asexual because I felt

close to nothing from my sexual partners. If I closed my eyes, I wouldn't be able to feel oral sex I would receive. And although from a hand I could sense I was being touched, it felt the same as someone touching my arm, only on my genitals, thus unpleasurable and insensitive. Research has led me to believe that there is no treatment for insensitivity. Some people would like to blame circumcision; I certainly did for a couple years. But when I looked at the scientific studies on the matter, I was unimpressed. Many of the studies were poorly done. Some of them didn't have controls and some had poor methods of how to test sensitivity and instead focused on the attitudes toward sex from the subjects. But overall, even the studies which did focus on sensitivity between adults who undergo circumcision showed no statistically significant change (Morris, n.d.). Even though the foreskin does contain nerves which cannot be given back once taken, those nerves seem to make little change regarding sensitivity. Some men found that circumcision led to longer sex which made them happier about it. And many circumcised men already feel that they are too sensitive, and to add more would be uncomfortable. Anti-circumcision groups will talk about how insensitivity is caused by friction which the foreskin protects the glans from. This is nonsense with no substantial empirical evidence to support it. The foreskin would also be touching one's clothes and moving around, causing friction to the glands anyway. It's a bad justification. Overall, any changes foreskin restorers remark regarding sensitivity are more likely than not placebo effects. All in all, I'm still against involuntary circumcision. Since it's permanent, unless there are serious health risks, I think the child once old enough to understand should be the one to choose or forego unnecessary surgery, not the parent. I am against involuntary female circumcision and will not have a double standard for males. But the main point is that I have a desire for sex, even though sex itself is highly unenjoyable for me. The best part is hugging. That's the most sensitivity I get, just bodily contact. My body is such that I can't even enjoy sex which is a major part of our biological systems of pleasure.

I also despise the unreasonableness of human beings. I believe that desires play an integral part of our functioning as humans. Yet our desires are sometimes contradictory. While beliefs may not be contradictory in my view, emotions can be. Here's a common example, people want others to choose to love them. But we don't choose to love whom we love. Another example is wanting to be at peace and wanting to overcome obstacles. In order to have obstacles to overcome, you cannot be in a state of total tranquility in your life. Aside from desires are all of our other emotions. I think emotions muddy one's reasoning, but as humans we can only reason with emotions. It's

a loathsome fact about us, about me. I despise being an emotional creature, and the act of despising them is emotional in nature. Again a contradiction!

It would be disingenuous of me to say that I try my hardest to be moral. I find myself willingly doing things I believe to be immoral on a regular basis. I sometimes litter, I don't recycle, I waste water, I waste food, I waste electricity, I lie, I scoff, I insult, I criticize, I humiliate, I manipulate, I argue, I choose to not donate, I choose to not help, I annoy people, etc. I actively make immoral decisions. And I know everyone makes immoral decisions, but just as I don't hold a baby responsible for hitting someone causing pain, so too do I not consider most people responsible for their immoral actions. I don't think most people are all that self-aware. I don't think most people think about what morality is. They keep themselves in ignorance, and in so doing they aren't to be regarded as morally irresponsible in my opinion. But people who are self-aware, who have some substantial ideas about morality such as myself, those who act immorally and understand that what they are doing is immoral and understand why are to be held responsible. I am in this latter group. Because I seek out morality and am aware of it, I am more immoral (or at least morally accountable) when I do a misdeed than someone who is oblivious to morality and does the same misdeed. But even if my arrogance blinds from my error, and in truth everyone is morally responsible either because moral responsibility doesn't factor in moral understanding or because most people are much more morally aware than I give them credit for, I am still largely immoral.

I remember every time I have made people cry. The memories haunt me. I have a very good memory, and I can recall so very many times when I've made people feel upset. When I bring these up to people, often times they don't even remember. They may even deny that I upset them. But when I remind them of the actions they took and the words they said, they forfeit that their feelings were indeed brought down on my account (they simply deny that what I did was grave or serious). I understand that everybody does this to people around them. Indeed, I find it to be inevitable for two people who know each other for long periods of time to hurt each other at least slightly every now and again. We all get on each other's nerves. We all annoy one another. So what's the big deal? Why can't I live like everyone else and just try and make the most of it? Let me answer by putting it this way. Some people are masochists, which I find okay. But I wouldn't want to hurt someone even if they gave me their consent. If they are okay with being hurt, that's fine. But I don't want to be the one to do it. So even if people give their consent to

let me hurt them from time to time as is inevitable between humans, that doesn't mean I have to be the one that does the harm. And I don't want to be. An objection might be that I could just try harder not to, but I've been trying my whole life not to. I fail too often. No matter how hard I try, I end up hurting people. And sometimes I end up hurting myself when trying to help others. I'm not smart enough to come up with the right solutions. My lack of intelligence is what leads to people getting hurt. Or maybe it's the lack of solutions, in which case why even live if no matter what we do, someone's going to get hurt anyway? I don't want to live in that kind of world. But if there are solutions and I simply fail to find and/or adhere to them, then I am the immoral one, and I shouldn't live because of my immorality. Wouldn't the world be better if immorality didn't exist? Isn't that the whole idea of heaven or utopia or perfection?

Not only do I do immoral things and cause harm, but I also don't do everything I can to stop it. This world has so much pain. People are starving, being abused, getting hurt, suffering, living in the poorest of conditions, living under tyrannical and oppressive governments, etc. and I don't do everything I can to stop it. By not doing my absolute best as much as I can as often as I can, I am failing to be moral. I don't want to live in a world where black people have good reason to feel unsafe just by walking on the streets simply because they are black and have the potential to be harassed or murdered by racist police in authority. I don't want to live in a world where children are in pain due to illness, starvation, lack of resources like water, are abused, have no friends, etc. Yet I'm not out there helping them. And I don't want to. I'm selfish and lazy. I'd rather sit in my room and play video games than volunteer and do hard work. And even if I did do the hard work, I'd be the one in pain then. The labor I'd be doing would put so much stress on me that I'd start having panic attacks like I do when I have a lot to do and believe that my actions have serious consequences on others. So between helping others or helping myself, I choose the latter. Even when I do help others like give advice, help with homework, give spare money to the poor, or help with a small task like picking up fallen items or bringing groceries up the stairs for a stranger who would otherwise have difficulties, I only do so because those tasks don't put much stress on me. I never volunteer for yard work, construction, lifting furniture, or anything else that would make me hate being alive while doing it. I'm a selfish jerk who's better off dead. The world would be better if only helpful and generous people lived in it. The demands of morality are just too much for me to satisfy. I can't live up to the expectations of what a moral person should do.

In addition to being bad for the environment and others around me, there are some ideas which if we accept, I am unfit to be a good person. Certain people in recent years have asserted that all white people are racists, all cis-people are transphobic, and all men are misogynists by virtue of being a part of the majority group in a society built on white cis-male supremacy. The idea is that if I am a part of a racist culture, then if I am in the privileged group, I must be a part of the problem from my upbringing. And since my upbringing is determined by things like race, sex, and gender identity, then by these things that I cannot even choose, I am forced into being a part of the problem. I don't actually agree with these kinds of arguments. I find the definitions poor and the analyses faulty. I don't think all white people (including babies) in America are racist just because they are white in a white-privileged society. It's a non-sequitur. The society can be built on racism without all of its citizens being racist. But if we were to accept this kind of argument, then I am a racist, a misogynist, and transphobic. And since these things are to be abhorred, then anyone in the unprivileged groups shouldn't be able to feel bad for my death. I am helping the situation by making there be one less racist, one less misogynist, one less transphobe in the world. That's one less oppressor. I suppose one could argue that it's my racist and sexist nature that is bad and needs to be destroyed and not my life itself. But if my life is inherently such that facts about who I am make me racist and sexist, then you cannot separate my nature from my life. Thus to destroy the racism and sexism in me, I must be destroyed. Another solution might be to say that even a racist's life is so good that it's worth more than the badness of racism, but I think racism and sexism are awful things that detract so much from life that to get rid of them as best as we can would be a better way to ensure the goodness of life.

However, I confess that I am probably racist and misogynistic even without such extreme arguments. As a child, I didn't like shaking hands with fellow students of color. And nowadays I am unattracted to men of other races with few exceptions. Although, I'm not entirely sure if this is racist, since I'm also not attracted to blond men. Does this mean I'm a supremacist to blonds or think blonds are inferior? Do I hate blond people? I'm not sure what the answer is, but whatever the answer is, it should work for both cases, not just blonds or not just other races. I believe it might have something to do with liking guys who look fairly similar to me, which may just be one of the most narcissistic things about me. But it would explain why I'm more comfortable sitting next to a dark brown short haired guy of white skin and similar body type than a blond long haired woman of non-Caucasian skin. Still though, I believe my prejudice to similar-looking humans is



easily considered racist and sexist. I am racist and sexist and probably even transphobic in spite my attempts to not think of other others negatively on the basis of skin color, sex, or gender. As a racist, sexist, and transphobe, I am scum. Therefore, again, I think this world is better off without me.

Additionally, I am willing to kill myself selfishly! Some of my reasons to die are altruistic such as getting rid of one more racist or immoral person or no longer doing harm to the environment. But mostly, they are for purely selfish reasons. I don't like things in life, I don't like the way my body works, I don't want to work or be the one who's causing the harm. Harm will still be going on; I'm just being selfish by not being the one to do it anymore. And let's not forget how much harm my suicide will cause the people who care about me (let alone the possibility that by not living and helping future people I'll meet, my death also harms them), but I am in so much pain and am too lazy and unwilling to live for their sakes that I'd rather stop my pain and take the easy way out rather than live for decades to come in agony to keep them content. I don't understand why anyone who loves me would cry. Who should cry for someone as selfish as me?

Lastly in this section, I want to discuss why I hate myself. I do hate myself for being the immoral scumbag of the Earth that I am as well as for having the repulsive tendencies my body has, but I hate myself for other reasons, too. I am a perfectionist ("You don't say!"). Yet I fail so much in every aspect of life. Others may look at failures as means to succeed, but if that's true, then what's the point of succeeding? If failure is good, then why not always fail? If we should be happy in not succeeding, then why ever succeed? But maybe the point isn't to say that failure is good and success is bad, but that failures are good because they help us succeed. Well then if I succeed in something without failing, should I be upset? After all, I may have succeeded which is good, but I didn't get the goodness of failing. Essentially then, by succeeding without failing, you're missing out. But that's nonsense. Nobody shames other people for getting something right on their first try. The way I see it, failure is bad, but since it is inevitable in life, we shouldn't let our failures completely stop us from success even if they slow us down. But remember, I think failure is still bad. Thus, I can still move onwards as I have done for years, but still feel bad for having failed so much even if I did eventually succeed. And failure is inevitable in life. But by dying, I can avoid ever failing again. I can make it so

that I never make another mistake. Failure is one of the worst parts about life, and death gives me an escape from failures.

Beyond my failures and mistakes, I've never been good at forgiving myself. It stems from my arrogance. I can forgive others, because from my perspective they're too stupid to know any better. And even if they do know better, they're too stupid to care, so I can forgive them just like one forgives a child for lying or being selfish. It's a condescending attitude I regret having. But for me, I believe that I know better. And I believe that I should care and do but still choose to do something wrong anyway. I can't pardon myself as I pardon others. I am to be held at a higher standard, one which I cannot or at least never do meet.

\*\*\*This whole time, you may be thinking to yourself that I am pitying myself when I shouldn't. After all, I have a great life comparatively speaking. I've managed to go through college completely debt free. With good grades and a lot of intelligence, I just have to put in some hard work and I'm good to go. So why feel so sorry for myself, right? I agree. So many others have it worse than I do. I have one of the best lives of anyone as far as I can tell. Many of my family members have had terrible lives comparatively, yet they don't sulk all the time. And then across the world are people with near unimaginably horrible lives. How dare I just sit here feeling bad when they actually have good reason to feel bad about their lives! I hate myself for my self-pitying disposition. But I am so weak. Where others can handle so much stress in their lives, I can handle so little. I have little doubt that in their place, I would kill myself without hesitation. I've been able to last this long only because of the easiness of my life. And yet, my self-infantilization isn't because I wasn't properly raised. My mother made sure to prepare me for life by teaching me to work hard, put forth one's best efforts, and try one's hardest the first time through but to not let failure prevent success, etc. And I was aware of the evil in the world. I learned early on that there were monstrous people who harass, molest, rape, kill, manipulate abuse, neglect, and do other forms of terrible harm to people around them. I didn't grow in a sheltered environment. I just don't have what it takes to face this big, bad world. And as I'll mention later on, I don't think I have to. I agree with these kinds of criticisms of me and use them against myself, so no worries there. But if you don't like complainers, then by letting me die, you will have one less in the world. If you look at me and think I need to just toughen up and take on the hardships of life like everyone else, I deny that I should be required to do so. If I die, I can evade all of these

harms. There is no necessity involved. In fact, I think dying and shutting myself up is better than giving myself a pity party throughout the rest of my natural life. It's extremely annoying when people like me can't handle what others can so easily, right? Please, I am not asking for your pity or sympathy. I don't think I deserve them. I am not asking for others to keep me alive, because it is not their responsibility to do so. If paying for all my expenses without me working is the best solution to keep me alive, I think I deserve to die, since nobody else should have to pay for me just to keep my heart pumping.

However, throughout the years I was able to love a part of myself in a very interesting way. As far back as I can remember, I had an imaginary friend who was my twin. Back then, we were identical in every way, except that whenever I did something wrong, he would do the right thing. He was the idealized self in the form of an imaginary friend. Throughout my childhood, he eventually took on personas of the television and video game characters whom I found to have the best personalities such as T.K. and Takato (from Digimon), Goku (from Dragon Ball), and Sora (from Kingdom Hearts). Eventually one personality stayed. It was Aang (from Avatar The Last Airbender). Aang was my imaginary twin from 12 to 19. By that time, my twin wasn't perfect but only had slight personality faults for the sake of being more realistic. It was a reincarnated life with him that I believed in relativism and Mormonism. At any rate, he loved me, and I loved him. He kept me happy during high school when I had no friends. He somehow managed to love me even though I didn't love myself. But looking back he was an imaginary friend, not another soul just trapped in one body like I used to believe. This means that Aang was just a part of my personality, a part of me that did still love me. But then one evening, he was mad at me. He said he couldn't take my complaining anymore. He was sick of me always feeling so sad all the time, so he left me after yelling at me. He didn't love me anymore. And it was then that I took the idea of suicide seriously (although I had thought about it much beforehand). With no more love for myself, I had no more reason to live for myself. Eventually I was able to admit that he wasn't real, but that didn't change anything. I still no longer loved myself, not deeply anyway.

### 10.3 Philosophical reasons

Aside from the emotional arguments of the last section, I have philosophical ideas pertaining to life and death which lead me to prefer to die than to live.

Firstly, I am going to die anyway. It's not as though not committing suicide isn't going to keep me alive. I will one day die regardless. And true, I would no longer be held responsible for my death, but I'd rather die on my own terms, so that's not a good reason not to commit suicide. People may also like to say that since it is inevitable I shouldn't invite it early. This doesn't follow. I could simply retort that since it's inevitable, one shouldn't prolong it. In both cases, our conclusions don't follow from the fact that death is inevitable. If I were to die naturally, by which I mean more customarily or perhaps more fluidly, the pain caused by my passing wouldn't be as harmful as by suicide. Though, I find this to be an issue of acceptance on the others' parts. If society didn't view suicide or death so badly as a whole, then the harm would be greatly diminished. Still, since people's mindsets are the way they currently are, I find this contention worthwhile in spite of its flaw. But one objection in particular is noteworthy, namely that by not dying sooner than later, more people who know me and care about me will die first, saving them the trouble of dealing with my death. This is very important to me because I care about my mother and her feelings very deeply. I would very much like to save her the grief of losing me, which could be done by not dying until after her death. But it must be noted that by continuing to live, I risk making new relationships whose people would be harmed by losing me, and I don't know of a good way of computing the cost-benefits of this kind of situation. But realizing some of these objections do have merit, I can't use this reasoning that death is inevitable anyway with much strength at all.

The next argument deals with authenticity. As someone who doesn't enjoy life or its prospects, it is inauthentic of me to continue on living. Now in order for this to work in favor of suicide, I would need to claim that an inauthentic life isn't worth living. But it's not so clear as to whether or not this follows. People can live without pursuing their dreams and just settle for whatever life gives them in contentness. And I am in no position to say that they shouldn't live like that. I could say such a life is undesirable or not worth living for me, but this is just a matter of personal taste. I might as well not even talk about living authentically or not, since the same kind of reasoning could be used for life in general about whether or not one finds it worthwhile. So in order for me to use this argument, I would need to demonstrate that inauthenticity itself is so disadvantageous that I wouldn't want to live because of that fact. Yet, I am unsure about the goodness of authenticity. I'm torn actually. Living a virtual reality simulation of the ideal life for me sounds like something I would love to do on one hand. On the other hand, I don't want to waste my time believing in a false reality. I'm not sure that if a

machine could give me the simulation of an ideal life I would forsake my desire to be reasonable and not be fooled by illusions like I used to be just for the sake of an inauthentic life. Though I fear that if the opportunity were ever resented to me, I would do it anyway. This kind of uncertainty leaves me unable to strongly assert or deny this argument. I thus suspend my judgement.

In chapter 7, I talked about the inherent meaninglessness of life (I actually think that life itself is outside the question of meaningfulness or meaninglessness inherently). Indeed, I don't believe life is inherently meaningful. Yet I also claim that we humans can attribute meaning to our lives for ourselves if we are so inclined. But I do not have this inclination. Nor do I have the desire to have this inclination. So it doesn't make much sense to me for me to want to live. In fact, I find life very abhorable overall, so it would make sense for me to reject life, as suicide allows me to do. And since meaning isn't inherent in things, that means my choice to commit suicide doesn't inherently matter either. It will matter to those who love me, and I attribute meaning to that. However, eventually everyone who knows me will be gone, and when that happens my suicide won't be negative anymore. It won't be positive either, mind you. So it would come down to my attributing negative value to life versus my attributing negative value to the harm dealt to those who care about me, which I'll get to later on.

I find that my lack of desire for life stems from my natural disposition. I'm simply not the kind to desire life. However, I also believe that mental illnesses are a part of one's selfhood. And I have little doubt that my depression plays at least some part in my lack of desire to live. I'll even grant for the sake of argument that my depression is the very root of my lack of desire for life. So let's suppose you have an antidepressant we both agree will definitely 100% cure me of depression and after that I will want to live. Should I take it? Before I give an answer, I show you a pill that gives you depression such that you wouldn't want to live. Should you take my pill? Well you would most likely say, "Of course not. I want to live!" Well, I regurgitate your response by saying that I don't want to cure myself of my lack of desire to live. Even if that pill would make me want to live, since I currently don't want to live or even want to want to live, then I have no good reason to take your pill just as you have no good reason to take mine. And if you believe that it is necessarily irrational to not want to live, I invite you to read the previous chapter. Even if it is, I should still have the right to refuse medication so long as I am competent, rational or not. People make irrational decisions all the time. People are

unreasonable every day. I demand my right to do so as well. Though I don't believe it is necessarily irrational in the first place anyway.

In fact, I am quite content in being depressed. You know how it feels so good in a cathartic way to cry when you're sad? It's kind of like that. I find my depression to be a "such sweet sorrow." But I'm biased. Just as optimists are happy with their optimism, similarly do I resign myself to my pessimism. I find that my philosophies are more reasonable than those proposed by philosophical optimists such as the idea that life is inherently good. Furthermore, thanks to my depression, I am more keen on others' suffering. Depression keeps me away from being blinded to how awful the world can be. This can be good, since I can better sympathize with others. And since I want people who wish to be happy to be happy, I do my best to help them. Maybe this would be the case without depression, which is why I said I'm biased. Also, although I would like to say that I am more reasonable because of my depression, I fear I cannot. I was depressed off and on throughout my years as a relativist. Besides, it is to be expected that I would be more reasonable now as an adult than as a child.

I also prefer depression out of disdain for happiness. In order to meaningfully discuss why I disdain happiness, we must define happiness. Unfortunately, this isn't all that easy. Indeed, I'm not sure myself. To show why, let's look at a few ideas and questions. If happiness is just being in a pleasurable state, then someone whose brain is hooked up to a "happy machine" which gives the brain all the necessary neurotransmitters to constantly feel pleasure would be deemed happy. If happiness is an attitude, then someone in terrible life conditions, like a sick elderly person being tortured and starved in a concentration camp could theoretically be happy with the right kind of attitude. If happiness is having a good life, then someone who doesn't fulfill all the requirements of what is called a good human life would be deemed unhappy no matter how cheerful they may seem. There are other theories of happiness, all of which have some level of intuitional appeal and all of which have a large quantity of problems. One particular question I want to ask is, "Can someone who upon reflection declares that they are happy be wrong (about being happy)?" I am open to change my views on this, but so far, I believe the answer is no. I find happiness to be one of those incorrigible feelings discussed in chapter 1. It's like feeling hungry. Even if you just ate, if you feel hungry, then you're hungry even if you shouldn't eat. Similarly, if you feel happy, then you are happy, even if your life is awful. The same goes for sadness. I'm sad, but my life is pretty

much great as far as human lives go. It just goes to show how unreasonable happiness and sadness are. Neither is particularly desirable to me. But I'm already sad and have no good reason to switch from one unreasonable disposition to another. Both happiness and sadness are poisons to me. I despise them both, but why choose one over the other? I already have the one and have no good reason to switch.

I find self-esteem to be an interesting topic. The way therapy, psychiatry, and psychology have it, low self-esteem is always problematic and high (but not too high) self-esteem is always desirable. This is ridiculous. If you are a terrible person, you shouldn't feel good about yourself. Low self-esteem can be a good wake up call to let you know that you need to work on yourself. Conversely, if you have high self-esteem and are content in yourself already, why would you improve on yourself? Aren't you already content? I suppose you could be content with something and still want more, but regarding self-esteem I find it to be the case that you need to lower yourself and realize your weaknesses if you are to improve. One issue I think people are trying to get at is the problem of thinking too poorly of yourself even if you aren't that bad of a person. I might be this way, though I can actually name off where I'm a bad person and give clear examples demonstrating my faults, so I find myself justified in believing I'm not that great of a person. However, I think it's odd that nobody seems to worry about thinking too highly of oneself even if one isn't a good person. There's almost an assumption that people are always good, or that their "deep true" selves are always good. However, I think one's self-esteem should reflect how good one actually is to the extent that a person can perceive oneself. And since we all understand we aren't perfect (with a few exceptions), our self-esteem should reflect that.

Another problem with happiness is how it works in practice regarding goals. If I have a dream, say a dream to be a published scientist, then that dream motivates me. Moreover, I feel happy whenever I think about fulfilling my dream. I can imagine what it would be like to see my findings get accepted into respectable peer-reviewed journals and how amazing it would be to find myself holding a Nobel Prize in my field of study. Yet, I have found that even when one's dreams do come to fruition, the actual idea is much more happy-making than the experience itself. It's far more enjoyable and wonderful to think about having a nice quiet home life with a significant other and kids than to actually have such a life. I'm not saying that the actual experience cannot be vastly enjoyable and fulfilling, and maybe one could argue that the authenticity of the

actual experience gives more value to the good experiences in spite of all the negative experiences which come along with it in reality. However, I do wonder if people would upon reflection feel happier at a quiet dinner table with a family than when they reflect on imagining a nice quiet dinner with family. At the very least, for me personally, I find myself happier when imagining a good idea than actually experiencing the good idea in real life. This works for other emotions, too, mind you. Sometimes the fear about giving a speech is more negative than actually giving a speech (though sometimes, one's expectations are higher than what happens during the actual speech). Indeed, I will admit that while I suffer during work, the dread of work is worse. Still, I hate actually working enough to not want to spend my life doing it. As for happiness, because aspirations are happier for me than actual experiences, if I were to seek out happiness as a goal, I would distance myself from reality. But since I am someone who cares about truth (empirical truth), accuracy of perception, coherent and justified beliefs, etc. between happiness and my epistemic goals, I deny happiness as a goal of mine.

Happiness and the desire therefor also cause cognitive biases like the ones I discuss in chapters 6 and 9 among others. True, depression leads to depressive biases, but since I'm biased from my depression, I prefer the depressive biases over the happy biases. Happy people do the same thing. They are more content with their biases than with depressive biases. If you look up articles on pop psychology websites that discuss the benefits of sadness or the shortcomings of happiness and seeking it out, you'll find that the authors always write them in a way that happiness is still always good. What's more is that the advertised articles to read next are about why you should be happy and how to do it. It's ridiculous. This isn't a quid pro quo fallacy. I'm not saying I'm right. But in my condition, I am reasonable in following my dispositions just as much as a happy person is with following theirs. Maybe we're all unreasonable, which may well be the case. And before anyone thinks to themselves that they're a realist, let me just shoot down that silly idea. Nobody is a realist as far as I can tell. We all perceive the world from our perspectives, and no one has a neutral perspective. And I see no good reason to favor one side or the other of neutrality aside from doing so under one's biases of the side one finds oneself on. Thus I choose to remain in depression with the entitlement to remain here undisturbed just as happy people are given the right to remain undisturbed in their happiness. My disdain of happiness is just a natural part of my being depressed like disdain of sadness is to happy people.



There are discussions of the human condition in philosophical matters. One such discussion deals with epistemology. I am a very strong skeptic (chapter 1), and as such I find myself unable to arrive at the knowledge I seek. I wish I could have absolute knowledge, but I don't believe we humans have the means to achieve such a feat. Thus my desire is left unfulfilled and literally cannot be fulfilled. The same goes for my desire to perceive reality as it is which as I discussed in chapter 3 is a contradictory notion. Perception hinges on there being an observer. An observer implies a way of perceiving which acts as a distortion of reality. So again, a desire I desperately wish to fulfill is unachievable.

This leads into a major point, that being that I do not wish to live a life in which some of my strongest and most basic desires cannot be fulfilled in life. It would be fallacious to want to live so that one could realize one's goals if one's goals cannot be realized in life. And this is the case for me. I have certain desires such as to absolutely know things, to perceive reality without distortion, to not hurt anyone ever in any way even slightly, to be reasonable and logical all the time, etc., but these desires are impossible to achieve for human beings. One might as well wish to be able to fly by flapping one's arms really fast. And then to live for the sake of these desires is to act erroneously. The solution is probably to get rid of these desires, but I simply cannot, or at least I haven't been able to no matter my efforts. But by dying, I will cease to have these desires, for I will no longer exist at all. Death is a solution to this problem.

But maybe I'm being too hasty. What about other desires which can be fulfilled in life? If the desires that can be achieved in life have more weight than the desires which cannot be achieved in life, then it is more rational for me to remain alive for the sake of the achievable desires.

#### 10.4 An ideal life

I already talked about my career plans if I were to remain alive, but there's a lot more to life than working. There are enjoyable things like movies, books, shows, video games, friends, and relationships. So here are some things I would like to do in life that I couldn't if I were dead.

I would like to play Kingdom Hearts 3, a game I've been waiting for over 10 years. I'd like to watch movies by Disney, Pixar, and Dreamworks. I want to read more and

more philosophy, psychology, and linguistics. I want to learn a lot more languages than the 16 I have already learned (Japanese, Chinese, and then a lot of Romance and Germanic languages). I would like to learn chemistry, math, and physics (if I could, seeing as I struggled to understand AP physics despite getting a 4.0 in the class). I would like to finish the many on-going series I enjoy watching as well as be able to rewatch the shows I love to rewatch time and time again. I would like to experience traveling abroad, though maybe I would hate it. I try to study culture and daily life as best as I can from afar through asking others about their experiences and doing research and estimate I would like it quite a bit, but maybe I'm wrong. Besides, I'm a picky eater and may not enjoy other countries' foods. I would like to make friends in other countries, assuming they would want to be friends with someone like me. But I also would like to isolate myself from others so I couldn't hurt them.

As for romance, I don't know. I do have a strong desire to find a nice man with whom I'd have a mutual love, but I fear it's not enough. I also do not wish to get close to someone only to hurt them, especially someone I'd love. Moreover, I understand that I'm nowhere near the best. Under the idea that "there's always someone better," I would rather have someone I'd love be with someone better than me than keeping them for myself. Besides, I can't imagine being in a relationship with me is all that healthy. I love optimists, as weird as that may seem, but super joyful people who make friends with anyone are just attractive to me. I like the idea that even though the person loves everyone with a big heart, they could somehow manage to love me in an even greater way. But for someone like that, I would be a downfall for them. I would need their almost constant validation that I'm not hurting them, but that would be annoying and taxing on even the most understanding of people. Indeed, you'll find online that people claim how toxic partners with low self-esteem are. And I wouldn't want to be a toxic factor in another's life, lover or not. For all that, a life without romantic love doesn't seem so great either. But would I be able to live with myself, knowing that I am negatively impacting someone's life just so I can live with less difficulty? I doubt it, though maybe I could.

So far, the desires I've listed are good, but hardly a good compensation for dealing with all the unpleasantness of life. In the last chapter, I said that one way to test the rationality of a suicidal person's desire for death is to ask them what it would take for them to want to live. So let me tell you what it would take for me to want to keep living.

In the most ideal (but still realistic) conditions of this life, I would win the lottery. This way, I could recompensate all of my friends and family with money for having dealt with me for so long. Even though this wouldn't be enough, at least it would be a start. I would budget my money so that I don't spend too much and get discouraged by the excessive amounts of money in my possession. I would give to charities gratuitously and seek out ways for me to help without putting any stressful effort into it. I wouldn't have to work and could just be the lazy bum who studies things at home like I want to be. I would be in therapy to help cope with the guilt of having wealth I wouldn't deserve or have earned. I would fill up my days with activities I enjoy and avoid stress. And since we're talking of ideals, we'll say that I would fund research to give sensitivity to those who don't have enough sexually. I would find a partner whom I trusted could handle me in all of my awfulness, whom I'd love, and to whom I'd have something to give in return for his companionship. He'd be a nice person who is intelligent and would learn languages with me and have philosophical arguments every day (or most days). We'd almost never actually fight, if ever. I would become a well-known philosopher, and I'd actually be a decent philosopher at that (unlike now). That way people would read my works and criticize my ideas in imaginative ways I never would come up with alone. This would help me come up with better ideas and discard the unsalvageable ones. Plus I would be able to talk to and have discussions with all the contemporary philosophers I admire such as Susan Haack, Daniel Dennett, Shelly Kagan, Michael Cholbi, Peter Singer, David Chalmers, John Searle, and Hilary Putnam (if he didn't die just a couple hours ago of me writing this but I envy him since he no longer has to deal with anything). I would also have an activist group to help suicide become more acceptable in society. Ideally, my ideas would help reduce irrational suicides and protect those who truly wish to die as well as reduce the harm of suicide done to those left behind. Eventually, when I would be too tired of life to even want this life, my partner, friends, and family would give their good-byes in acceptance of my choice. I would die painlessly in a hospital, knowing everyone I love is at peace with my fate and that my body will be used as donations to help those who wish to survive and to research things like depressed brains.

That's a nice dream, and while not impossible per se, it's almost laughably improbable. I'd have a better chance of winning the lottery five times in a row than to have the stressless life I so desire. But even still, even in these conditions, I'm not sure I'd prefer life over death. I would still be a human with many faults. I'd still be greatly immoral and unable to help stop all the pain and misery on the Earth. I'd still be unable

to have absolute knowledge or be totally reasonable or perceive reality without distortion, etc. That's not to say that I wouldn't live such a life. That kind of life would be tolerable, and I would live it so as not to have to hurt others by dying, but it simply would not be enough for me to want to live for my own sake. But I want to go one step further. Let me give an account of my ideal life imaginable.

I would be the twin to Aang, living in his world. We would go through the adventures of the television show from which the character comes. I would be the best fighter. And we would be an amazing couple. Our relationship would be perfect. Then when we die, we'd be reincarnated into the world of Kingdom Hearts, wherein I'd be Sora's twin (but Sora and Aang are the same person just different bodies since reincarnation). My twin and I would go through many adventurous life times in many different worlds (or universes rather) each with different kinds of exciting powers. In between each reincarnation, we'd be able to remember all of our lifetimes thus far. And eventually when we will have had enough, we would cease to exist (see 6.2).

There's a problem with all of this besides the whole magic and reincarnation don't exist parts. For my ideal existence to occur authentically, people would exist in those worlds I'd have adventures in. But if that's the case, my ideal would have people suffering. Indeed, my ideal would involve wars, death, despair, and all manners of atrocities for billions of people for millennia all for the sake of me being able to save them. What a sick, twisted desire! To think that I would have a universe created to satisfy my vanity project of being a hero in which there's so much evil and pain that a hero is needed in the first place. It's abominable! The only way in which this problem could be solved is to say that these universes already exist with or without me, but if I go live in them, I could help put an end to a lot of the suffering. Not that it matters, though. This is just an imaginative ideal, not some real problem. However, if I had the choice between creating universes for the sake of my ideals and not existing, I'd prefer the latter. I would be too repulsed by myself if I caused that much pain to a whole universe.

So even in ideal cases of fantasy, I'm inclined not to live, at least not entirely. But that's because I have desires which cannot be fulfilled in living. As it would turn out, the desires that I do have which could be fulfilled in life are extremely improbable and still not as important as the desires which cannot.

I should quickly note that I spoke of ideal lives from my current standpoint. I am aware that one way for me to want to live would be to neurologically tamper with my brain until I held the desires of wanting to live and of things in life. But I have no good reason to accept such a procedure, and it would be an infringement of my human rights to do such a procedure forcefully. Another way would be to argue with me and convince me that life is better than death, but so far none of the arguments against death or in favor of life have been all that promising to me. Still, I like to keep an open mind and am willing to change my views given better arguments, reasons, and evidence.

### 10.5 Why I lived for so long

If I really hate life as much as I'm giving on, then why haven't I already died? Essentially two reasons kept me alive as long as they did these past few years: the desire to not be unreasonable and the desire to please others. The first is why I'm always talking about being reasonable in this book. I hate the fact that I was so lost in delusion for so long. I never want to be so deluded again. I've tried so hard not to make that happen, even though I do recognize that maybe I have failed. After all, maybe all I've done is replace relativism with skepticism and pragmatism, and I am no less deluded by the latter than by the former. I'm still very relativistic in the strictest sense since I believe we believe and perceive based on our neurology and psychology which are individualized. This book shows many places where intersubjectivity still plays a large role in my understanding of how humans interact with each other (though I don't believe our subjective realities affect how things *really* are). And as I've said before, no human is fully reasonable, so I may still be widely unreasonable (even for a human). Still though, for people who knew me before and still do, they seem to agree that I have become someone with very reasonable beliefs and methods, especially regarding my willingness to admit when I am proven wrong and my attention to justifying the beliefs I do still hold.

My desire for reasonableness though has also kept me alive in addition to affecting how I live. You see, I found it reasonable enough to grant that death is permanent with regards to this lifetime (even if there's an afterlife). Therefore, if I died, it would be a permanent change. But in living, there'd still be the potential for time to fix errors in my thinking. So even if I didn't want to live anymore, it would be prudent for me to live before making any hasty decision based on poor reasoning. If I was going to die, I could only do it with sufficient reason. But if in my philosophical investigations I

discovered that I should live, so be it. Let the best arguments win. What more could I do than be persuaded by the best argument available? It's worked wonders for science with a great track record so far, after all.

As for the desire to please others, I understood that others wanted me to live, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, I resigned myself to stay alive for their sake. I was aware that if I asked myself what the point was of pleasing others, any answer I gave was going to inevitably lead to nowhere. But the desire still pushed me anyway. That is the nature of our desires and emotions in general. They aren't always justified with reason, and thus are at least sometimes unreasonable. I would say that the more deep-rooted the emotions (and especially desires), the less likely they are founded in reasoning. Reasonable or not, I find them to be the forces which guide our actions. So continuing to live was just me being pushed by my desire to not hurt others.

However, because I also had the desire to die along with the desire to free myself from all the burdens of life, it wouldn't make entire sense for me not to also act upon those desires. At the time, I didn't hold myself to the belief that we only act on our desires, so I didn't act under such a notion. Nevertheless, I did do something in light of the mixture of desires between life and death. I came up with a plan. I would continue to live, and in the meantime I would continue looking into philosophy with an open mind looking for arguments in favor and against suicide, death, life, morality, rationality, knowledge, and the like. In order to be as unbiased as I could, I would seek out counter arguments to any idea I found attractive. I would do what I could to use good logic and reasoning. This part of my plan would at least open the possibility to commit suicide without abandoning my desire to be reasonable, provided one can suicide reasonably and rationally. Obviously, I did come to believe suicide can be reasonable and rational depending on what the reasons are and the circumstances (see chapter 9).

As for the desire to not hurt others, I came up with some ways to diminish the harm. First, I tried to get everyone to hate me. After all, you can't miss someone you don't like or care about (this may not be (necessarily) true as I have come to understand). I would have to do this in such a way as to not hurt them in the process, less my method be contradictory to the goal of using the method. I decided to slowly let people know more and more about me such as the fact that I had an imaginary friend even into adulthood or that preferably, I would marry my own twin. These kinds of facts over time

would be repulsive enough to make people not want to associate themselves with me without the end of our relationship being a difficult time for them, so I thought. (I do realize that trying to repulse people is in fact a harm in itself, but it was minimal and easily at least on par with if not less weighty than the everyday harms of just being around me such as when I annoy people with my incessant dry humor.) Unfortunately my plan failed miserably. People were very accepting of me (I have really good friends and family). Even those who think it would be immoral didn't care just like how I have friends and family members who are against homosexuality but accept me as gay. How distraught I was to have failed to make people choose to leave me, when in high school I wasn't able to get anyone to like me. It was a very ironic thing indeed. When I cared about making friends, I couldn't get any for years. But once I had them, even though I wanted them to forsake me, they wouldn't. By just being understanding (which I'm not saying is a bad thing at all), they unknowingly foiled my plans. It was a serendipitously hilarious plot looking back.

That wasn't my only attempt. I also just tried to cut off all ties entirely. For weeks I stopped talking to people and hanging out with them. If someone talked to me upon passing such as in the hallway, I would give the customary salutations of my culture and briskly take myself out of the situation to avoid conversation. The harm done to others by severing off our relationships so curtly was justified in my mind, because eventually, I would leave college one day by graduating, so it's not a harm which wouldn't happen anyway. I clearly didn't take into consideration how it could be more harmful to not be in contact with someone who's still physically around than to not be in contact with someone who isn't around. Someone did bring this contention up to me, and trying to be reasonable as best I could, I quit my attempt since I couldn't defend myself reasonably against this contention. Again, my point was to diminish the harm caused by suicide, so using a means which is harmful is self-defeating.

My third attempt was arguably the best, but it failed, too, as you will see. After reading the laws on involuntary institutionalization for mental health related cases in the states where I would be, I decided I could finally open up about my suicidality without fear of being locked up against my will and forced to pay for a ludicrously large medical bill I definitely couldn't afford, insurance or not. (It took me over 15 months to pay off a bill of over \$1000 just because I took the appropriate measures after I was raped a couple summers ago and got a rape kit done! There's no way I could pay for thousands of

dollars per night at a mental hospital!) By talking about my desire for death and hatred of life, my hope was to desensitize people to the idea of me suiciding. This way if I did ever die by suicide, they would be understanding of my situation. Further, people could have closure. This is important, because looking at help groups for people who are left behind from loved ones' suicides, I found many complaints about not knowing why and not being able to say their good-byes. But through my plan, people could ask questions. They could come to understand how in pain I was and have the compassion to accept my suicide and respect my choice. They couldn't complain about not being able to say good-bye and let me know how much they love and care about me. Also, they could argue with me and try and find substantial criticisms in my thinking to make me give up on my ideas or give me good convincing reasons to live.

I understood that the harm of just telling them would be great. Additionally, even if my plan were to succeed, my suicide wouldn't be without harm. However, my thought process was thus: "Which would be worse? Me committing suicide without telling anyone and them just waking up one day to discover I'm dead with no warning or explanation just left in confused ignorance, OR me telling them and causing some initial harm to prepare them emotionally for a suicide which is likely going to happen anyway and me giving them tools to handle the situation emotionally and logically?" I figured people would find the latter overall not as bad as the former. Furthermore, I believed that if I did succeed, then my suicide doing the diminished harm would be able to offset the harm done to me at the cost of keeping me alive for the rest of my natural lifespan even with the added initial harm of me telling them in the first place. However, I didn't think the harm done to me by living for the next few decades would be able to offset the harm done to others by an unannounced and unexplained suicide which is immensely painful and would continue to be painful for years to come, since people would be distraught by not knowing why and not having had their desired closure.

My plan failed for a few reasons. The first was that I overestimated just how willing people would be to engage me in conversation. Very few people asked me questions or even attempted to disagree with me, even though I told them I would only live if I were bested in argumentation. In fact, people tried to pretend like nothing was ever said. Because I still told jokes, laughed, and smiled daily, people acted and sometimes even said things along the lines of putting all that darkness behind us since I was no longer depressed. This irritated me heavily. Happy people can frown and cry even



every day but still be happy. Depressed people can laugh and smile and still be depressed. Just because I tell jokes and laugh at jokes doesn't mean I stopped hating life. They probably thought I was no longer suicidal because I was acting like my normal self. Of course I was! I had been suicidal for years. The Kegan they knew was suicidal, they just didn't know it. People wanted all the suicidality to be gone and done with, so they believed it by virtue of wanting to believe it (Pitiful!). And whenever I would contest this, they wouldn't want to talk about it anymore. They were content in covering their ears and closing their eyes to not deal with the truth of the matter. So be it. Less than 10 people actually ever brought up my suicidality without me being the one to start the conversation. And only half of those people tried on multiple accounts to give me the best arguments and criticisms they could. I was actually very proud. I expected very little from most of the people, simply because they aren't the philosophical, argumentative, or logical types. For example, my mom couldn't justify her assertion about god, an afterlife, moral realism (essentially her moral theory), the inherent badness of death and suicide, etc. though I am highly appreciative of her trying her hardest to convince me and to understand where I was coming from, even though she couldn't. But I did get some very good criticisms every once in a while.

For example, my father pointed out that I was practically trying to get permission to commit suicide but that's not the responsibility of others. What an excellent point! It's not the job of others to accept what another person does, especially if they disagree fundamentally with the very action carried out. My problem with this is that while I agree that people don't have to accept it, it would be in their best emotional interests to do so. Furthermore, by getting people to accept it, the action is less harmful and therefore warrants less scorn. Still, I appreciate the objection which led to a realization on my part.

One of my sisters tried on several occasions to argue with me, which I greatly admire. One of her criticisms one day was against the idea of an altruistic suicide. She said that suicide could only be selfish because it's done for the sake of helping oneself at the cost of hurting others. Her justifications of this conclusion were very poor, but I decided to try and justify it myself as best as I could to help her out. What I came up with was that one can commit suicide with some altruism, such as in order to not be a financial burden, to help make the world a better place (by getting rid of a bad person i.e. oneself), to donate one's organs and blood, etc. but overall, it is still widely selfish. And

even in such cases, the selfishness may be greater than the altruism in the case of mixed reasons. In my case, I ended up agreeing with her that my suicide would be selfish even in spite of some altruistic components. Though one must consider whether selfishness is bad and to what extent. Also, it might be the case that others are selfish for wanting to keep me alive even if my life is doomed to be painful and agonizing. I don't think there's a reliable method to discern whose pain is greater, mine in living or others' in dealing with my death.

But my sister made an even greater point on another occasion. My sister criticized my very method of discussing suicide with others. I had assumed that people would be less hurt by suicide if the suicide were discussed first, but she disagreed. She told me that she would prefer to have to deal with it all at once after the fact than to deal with it on multiple occasions by discussing it beforehand and then dealing with the real thing. This was very surprising and detrimental to me. When I told my mom about our conversation, my mom was able to add to this criticism, which I am proud of her for. She said that she didn't care which method I chose, neither case seemed less bad to her than the other. But eventually she did say that the method I chose was worse, because by being aware of my suicidality, it caused her to worry and fear every day about whether I had taken my life that day. This struck me hard! I didn't even take into consideration of weighing the pains the harm done between discussing suicide and the actual suicide. I only focused on the initial harm done and the ending harm done without even thinking about the harm in between! How idiotic of me! What absolute stupidity! This is in addition to the fact that I have come to realize that people don't really care about closure. The absence of discussion showed me that they don't want to say good-byes or learn about why people commit suicide in the first place. People who complain about not knowing and not having closure are just finding whatever they can to explain why they are hurting. But if ignorance and unclosed relationships were really the cause of the harm, then people wouldn't be so willing to pass up the opportunities I gave them. In the end, my attempt to ease people into the idea of my suicide in order to diminish the harm was one of the greatest failures of my life! What a terrible fool I was!

## 10.6 So then why did I die?

Looking at my moral theory, I realized I couldn't be rational in choosing to die if I wanted to be moral. After all, in order to be moral according to my theory, I would have

to do whatever I can to minimize the harm that I do. This means that I couldn't commit suicide morally because it would cause more harm than by staying alive. I disagree with this last part, since it's near impossible to tell whether my life full of pain would be more harmful overall or not. Not to mention the fact that since I'm imperfect, we'd also have to include all the harm I'll do on a daily basis. Still, I realized that I favor prudence most of the time. And since I cannot accurately estimate the harm of living that I would cause to myself and others vs. the harm of my suicide, it would be at least virtually immoral for me to commit suicide without the proper evidence to demonstrate that my suicide is the lesser of the two harms. While my desire to not be in pain is immensely great, my desire to not be the one to cause harm was greater. Unless I could find a way to diminish the harm done by suicide which would not itself cause great harm, I couldn't rationally choose to die. And so I chose to resign myself to living.

However, this is not the end of the story. Looking at why I don't like harming others, I found that my reasons are selfish. My desire to not hurt others stems from my desire to not be in pain. It is painful to me in knowing (or believing) that I have hurt another sentient creature, even minimally. If I weren't aware of the harm that I cause, I wouldn't be hurt by me doing the harm, in which case I wouldn't be against myself doing the harmful action in the first place. Awareness plays a key role in my desire to not harm people. This analysis has two major implications. The first is that if I live for the sake of not hurting others and I only want to not hurt others because it's painful to me to do so, then I continue to live for the sake of my own feelings. I do not have the strength to handle the mental torture of harming others the likes of which my suicide would cause.

The second implication is this: in death I won't be able to experience the pain of knowing I have harmed others by dying. If I do live though, I will experience the pain of the harm I do to others. Therefore if my desire to not harm others comes from not wanting to be hurt by hurting others, I have more reason to die than to live. This argument isn't convincing enough on its own, though it does have some merit. I'm alive right now and want others who want to feel good to feel good. Even though after my death I wouldn't be aware of the harm done, I am aware of the potential harm now. So my current self does not have good enough reason to choose death over life with regards to my desire to not do harm to others. I repeat, we act on the basis of our current selves, not who we once were or will eventually become.

For all that, there are two things which prevent me from living rationally on the grounds of morality and my desire to be moral, namely my moral standing and the strength of my desire. I am not a very moral person at all. In spite of attempts to act morally in most cases, I do currently believe consequences have more moral weight than intentions. So despite my attempts to be moral, the fact that I do immoral things is more important. But maybe someone can be moral without always only doing what is moral. Even if that's the case and even if intentions did matter and moral consequentialism were wrong, I still wouldn't be moral. I am selfish and don't act morally when morality is inconvenient for me. Likewise, if an immoral action which causes harm is better for me, I am inclined to take the immoral route. So even if it is moral to live for the sake of others, I am not a moral person in the first place, so I can still commit suicide.

But if I do so, then I do so irrationally because of my desire to not be immoral. The problem with this is that this desire to not harm others and my desire to act rationally in regard to being moral must be weighed against all of my desires which go against living. Aside from the fact that the latter group outweighs the former immensely, one desire in particular can do the job, I think. I stated that my desire to not do harm was greater than my desire to not be harmed. This used to be the case. Let me explain: My college life is near stressless. I excel in school, it's not difficult. I don't have a job. I literally have had less than twelve hours of class time per week these last four semesters. My college is paid for by a full-ride scholarship, so I don't have financial stress. I don't do anything which can stress me out much. I try not to do anything I significantly risk failing at. This semester, I auditioned for the part of Charlie Brown in a play, thinking my pessimistic attitude, decent acting skills, and bald head would be a great casting choice. I felt bad when I didn't get the part, irrationally I might add. I would rather the part go to the most suitable actor which obviously wasn't me, yet I still felt upset even though I wouldn't want the part if I were deemed inadequate which I was. The point is that this was the first time in months that I took a risk of failure.

I have been able to stay alive for so long because I can tolerate this near stressless lifestyle I currently have. However, as my college career draws to its conclusion, I will need to get a job and work more than three times as hard and as often as I currently do. My life will be filled with stress from work, from financial issues and concerns, from my philosophical issues, from my emotional problems, and so on. Moreover, with 40+ hour work weeks and the need to do my own cooking, transportation, errand running, and the

like, I will no longer have time to do the pleasurable activities I enjoy. Without the large amount of down time I currently have, I won't be able to relax myself from all of my stress. And during the days I don't work, I'll be too exhausted to do anything remotely difficult like study languages or philosophy. I'll be too braindead from working all week. I know this, because whenever I would work full-time during the summers at McDonald's (an easy job), I wouldn't have the energy to do anything during my days off aside from lying in bed all day watching T.V. and playing mindless video games.

Because my easy lifestyle is ending and I dread the stressful life that would otherwise inevitably await me, it is prudent for me to die now while I still am debt free. Let's not kid ourselves; I wouldn't survive long in a stressful environment. I tolerate my current life, barely! Working full-time just to barely survive in society would have me kill myself in two years tops, and that's a very generous maximum estimate. And because of the imminence of the stressful lifestyle that awaits me (ask around, I dare you; virtually nobody claims their job isn't stressful), my desire to not be harmed has become far greater than my desire to not harm others, so much so that I am now willing to accept that I will harm others for the sake of avoiding the harms of life. It isn't rational for me to choose death and harming others over dealing with my easy college life, but it is rational for me to choose death and harming others over dealing with the hard life which awaits me beyond graduation. In the latter case, my own pain is too much to handle. Not even my desire to be moral and not hurt others with my actions are not enough to keep me resigned to life.

You might be wondering why I didn't try antidepressants. After all, it may be the case that all of the facts about what a life entails are too much to handle now, but with the right treatment, I would be able to tolerate it all. Then I wouldn't have to die and hurt others and still be able to avoid all the subjective pain I fear so very much. Well, I admit I haven't given antidepressants enough of a try. I have only been on two, which I shall not name so as not to talk negatively about a trademarked product. Not being around to legally defend my book, I don't want to give anyone a reason to have it legally restricted for infringement. But I will say that one very, very popularly known antidepressant was entirely ineffective after six weeks. The other made me more tired than I already am. It's bad enough that no matter how much I sleep, I'm always tired, but that medication made me exhausted to the point where I could barely do anything, even my homework. Additionally, it made me irritable and made me angry. I hated everybody who annoyed

me while on that medication. This was unacceptable. I am not an angry person. Anger is my least favorite emotion and it hurts me when I feel it, which I rarely ever do. It also gave me nightmares. Sleep was my only salvation from life and that medicine took that away from me! But the reason I didn't continue was because I didn't have insurance and couldn't afford to pay hundreds of dollars to talk to a psychiatrist for half an hour every two weeks who would give me a new drug to become dependent on just to think the way society wants me to think. I have doubts that they would work anyway; my skepticism would prevent a placebo effect (I like to believe, though I may have been no less susceptible) and my suicidality stems from more than just feelings of depression and stress even though they are a significant part of it. I also was suicidal for philosophical reasons which I doubt pills could magically fix. Besides, I don't think my way of thinking is in need of medical interference. I reason just as well if not better than other people, and they don't have to medically fix their neurology. I didn't want to take something which would make me like what I didn't like or what I didn't want to like in the first place. I wouldn't take a pill if I knew it would make me love art, even if others want me to enjoy art, because I currently have no interest in art. It would be irrational of me to take something which would make me desire what I do not desire. Finally, as expressed in the last chapter, I find that psychiatric understanding of mental illnesses is too uncertain to put as much credence into it as society does. I don't think psychiatrists have the authority to dictate what kinds of thoughts people should have and what neurologies need to be medically altered and which ones do not.

I choose suicide because the hard life of working is more painful to me than the thought of all the harm my suicide will cause to those I love. I still love them, but I care about my own well-being more. I admit that I am selfish.

### 10.7 Reasonableness and rationality of my suicide

So now you know my story of how I came to die by suicide. What's done is done. But still, those who are still alive such as you the reader can reflect on whether my suicide was done with reason and rationality. Please see sections 9.3 and 9.4 for my basic analysis of what it means to be rational.

Starting with rationality, I don't see how I could have likely been irrational in my decision. I chose the option which satisfied more desires as well as the option whose

desires being satisfied was more important to me. I acted in such a way to get as many goals as I could. What could be irrational about that?

Maybe you doubt that I actually did fulfill my desires by dying. After all, my desire to perceive reality cannot happen if I'm dead, nor can I enjoy the relief from not being stressed in death, since I will no longer exist to experience the relief. If you thought of similar criticisms, good job, except there are some factors not being taken into account. While it's true that many my desires which cannot be fulfilled in life such as the desire for absolute knowledge and undistorted perception of reality, that doesn't mean I cannot rationally die with these desires in mind. As an analogy, I have been balding since about the age of 16. Now, I would prefer a full head of hair. So we'll say that a full head of hair is five points out of five. Being bald (I now shave) isn't so bad though. Let's give it a 3 out of 5. But a balding head looks terrible to me. A balding head deserves a 1.5 out of 5. Now supposing there was no possibility for a full head of hair, I could either have a balding head or a bald head. Clearly the bald head is better even if it gives up on the 5 out of 5. Similarly, my quest for knowledge and undistorted perception are reasonably out of my reach. They would be great, but between being a creature with imperfect knowledge and perception with the forever unfulfilled desire for more and not existing as a sentient creature at all, I would prefer the latter. Thus it is rational to choose the latter.

As for the fact that I cannot feel relief in dying, I deny that this is what I desire. If I did desire to feel relieved or happy, then I could only do so by living. I understand that death is a permanent choice which I cannot take back. I'm willing to give up the chance to experience every good thing in my life for the sake of abandoning all of the bad things which outweigh the good for me. I don't care if I can never feel good ever again. I don't care if I can't revel in my escape from life. I simply don't want to experience the harms of life. This desire can be achieved in death and not in life. Therefore I am being rational by choosing death. Death serves my interest of never being in the slightest bit of stress or pain ever again, even if I cannot enjoy it. And this is fine, because I don't want to be sentient. I wish to no longer exist as a thinking thing. I hate being an observer, a human, a sentient creature with thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.

There is one area in which I may not be rational by choosing suicide. I say I hate emotions, and I do. Moreover I say I want to rid myself of my emotions, which again I do. But this might be irrational. It certainly is contradictory to desire to not have emotions. I

essentially desire to not desire. But desiring to not desire is irrational, so the objection goes. This objection rests on the premise that desires cannot be contradictory. I disagree. I think emotions can easily be contradictory. They're not logical after all, they're emotional. Emotions do not abide by the rules of logic. Emotions and especially desires can and are sometimes self-conflicting and contradictory. Still, we might just define rationality in such a way that contradictory desires cannot be rational. I would disagree with the definition, but even if I were to accept it, I wouldn't care. I don't desire to be rational in that sense. I want to be rational in the sense of instrumental rationality as I have generally defined it.

Some may say I am irrational because I don't have enough knowledge to accurately weigh and understand the consequences of my choices (Cholbi, 286). This is a weak argument. If you doubt that I have an accurate understanding of what life entails, then even if I chose to live, I would be irrational under this contention. So either way I couldn't be rational, so why criticize me dying? Besides, have I really said unreasonably false things about life? Is it not true that there are no stressless jobs? Is it not true that two people who know each other well inevitably get on each other's nerves now and again? The problem I think most people have with how I view life is how I value the things in it like the stress of work being extremely bad. But this isn't a fact. It's my subjective opinion. And I challenge you to tell me that I am wrong to fear the stress of work I've already experienced before. As for understanding death and the consequences thereof, I admit that I could be wrong. However, I think I have enough evidence and sufficient justifications to support my beliefs. Some people only live because they fear that suicide will lead them to hell. Those people have even less evidence to justify their claims about an afterlife or hell, so they would be irrational for living! I doubt many people would disagree with them living though. This shows that maybe you disagree with my choice not because it was irrational, but because you are dogmatically against any reasoning which comes to the conclusion that suicide is rational or otherwise okay. If that is actually the case, then I don't care much about what you have to say. There's little point in arguing with someone who doesn't even fancy the possibility that they could be wrong.

And it wouldn't make sense to say I'm irrational based on facing death which I fear naturally. I've never had an issue with death. I never found death itself sad or even scary as a concept. When I was five, I believed that I would ascend to heaven (I was going



to church briefly that year) by standing under some rays of light that showed the clouds on top of a hill near my apartment. I thought about how I wouldn't see my friends or family ever again but ran up hoping to leave this planet. I was disappointed when nothing happened. Then when I was seven, I almost drowned, or at least I believed I was going to drown. By that age, I had a better understanding of death. I wasn't sure about the existence of an afterlife by then. I again understood the permanent nature of death and the harm of losing me others would have. I also believed that that may have been the end of my dreams and my thoughts and my happiness. But I didn't even try to save myself. I knew I couldn't swim, so I didn't even try. I accepted death for whatever it may be. I was content in living as long as I had. A lifeguard did eventually save me, but I was neither happy nor upset. Death wasn't good or bad to me, just a part of life, and I understood that. This is not to say that I don't have any fear of death whatsoever. I biologically do. I get sweaty palms and quiver just a bit when contemplating my own death. But I have similar biological responses to an open car window or thinking about a roller coaster, and I wouldn't say I fear either one. Fearing something biologically doesn't mean one cannot rationally choose to face it, even undergo it. I can rationally roll down the window in a hot car to cool myself off even if a small part of me fears the loud noise of the wind. I can rationally choose to have fun at an amusement park at the expense of going on a roller coaster I'm partially anxious about. Similarly, I can rationally choose to die by my own hands even though I will have some level of instinctual fear. If anything, I fear living. I fear getting caught and thrown into a mental hospital. I fear having to work for the rest of my life. I fear failing at suicide and finding a newfound desire to live. But I think such a change of heart would be miraculous. After all I've done to prepare myself, I doubt a near-death experience will outweigh everything thus far.

What about reasonableness? Was I unreasonable in choosing suicide? You know what? Maybe! I admit that since I'm not that great at philosophy and certainly didn't write a great book here, maybe my reasons are poor and I was unreasonable in committing suicide. However, I dare you to sit there and think that I was excessively unreasonable. I spent years developing my beliefs with an open mind. The fact that I came to the conclusions I did, even if wrong, shouldn't mean that I wasn't reasonable to some extent. Moreover, I doubt the majority of people walking on the street could give adequate reasons for why they do what they do, especially live. People live for the wrong reasons or for little or no reasons all the time. People act with bad reasons. People are unreasonable all the time. Some people make decisions based on horoscope predictions,

Tarot cards, prayers, “signs,” or even rolling dice! I make decisions based calculated cost analyses of the consequences of various outcomes of the actions and inactions I take. At least I try!

Maybe I’m unreasonable because I’m so “obsessed” with being reasonable. This is an interesting idea at first glance. After all, others are deemed reasonable without constantly trying to be reasonable in their beliefs and actions. But me, I try to rid myself of ideas that I find unreasonable in light of evidence and arguments and try to only tentatively hold to beliefs that I find reasonable using my best judgement at the time. So then, the objection would go, I am unreasonable because I put forth effort where others do not. One may even make the claim that to try to be reasonable is itself unreasonable or demonstrates that one wasn’t already reasonable (otherwise why try?). All of these ideas are misleading, as far as I can tell. While it may be true that one isn’t being reasonable in the first place, trying to be reasonable shouldn’t keep it that way. And it seems contradictory to me to say that to try to be reasonable is in itself unreasonable. Reasonableness is a matter of utilizing coherent logical systems. How might trying to be logical be itself illogical? I’m not saying it can’t be (I’m not trying to make an argument from ignorance), but it does seem self-contradictory. If one is illogical or unreasonable but cannot try to amend the situation, what is one to do? Nothing? Shall we not try to amend the situation and just accept that we cannot be reasonable and rational? I think not. To try to be more reasonable and logical is I find coherent with being reasonable and logical. Moreover, just because others may be deemed reasonable enough without putting much if any effort into it, that does not mean to do so is to abandon reasonableness. If others are strong without lifting weights, lifting weights doesn’t make one physically weak. I think a similar state of affairs is at work regarding reasonableness. As for the idea that I’m unreasonable by “obsessing” over it so to speak, I must admit that I’m unsure. I don’t know if reasonableness is best when moderated or not. It certainly seems weird if not contradictory to say that it is sometimes reasonable to be unreasonable. Perhaps though, because humans are not fully reasonable creatures to begin with, it is our best interests as humans to be unreasonable to reflect that part of our nature. Of course, if we were to say that I am unreasonable by not moderating my reasonableness, then wouldn’t I be moderating my reasonableness by being unreasonable in not moderating my reasonableness? Do you see why I think this kind of objection is paradoxical?

Of course, reasonableness needn't be an all or nothing thing. It might be the case that some actions like choosing what book to read don't need to be reasonable or need very little reason. But others need to be reasoned heavily. I do not think death is such that no amount of reasoning can justify choosing it. I don't believe in infinities like that. So a finite amount of reasoning should suffice. As for how much, I don't know. Obviously I do think I had enough good reasons to kill myself or I wouldn't have done it. But let's look at the evidence, shall we?

I wrote an entire book after years of research in philosophical investigations. This book is a collection of my beliefs and perceptions and the justifications and reasons which came from my perceptions and led to my beliefs and conclusions. I hope that this is at least somewhat a good demonstration of my reasonableness. It's not like I committed suicide at the very first argument in favor of me doing it. I even specifically sought out counter arguments. And when talking to others, I help them make their arguments stronger even if it goes against what I think! As my friends can tell you, when I discover that I am wrong I explicitly tell them that I was mistaken and what they said which showed me my problems and how that led to my dismissal of my former beliefs. Does this sound unreasonable to you?

Of course, I don't want to make a logical fallacy here. I understand that it might be the case that I am reasonable overall. We could even grant for the sake of argument that I was right about everything in this book up until this chapter. Even still, I could be unreasonable about choosing suicide myself. Just because I'm reasonable in one thing or in many things, that doesn't mean I can't be unreasonable in another thing. I agree. However, I would contest that I have used similar argumentative styles and similar forms of logic and reasoning to arrive to the conclusion of suicide as I have used in the rest of the book. So you could either point out how I haven't used similar reasoning in this chapter compared to others, or you could argue that the types of reasoning I use in my life and in my book are adequate for most things, but suicide requires other forms of reasoning. Either option you pick (maybe there are more), I expect you will have a hard time defending your position. I was very keen about using the best reasoning I could when writing. I want to take a moment to remark on the fact that I am aware of these objections. I come up with some of them myself! I am always trying to prove myself wrong, because I do have the desire to rid myself of false and unjustified beliefs and replace them with better ones. Even in this chapter, I have presented objections to my

ideas, some of which I admit do nullify my original ideas! I find it hard to believe that this is a mark of a madman that is too incompetent to reason well.

Moreover, I was smart in my suicide. A lot of people who attempt suicide don't even take the time to do basic research for crying out loud! Overdosing on sleeping pills is not likely to kill you despite being a common sudden choice. And even if it does, the idea that it kills you peacefully in your sleep is easily proven false if you do a quick search online. What basically happens (without using scientific jargon) is that your liver gets overworked and begins to malfunction, unable to process all of the medicine. You end up waking up in excruciating pain. Sometimes your liver can process it after hours and hours of being in a state of physical torment, in which case you're unlikely to die. Even if you do die, you're going to die from liver failure, so it's nowhere near the desired peaceful sleeping death people think it is. Most people get discovered or end up calling the ambulance themselves and then get their livers pumped. This is common knowledge for anyone who talks to people who have survived suicide attempts or looks into how death occurs in various circumstances such as overdosing on over the counter medicines.

Me, I will only be choosing methods I agree with. Ideally, I would die by inhaling a noble gas like helium in a bag covering my head. The method may not have a very high fatality rate, but I would do my best to not do it incompetently by ensuring minimal oxygen in the bag and minimal chance of the bad coming off. One will survive if the bag comes off by not being able to remain tight on one's head during the inevitable thrashing that the body will do while dying. It can also be painful if too much air is present in the bag before the helium (or whatever noble gas) is added. However, as long as the air amount is minimalized and the bag secure, it is a peaceful method which can be near painless and makes you unconscious within seconds (Stone, Chapter 17). Then as you die from suffocation, you won't be awake to experience any pain. Plus, if you have an opaque bag, nobody who discovers you will see the grotesque dead face. It's a nice idea indeed.

However, this is a later resort because it isn't too successful. I would rather practically choose a way that is probabilistic in lethality. I also want a method which others won't have to clean up or see a disgusting scene (I don't want to cause harm in that way if preventable at little expense to me). And finally, I want a method which is mostly painless. So I have decided to leave society to die. I will die in a secluded area where I don't expect anyone to discover me. I also choose drowning as a method. This is

lethal, can hide my body well if I sink to the bottom of the water (with a weight attached to prevent my body from floating), and I can avoid the pain by taking sleeping medicine such that they will take effect shortly after I descend in the water. As an extra precaution, I will strangle myself until I pass out so even if I gasp for breath, my lungs will not fill with water until I am unconscious so as to avoid the pain of drowning. The best part is that I live in Michigan with very large lakes all around. No one will find me or even know where to look. This way, nobody has to worry about expensive funeral costs for me (I don't want to cause financial harm either) and nobody has to see my dead body, which I imagine would be traumatizing for a lot of people. I will time my death in such a way that nobody will see me enter the water and be suspicious. I will be very intelligent about this.

I'm a tactician, or like to think of myself as one. So in the event that my plan fails, I have backups, and backups to those backups. I will be prepared to die by hanging myself with knowledge of what knots are lethal, where to tie the rope, and how to make it probable that my face will not become engorged in blood afterwards. If that fails, I will use a noble gas bag. Then I will use a bag with limited air supply with well-timed sleeping pills to ensure that I die unconsciously as I suffocate. I can then try drinking two bottles of soy sauce which could kill me due to the massive salt intake. If still I fail, I will arm myself and forego the painless requirement if I must. After all, even a knife to the heart would be much less painful than a life full of turmoil and stress. And although I really don't want to do this, if all of these attempts fail and I still desire death, I will risk harming a train conductor and anyone who witnesses the aftermath by jumping in front of a train. I hope I don't have to be more immoral about this than it already will be, but I will do what I must.

In all cases, I will be in my underwear (well, unless it's too cold). This is because clothes slow down the decomposition process especially by helping scavengers erode the body. But I will be in underwear so that nobody who discovers me would have to deal with a dead, naked body. Americans are a bunch of prudes when it comes to nudity, so I'll respect that. Whatever is the case, I find it a pleasant idea that scavengers and other organisms which help the deterioration process will find use for my body. I'd much rather donate my body to science and medical needs, but donating my body to other organisms isn't so bad.

Another important thing I will do is give personalized letters to several people I care about (over 50 pages worth of letters). This is much more than what many suicidal people do. Many don't even leave notes. And those who do rarely leave more than a page (though there are some exceptions like Mitchell Heisman whom I recently discovered who also wrote a philosophy book before suiciding, which I found to be sensible, though I think he was too religion-driven to call himself a nihilist I think). I have left an entire book. But that's still not enough. I will give out letters to people I love so that I can help them emotionally in dealing with my death as much as I can, including telling them about my book and where to find it and the YouTube videos I'll be making regarding my death. But mostly, the letters will be personal to each individual to help them cope.

With all this in mind, knowing how much thought I've put into this over the years, can a person reasonably look at my life and my choice to die and declare me irrational, capricious, and unreasonable? I think not.

## 10.8 To those who love me

Even if you don't know me or feel bad about my death, I still think you may find this section worth reading. There will be some common objections to me choosing suicide as well as further insight into my reasoning and my feelings.

Firstly, to those who love me, I truly am sorry. I know it may seem hard to believe, but I do feel guilty and remorseful for the harm I've done. It's true. I just couldn't stand to live any longer. It hurt too much. But that doesn't mean I didn't still love and care about you. I was selfish and I'm sorry. Still, I don't regret my decision. I'm just doing the best I can with what I have available to me, as we all do.

I wish I could take the hurt away, but only you can do that. Only you can move on. I may be able to help though.

Firstly, you might find it easier to let go of me if you hated me. I don't mind. I hate myself anyway. But I ask you, having hurt you like this, why do you still care about me? Why would you care about someone who knew the pain that you would feel? And I do. I know that you will miss me. I know that you will cry. I know that you will wake up after having me in a dream and be distraught that that's all I can be for you now. I know that you will be reminded of me by something random and that will tear you up inside. I

know that you will ache in the pain of loss. I know that some of you will consider death yourself. But I hope you will be reasonable and rational and not make any hasty decisions. But even though I knew about the heartache I would cause you for the rest of your life, I still did it. So why would you love someone who would do such a thing to you knowingly? Don't you think only a monster could do that? Why would you feel bad about the death of a monster? I've been told that there's no pain greater than losing someone to suicide (doubtful, I would argue concentration camps, slavery, torture, abuse, and rape can all be worse). That makes me someone who did the most deplorable harm a human can do. Am I really worth missing and crying over then?

You may be wondering why I couldn't just accept life for what it was, accept myself for who I was. But if you assert that I ought to accept what life gives me, then you are being hypocritical. I am dead. If you think I should've accepted the bad things in my life and continued moving on, then I invite you to do the same. Accept that suicide happens and that I did it, and move on. If you contest that one should accept things out of one's control, then you still should accept my suicide. It was out of your control, which I'll readdress shortly. I actually don't think you should accept things just because they are a certain way. If you feel wronged, you should be able to express yourself and act on your emotions. I believe we act because of our emotions, so be a human and get upset by what happens to you that you don't like. You don't have to accept it just as I didn't have to accept my life.

I find the assertion that I should accept myself particularly humorous. People can only handle having serious conversations with me (usually philosophical in nature) for a maximum of an hour or so. And when it comes to my depression and suicide, they quickly become overwhelmed. Here's a particularly amusing story. I was discussing my suicidality with someone who studies philosophy himself and is probably better at it than I am. He was prepared to call the police on me (he literally told me he was about to) because he was afraid that I would kill myself that night. But apparently he was so concerned about me staying alive that he couldn't stand to talk to me anymore! What kind of twisted logic is that? If I tell you that the only way to keep me alive is to prove me wrong and you refuse to engage me in conversation, then you aren't doing a good job of trying to keep me alive. My point is not to guilt you though. My point is that you think I should live with myself. But you can't even stand an hour thinking about the things I'm constantly thinking about. And before you say I should just think about other things, I

try! I try my hardest to distract myself from the philosophical questions that haunt me every waking hour. But it never works. Every time I hear an assertion or am a part of a conversation, I can't help that my brain unconsciously makes me have philosophical questions that I then must process. And if I try to refuse, then I am forced into justifying why I would refuse, ergo more philosophy. My brain is a torture chamber. You think it's not so bad because you get to say you've had enough for one day and walk away to think of other things. I don't have that luxury! Except for when I'm asleep, I am haunted by strenuous thoughts all day long (not every moment, but enough to be agonizing). You would hate yourself as a thinking thing too if you couldn't escape your own thoughts which stress you out!

If you are against my suicide because it's an act of quitting or giving up, then you are probably an American. American culture is pro-perseverance to an unreasonable extent. When I ask foreigners how perseverance and quitting are regarded in their cultures, I find their responses to be far more reasonable than here. Some Americans think that if you start a game with others, it's negative on your character to quit even if it's not what you expected and no longer wish to play it. I agree that perseverance is generally good, but not always. It's ridiculous that quitting a club is viewed as negative here in the states. You shouldn't continue doing something you don't enjoy, at least not if it's optional like a club or an instrument in school. If you enter a race, you should quit if you are overdoing it and are about to vomit or hurt yourself. Quitting can be the best option in one's interests sometimes. And quitting life was in my best interests.

One more common objection is along the lines of, "You just need to keep living and move forward." The problem I have is with the word "need." Necessity, when referring to an action, implies a goal. In order to pass a class, I need to get a certain grade. In order to get a good enough grade, I need to do some of the work at an adequate level. But I don't need to pass a class in the first place, not inherently anyway. I do if the only way to achieve a goal is to pass a class, such as the goal to graduate. And I may need to graduate in order to achieve some other goal, but in itself graduation is not something I need to accomplish. I may need to move on and keep living if I want to be happy or if I want to persevere and keep living. But inasmuch as I do not desire life or to achieve what can only be achieved by living such as happiness, I do not need to live. There is no metaphysical requirement to desire life or things therein, and it just so happens that I do not desire such things. At least, my desires are overall in favor of not living than in favor



of living. My overall goals do not require me to live but to die in order to achieve them as best as I can.

I wonder what you will think of me. I wonder what people who used to know me back in high school or even childhood would think if they found out I died by suicide. They probably would be shocked that someone so intelligent and so much going for them could want to die. But that just goes to show how much people blind themselves to reality. Suicide is a leading cause of death. It happens. The fact that people think it couldn't affect someone they know is just ignorant, and likely willingly so. As for me being the suicidal person, I wouldn't expect people to know. I used to be so full of optimism and would often talk about my future plans of being some big shot scientist in Japan. But as a kid, I still believed in magic, and thought I lived in a magical world. Every year I hoped that was the year my magical destiny would present itself to me and I would be whisked away to another world after saying my good-bye's to everyone who would accept my fate as away from this boring planet. Even as a kid, I may have spoken about plans in this world, but in my head, I never wanted this life, but another one. In high school, I was suicidal, but nobody knew because I didn't dare talk about it. I was too afraid of being put into a mental hospital and my family not being able to afford it. So of course suicidal Kegan would come to a large shock. And it would seem that suicidality isn't a part of the "real" Kegan you used to know. But the truth of the matter is that I've been wanting to die for years, and I was almost never content with the promise of a life in this world.

\*\*\*I must mention this. I must ask you not to feel guilty, if you do. It's not your fault. Any thoughts like "If only I had said or done something, he would still be alive," are misleading. I was too determined. There's nothing you could have done to save me. There's nothing that you could have said differently. While I was open to changing my mind, your neurology was such that it could only come up with the arguments it did, and they weren't convincing to me. So it was out of your control. If you didn't engage me in argumentation, then you aren't the kind of person to do that. The necessary steps to persuade me from suicide weren't available to your skill set, so you are not to blame. You all did your best in the ways you specifically could. I also don't want to give anybody the false idea that I made a cry for help through some gesture or something I said. That isn't the case. Sometimes I talk about life, death, and even suicide or make jokes, but these aren't ways for me to ask for help. Even the request to be proven wrong was a means to

get closer to a more reliable truth and not a means to have a reason to live. If anything I was biased to die, but I didn't want to die for bad reasons. So please don't look at a certain memory and think to yourself that I was reaching out for help. Such perceptions are you trying to make something that wasn't there. And if you wish someone had locked me up, I would have been infuriated. In a rage I would have done whatever it would take to kill myself in that hospital. It still wouldn't have been your fault, but my suicide would have been much worse (finish this section and the next to find out why). I'm upset that my decision has to be harmful to others, but I'm not upset about my decision overall. It was my choice. And even if you could have done something different, take your own advice. You can't change the past, so don't worry about what could have been. Keep moving forward now toward a brighter future. Don't look back. Don't focus on the bad, just the good. Don't blame yourself for what befalls others. Don't get upset of what you can't control. If you believe these things, then practice what you preach. Even if you don't, I did what I did in full conscience and understanding of the consequences and their relation to my desires and ends. To that extent, I did what I did of my own volition. It's not your fault. You don't need to feel guilty.

Finally in this section, I'd like to focus on the positive side of things (I know, right?). I imagine most people will be distraught by my suicide. If this is the case for you, please hear me out. You're so upset that I'm not around and that you can't enjoy things with me anymore. You're upset that I can't be happy like you wanted for me. You may be upset in believing that I'm in hell. All of that is fine. But you have reasons to be happy for me, too. My life is a nightmare. I am in torturous pain every day. I go to sleep, relieved that I can stop being me for just a few hours while I'm unconscious. The worst part of my day is waking up, because I realize that I'm still alive and have one more day's worth of torture to deal with. I am miserable and hurt all the time. Sometimes I feel like I'm about to implode, and my insides clench with intense strife. Other times, I feel like I could explode. Until recently, I was unable to cry for five months. Crying feels good and is relieving. In my misery I couldn't cry though. My body wouldn't even let me have one ounce of catharsis! Can you imagine? When I'm walking to class every week, I look at the ground and wish I could just drop down and never get up ever again. I was date raped a couple summers ago. And you know what? It wasn't even that bad for me. I am in so much suffering every day that getting raped was hardly anything especially bad to me. I feel worse thinking about work than I do about my rape. That's how bad of a situation I am in. And people tell me to be happy. I look at happiness and all the stupidity,

ignorance, and biases that come with it and hate it. Everybody wants me to want what I don't want. They want me to live with myself even though they can't stand an hour inside my head. They want me to live even though I struggle just for the sake of not hurting them.

So I ask you to look at my death with the understanding that I am free. I am no longer in so much pain. I am no longer hurting. I am no longer full of desires I can never have fulfilled. I am no longer struggling for knowledge with a mind that is so full of doubts and uncertainties. I am no longer tortured by my thoughts and by the stresses of life. I am no longer controlled by my neurology just like I think everyone is. In that respect death is liberating in a way (though this kind of freedom may not be desirable since one cannot relish one's freedom). In spite of my philosophical pessimism, I am still that little optimistic kid. I'm still hopeful that I don't need to be tortured anymore. Please, I'm begging you to consider my death at least partially good in this regard. If you could find it in your heart to be happy knowing that a pet was put to sleep so as to prevent a life full of misery and agony, then I hope you can find it in your heart to be happy knowing that my death has spared me a most treacherous fate of a stressful life. If you want to be happy, then I believe you can accomplish your goal. Just ask yourself what it means to be happy and how to achieve happiness and then take the steps to attain your desired happiness. If you have to let me go, hate me, forgive me, forget me, or whatever, it's okay. I want you to have what you want. If you want a life with me in it though, I'm afraid I also want what I want. I'm sorry for being selfish. I hope you can find peace in your life. And if not, then I hope death is the end of consciousness so that you won't be distraught for too much longer, just a few decades left to go. I couldn't stand such a long time, because I'm weak. I'm not enduring like my mother. I could never make it through what she went through. I'm sorry for being so weak. I'm sorry. I really am being honest as I write these words. I'm sorry.

I know you loved me and wanted what you thought was best for me. But I just can't take it anymore. My intelligence wasn't enough to keep me alive. My reasoning skills failed me. I couldn't know things like I wanted to. And I'd rather not know anything at all than be forever separated from the knowledge I so desperately seek. Please be rational. Think about what you want, what you really want, weigh your options and your desires, and do what you can to get what you want. I'm okay now. I'm no longer hurting. I'm sorry for shifting some of my pain on to you. I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry!

## 10.9 This book, suicidology, and something optimistic

Well, we've come to the final section of this chapter. I hope someone reads it. I hope someone reads this book. But it's reasonable to wonder why. After all, don't I think nothing matters in the end?

I do indeed think that. But as I state in chapter 7, I do have desires, and I want people to know about my ideas. I want to be understood. Moreover, I want this book to help people. Not only do I think this book can help people who are hurt by my death to cope, but I think that this book has potential elsewhere. If some of my arguments are indeed good, then they can be helpful for philosophers. If my ideas on suicide in particular are good, then maybe my book can help others who rationally and reasonably wish to commit suicide to be in a society which understands them and has more compassion for them. Maybe this book will help take away some of the stigma of suicide and will lessen the harm that future suicides that happen (and they will certainly happen) cause. Conversely, if I'm wrong and my ideas are harmful to society and its citizens, then I hope criticisms of my work will become well-known. This way any rational and reasonable person who is attracted to my ideas would see the criticisms and hopefully have enough reasoning skills to see the merit of the objections and abandon my poor arguments.

This is an optimistic position, but that's because it's an ideal hope for this book, not an expectation. I don't consider myself a martyr and I don't think I have illusions of grandeur about my suicide. Actually, it would be surprising for me (if I were brought back to life for example) to discover that my book became popular at all. I imagine that this book as well as my life will fall into obscurity in little time. And that's fine. I don't care about being famous in history. I do want my ideas to help others if they are helpful. But equally, I would rather not hurt others with my ideas if they are harmful. And it is true I think that once sentient creatures all die out, this book will be meaningless. To that end, it doesn't make one significant difference whether anyone reads it or not, since there will no longer be significance in the world. I am like every other human in the sense that I do futile tasks because I simply want to.

I understand that eventually I would be free from my torturous life one way or another. It was just a matter of when, why, and how. But I'll say this. Since the end result is the same whether I live or die, I looked instead at the difference. And the difference

lies in life itself. By living, I am experiencing the pain of life and it matters to me because I can't help but attribute value to my suffering. By dying, I do not have to experience the pain. In one hundred years I'll be dead either way, but one way has pain that matters to me and the other doesn't. Besides, in suicide I get to send out letters and make it clear to those left behind that I am not upset that I'm no longer alive as well as get to choose a painless way to die instead of leaving it up to chance. As in chapter 7 I believe we act on our current selves not our future states. We don't act because it's meaningful to do so, we act because our emotions push us to act.

If someone is reading this, I hope you could do a favor for me. I want this book to be read by a suicidologist. At the very least, someone who researches suicide could find use for this book. I have given them a lot to work with. I have created a website where this book is also located. Perhaps it will get taken down and/or the friend to whom I have given the rights to this book and my website has changed the website into a new domain name. But by the time of my death, at <https://reasonabledeath.wordpress.com> are also the letters I wrote. I put them there because I have read others' suicide letters and want a suicidologist to look at them and evaluate them. I also put them there in case someone loses theirs. I did this at the expense of the people to whom they are addressed feeling betrayed or that I "threw them under a bus." I don't believe any of them are detrimental to anyone's reputation, so the only harm done is that I made them public, but they are still personalized.

If a suicidologist is reading this, I want to make some things very clear. 1. I died in April. However, I did not die because I have been feeling cheerful due to spring and finally found the energy to die. I died in April because it's just before the end of the semester. I am not a part of the general statistic of when most suicides occur for the generic reason. 2. I am not a relevant part of the LGBT suicide statistics. My suicide had little to nothing to do with me being gay. 3. A couple months before my suicide, another student in my same dorm building killed herself (most likely based on how the RA's talked mysteriously about needing to talk after a tragedy). My suicide has nothing to do with hers. My plans were conceived two years ago and put into progress several months ago. It's purely coincidental. 4. My suicide had nothing to do with drugs or alcohol. I have drunk at about 1.0-1.5 times per month since turning 21. I will not be drinking within the week of my death. 5. I am fine with being considered in suicidal statistics based on my age, race, status as a student, income (financial stress is a huge factor), and

of course being considered as one who suicided for philosophical reasons. 6. Although depression is a major factor in my suicide, it shouldn't be seen as the sole root of it. In December of 2015 until the middle of January, 2016, I felt different. After a couple of weeks, I realized that I was feeling not depressed, a state I hadn't been in in years. In my state of non-depression which lasted about three weeks, I still wanted to die and still hated life. But I didn't feel weighed down like I normally am. I didn't feel crushed by my sorrows or by my racing thoughts I couldn't control. I felt at peace with myself, my life, and with my decision. If you doubt that I truly wasn't depressed, I would have dared you to prove it neurologically, but wait, you couldn't. Depression isn't defined by neurology as a neurological disorder ought to be. Instead, you'll just have to take my word; it's the best anyone can do currently. For all that it didn't last long and it didn't change my decision anyway. Though it did allow me to cry again when I sunk back into depression, which was very pleasant.

Regarding my death date, it is going to be the first week of April, probably on Friday April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016 but might change depending on the weather. I'd actually prefer to die on my birthday May 23<sup>rd</sup> so as to spite the day of my birth which I scorn, but that's not so possible. Actually the day of my birth isn't as rueful as the day of my conception. However, that is unknown, so I can't very well die on that day out of spite.

To end this chapter, I've been saving something very special and optimistic (mostly). I've been preparing for my death for the last few years, but I've also been taking care of myself and things that need to be done in case I end up living (I don't want to be unprepared). This last part will be dedicated to explaining how I prepared myself and my relationships for the end along with a mostly optimistic story.

In addition to writing this book and my good-bye letters over the last year, since the last attempt to diminish the harm of my suicide had failed, I began to stop talking about suicide except with my friends whom I believed could handle it and were interested in my philosophical reasons. Otherwise, I have tried to act happy around others, since that's what they seem to want out of me. I don't want to force them to think of me as suicidal or depressed if they don't care about the truth (see 2.6). If they didn't want to think about it, I wasn't going to try to make them. And especially these last few months, I've been trying extra hard to be upbeat and only talk about positive things with people who don't like having serious and negative conversations. Even the ones who are,

I will make sure our last interactions are positive. I intend to call my family members with whom I have a good standing relationship shortly before my death. I will video chat with those family and friends whom I'd like to see one last time before departing. It may be unfortunate that we can't have one last hug, but I am hopeful that they will manage, and I certainly will. For those who are around me, I will try to give them one last hug. And in all cases, I will make sure that they understand how grateful and appreciative I am for having had them in my life and give them hopes for the future. I'll let them know that I know they love me as well as let them know that I love them as well. I will make our last encounter one worth cherishing, one worth being called a final encounter. Even though most people seem not to care too much about closure as it would seem, I'm going to give it to them just in case. I want people's last memories of me to be good for their sake. After all, it would be a shame if I died after a not so happy conversation and they had to live with that being their final memory of me. This is why even if I end up living for several decades, I'd still prefer to die by suicide one day, to ensure things go well.

Unfortunately, because of how unaccepting society is toward suicide, I'll have to do all of this in such a way as to keep my motives a secret. It shouldn't be too difficult. Though it's too bad I have to be deceitful in the first place. I would rather be honest with everyone. I'd like to say exactly where I'll be dying, but then someone I know would probably claim my body and have a funeral and do something with the body (which wouldn't be good, since I don't want anyone to have to pay for me even after death, and funeral costs and body disposal are so very expensive). At any rate, I will do my best to give others as pleasant a farewell as I can give.

My final day will not be a bad day at all, I suspect. In fact, I imagine it will be a very lively day indeed. I plan to wake up after getting a good night's worth of sleep and eat something delicious for breakfast. Then I'll watch one hour of my favorite show (the avatar series of course) and play one hour of my favorite video games (Kingdom Hearts' and Super Smash Bros' series). At noon, I'll eat whatever sounds like the best choice at the time. When my roommate is gone for class, I'll quickly pack up all my loose things and leave my note for him on his bed. Some night before I will have told him that I would try to pack up everything to see if I would need to ship anything in case it couldn't all fit in my suitcases. This way, he won't be suspicious. I hope he won't see my letter until night time so the police don't get called early, though I doubt it will matter. I've calculated my steps well. Before leaving, I will post my final messages online instructing

people to read my book and watch my videos along with words of encouragement and hopefulness. Then I will leave with everything I need to die. I will go to the post office and send my letters. Then I'll go swinging. Swinging on a swing set is one of my favorite activities, so I want to do it on my last day. Afterwards, I'll leave the city and travel to my final destination listening to my favorite music along the way.

I expect this day to be a culmination of what it means to be alive. I'll be very perceptive, remarking how I perceive things and what I perceive, paying close attention to detail. I'll think critically as well as I can while I have philosophical musings. I'll make jokes and laugh. I'll feel so many emotions including relief, happiness, joy, contentness, surprise, pain, anger, regret, sadness, gratitude, indignation, fear, disgust, humiliation, coziness, hope, comfort, suffering, humiliation, pleasure, displeasure, togetherness, unity, isolation, depression, etc. I'll feel very alive and likely will feel both good and bad about it. I'll try to smile and cry. I'll make the most out of my final day. I may not be able to revel in tranquility after my death, but I certainly can and will on my last day.

And before I end it all, I'll reflect on my life. I'll try to remember all the fond and all the awful memories I have. In my head I'll apologize to everyone I've ever hurt for everything I've ever done, including existing. I will apologize for all the pain I will cause. I will talk to myself one last time. I'll yell at myself and try to forgive myself after apologizing to myself for all the hurt I've done. I will then talk to my imaginary friend whom I miss having around so much and whom I wish could be real. I will tell him that I love him, and in my head he will accept my decision and express his love for me one final time. Out loud I will say my final words. They will be something along these lines if you're curious: "It has indeed been a misfortune that I was born. The pain I've caused has been an even greater misfortune. I hope everybody finds peace. Even if they can't, I suppose it won't matter, given enough time. And at least I won't have to deal with it anymore. I'm free from all the pain. I'm happy for all the good things in my life though. I'm sorry everyone. I do love you. And you, Aang, I love you so much. I'm sorry we couldn't be together. I love you my brother, my friend, my twin, Aang." I want my final word to be his name. As I descend into death, I'll be listening to pre-recordings of my favorite quotes from him from the show. The last thing I hear will be his voice. I'll smile as I take my last breath in relief. I'll die happily in peace, hopeful that everything will turn out okay. I'm still the optimistic little kid who loves learning and laughing and



intellectual subjects. But above all, I'm only human and am imperfect. I make mistakes, and I do immoral things. I'm sorry.

# Appendix

## Self-Criticisms

This book has far too many arguments in it that I win. This is because I get to decide what objections go in the book and I get the last word all the time. But because I am so skeptical even of my own beliefs and reasoning skills, I have decided to include this appendix to serve as a list of criticisms to show that I am not as deserving of winning the arguments as the contents of this book would suggest. The criticisms will include potential logical fallacies I made, remarks on lack of justification on my part, meta-criticisms of my topics or my book and writing (even of myself at the risk of ad-hominens), etc. This appendix will do chapters first with section-specific criticisms before chapter-general criticisms. After all the chapters, I will give criticisms on the book as a whole.

### Chapter 1

1.1 I should mention that I didn't intend to defend a table rasa view of infants. I think instincts are common enough and that humans have a lot of disposition for knowledge (perhaps it all is dispositional if determinism is true), however even if one is born with innate ideas or beliefs, I wouldn't call it knowledge until empirical justification has been had.

1.3 It's ironic how I talk about no novelties in tautologies only to then demonstrate where definitions can give novel understanding. Now clearly I was talking about no novelty in the parameters of the tautology, which my bachelor example is not a part of. Still, my ambiguously contradictory paragraph is worth noting.

1.4 In case one is wondering, I didn't intend to plagiarize Ayer or other logical positivists. I actually didn't even read about logical positivism until the summer after first writing this chapter. If my epistemology is a form of logical positivism, then I unwittingly plagiarized it by recreating it myself. I don't know if this is plagiarism or not in philosophy. But I did give some credit of my ideas of synthetic truths already having been made a century ago. However, I ought to be criticized for not going through each of my ideas and finding logical positivist equivalents so as to cite them in case what I have done is indeed plagiarism.

1.4 I didn't put this in there, but maybe logical positivism failed because it tried to construct a logical language to have no room for propositions like my synthetic dictum. I do understand this to be one of the movement's greatest plights. But I think even in working with our faulty languages, verificationism and analytic/synthetic distinctions are widely useful and resolve a lot of issues, which is why I still hold to them in spite of some new problems caused by holding these tenants.

1 This chapter and the second chapter are strictly on epistemology. Epistemology is readily the field of philosophy I know the most about and my epistemic theories are much more developed than other philosophical theories of my book. Yet, I chose to keep to the basics for the sake of accessibility to non-philosopher readers. This gives the impression of having very little thorough understanding of epistemology which isn't the case (not in my opinion anyway, but what do I know?). I believe I could write a series of books on epistemological topics, though I just wanted to present my basic groundwork since understanding me as a reasonable person is the main purpose of this book and to give a full-blown epistemology going through various problems of philosophical history and my solutions to those problems would be far beyond the scope of this book's purpose. For all that, since the evidence of my epistemology is just here, I would not fault anyone for believing that I am ignorant of epistemology as an in-depth rigorous field of philosophy, though I do maintain that I am quite well-read in this field AND have still very much to learn.

1 Despite my attempts to make this chapter accessible to non-philosophical audiences, I had a handful of friends read it and even the ones who have studied philosophy said they felt ill-prepared to read it. So even though this is just the bare-bones of my epistemology, the first two chapters fail to be publicly easily comprehensible. It is a real shame.

1 I discuss pragmatism in this chapter not as a whole but merely my own pragmatism. It isn't until 2.6 that I discuss pragmatism in general. The reason this is a criticism is because unlike chapter 2, chapter one's title explicitly includes pragmatism. Yet I failed to give a full basic account of pragmatism in the very chapter about it!

## Chapter 2

2.3 I say that induction gives the most certainty as a form of reasoning. Most people believe deduction to give more certainty. However, I find deductive reasoning itself to be learned by induction as explained in 1.1 and that the premises of deductive arguments are based on inductive

reasoning themselves. Thus even if deductive reasoning is the most certain form of reasoning, I would say it's by virtue of being based on inductive reasoning.

2.5 I make it sound like I think Gettier problems are a waste of time. This is far from the case. Even though I think Gettier problems are problematic with regards to demonstrating that the JTB theory doesn't adequately constitute knowledge, I don't think they aren't helpful. After all, I used them throughout the entire chapter to help make my various points.

2.5 I understand that my pragmatic shifting of to what extent knowledge must be verified or justified is actually a proposed fourth criterion to the JTB theory in light of Gettier cases. I do not think I am doing this though. I am not saying that the pragmatic shifting belongs in the definition of knowledge itself (i.e. a justified, true belief) but that when comparing different cases of JTB knowledges, we might use the pragmatic shifting to better understand the degree of knowledge one has, since I take knowledge to be incremental and not all or nothing.

2.6 I did not even discuss how Clifford's evidentialism would need to overcome the seemingly insurmountable problem of regress. Nor did I thoroughly criticize his non-consequentialism or his moral eternalism. I take issue with all of these parts of his evidentialism.

2.6 I say babies are included in everyone, but that needn't necessarily be the case if by everyone he means every person and takes personhood to require a more complete personality and self-awareness than babies possess. Therefore although babies are all humans, depending on our definition of person, they needn't be considered in 'everyone.' This is a nitpick, but I admit I failed to account for this.

2.6 I actually never did say why I ended up accepting pragmatism. Let me do so here, it was the realization that others have their own goals and that I am inadequate to force my goals upon others in addition to belief that some sort of deflationary theory of truth is best that I eventually came to accept that truth could be personal to some degree.

2 Considering just how integral justification is to knowledge, you would think that justification would be at the forefront of most of the chapter's discussion but it isn't. I barely touch on what justification is needed for various situations like the credibility of testimony. This is partly because even my fullest account of epistemology struggles with detailed justification requirements. It is still in the works as I read more philosophy and continue living my life trying

to decipher what it would take to have knowledge in various circumstances in light of various forms of evidence and justifiers.

2 It's odd that epistemology is the field of philosophy I'm most knowledgeable on (haha that's punny) yet the first two chapters are each significantly shorter compared to other chapters. It kind of takes away credibility of just how profound my understanding of epistemology is. The best I can say is that I stuck to the basics, but I don't expect that to warrant belief that I know a lot of epistemology.

## Chapter 3

3.1 I talk about variance among observers but this seems difficult to prove between two people who claim to have the same experience. If we both see purple (we're not colorblind), it is possible that my purple experience matches your orange experience or something like that. And while I do know some recent psychology studies demonstrate that our color perceptions do vary, I don't actually use any such evidence for my case. The argument I make is that we would still agree even if we did have differences. But since I didn't demonstrate that we do have differences, I shouldn't have been able to claim that there is variance. I skipped an important step. It's really ironic, since this is right after a chapter dealing with justifications!

3.1 I don't discuss how color perception may also be affected by language. There are some interesting psycholinguistic studies which show how more extensive color vocabularies can lead to more precise and more distinct color experiences. I didn't talk about this because I was too lazy to find, read, and especially cite such studies (because I hate bibliographies), and because I didn't want to get into talking about the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis even if I think it's correct in some ways.

3.1 I actually didn't use specific arguments I know of to defend sense-data theories. Again, I didn't want to have to do more citation and bibliography work. So instead, I only used my own arguments that I made up before reading others' arguments. Hume is an exception because I got inspired by him in phenomenology so I couldn't take credit for coming up with the double vision argument. But I think other philosophers' arguments from hallucinations, Leibniz's law of identity, etc. are also helpful and good. I probably would have included them as well if phenomenology were a chapter and not just a section which was itself rather long already. So space was another reason why I only used my own arguments.

3.1 My straight lines being wiggly for someone or for a species thought experiment has a flaw. We might imagine that even a wiggly line has straight parts if you put two points close enough together and zoom in. Maybe a wiggly-seer would experience the entire wiggly line as being wiggly all throughout though. But since straight lines are wiggly and wiggly lines are just wigglier for the wiggly-seer, I suppose a conversation about the difference between wiggly and straight might lead to the wiggly-seer mentally depicting a less and less wiggly line until she finally experiences straightness. This would not only discredit my thought experiment but also my idea that the imagination cannot conceptualize what the brain has never experienced empirically. Though, maybe she couldn't. Besides, I am quite comfortable with granting primary properties as being real and accurate; I'm just prudently doubtful since straight lines suffer from being wiggly the more closely you examine them scientifically (a printed straight line has microscopic and subatomic wiggles). And it would require that someone be discovered to have a difference in experiencing primary properties which this thought experiment does show to be very difficult to detect.

3.1 In this and the first chapter, I claim realism about the external world. I am inferentially speaking, but since I do believe that we are limited to our mental lives, I think I'm more overall an anti-realist, at least in so far as we are talking about what we can directly understand and perceive.

3.1 Even though I said we shouldn't be able to say anything about how the external world is aside from inferencing its existence. However, if say we believed that matter is indivisible, and we are correct, then we might be able to equally inference such a property since there would be a reason to posit the existence of matter where we continue to indirectly observe it through corroborative tests. While there might be properties we could also inference, I'm skeptical. After all maybe we can't divide our experienced substance but the real external substance (substance') might actually be divisible. So I think we ought to be wary in skepticism.

3.1 I couldn't find a place to discuss how experiences are only in the brain I think. I won't justify my assertion and make arguments here, but just know that I believe the nervous system in the hands cannot have the qualitative sensations of pain or wet texture, that eyes or retinas or optic nerves do not perceive color, etc. The qualitative experiences I think are all in the brain. I think this is important, but didn't really fit anywhere in the section unfortunately.

3.2 I didn't even discuss the Quinean skepticism of language but you already know why by now. If only I could discuss what I got out of Quine's work without needing to leaf through page after page to find the specific page number to reference what I remember. I rue whoever thought bibliographies were a good idea. Why can't I just say I got the idea from Quine? Why do I have to cite the very edition of the book and where it got published? It's so irritating!

3.3 I suppose in light of the absence of inductive evidence, a brainless mind could be believed in by inference similar to how I inference the existence of a mind-dependent world. So I think that arguments inferencing a deity from "intelligent design" might be the best way to disprove or give doubts to my physical brain requirement to minds, but they have an uphill battle I think against the apparent unintelligences of the "design" of this universe and against Ockham's razor which does work in favor of inferenced metaphysical realism.

3.3 I have a weird system of using jargon selectively. I talk about epiphenomenalism but don't use the terms supervenience or multiple realizability. I'm pretty inconsistent with how technical and jargony I want to be.

3.3 So as it turns out, after I wrote my chapter I found that I am not the only one who thinks Searle's philosophy of mind is strikingly similar to property dualism. I'm glad I wasn't the only one who saw such a resemblance. I'm willing to accept that they are two separate theories, but it's nice to know that it's reasonable for me to agree with both provided that they are similar. Actually, when I first read Searle's work, I thought I had accidentally plagiarized (maybe I did) him. This would be the whole verificationism and Ayer all over again. It really is awful that I try to come up with my own ideas (not to say I only believe in novel things. I clearly get inspired by other ideas and criticisms) only to discover that my creativity isn't very creative since they've already been "invented."

3.4 I didn't discuss what I thought was the best argument in favor of the soul, that being an appeal to Leibniz's law of identity and showing how "soul" has properties we agree are real which aren't shared in the physical realm or descriptions of the physical. Needless to say, that wasn't very nice of me, since it makes me look like I'm straw-manning soul theorists. But I really was too lazy to discuss the soul in any rigorously philosophical way.

3- I wrote this third chapter in March and was stressed for time and getting more and more burnt out as the days went on. So I put a lot of work into the first three sections, but by the time I got to the fourth and fifth sections, I didn't care about the topics that much. I only put them there

because I have a lot of spiritualist/religious audience members in mind in whom I would like to instill some well-deserved skepticism. But since I'm a physicalist, of course I find the soul to be a misunderstanding of ourselves and metaphysics. And since I think we should act as though we have free will and don't find it all too interesting a topic anyway, it was hardly worth putting in the book at all. Forgive me for my laziness, but I just didn't care enough any longer. I had already written all the chapters past chapter 5 which are far more important to me. Besides, even if people do read my book, I specifically ask that people read the last few chapters if they choose to not read the whole book. I doubt people will even bother with the third chapter, so after the interesting subjects, why waste precious time writing extensively and rigorously about two subjects won't probably be read by the intended audiences?

## Chapter 4

4.1 I do hope it's clear that my 'pleasure' could be 'happiness,' 'pleasantness,' or some other term often used by utilitarianists and hedonists. The same goes for 'harm' with respect to 'suffering,' 'pain,' etc. I also hope I implicitly made it apparent that not all pleasures and harms are equal. So someone who lives a "hedonistic pig" life may not actually be getting as much pleasure as someone who spends her time seeking pleasure indirectly from things like knowledge, diligence, relationships, charity work and altruism, triumph over hardship, etc.

4.2 I say I don't believe actions are moral or immoral by virtue of the actions' nature, but I still am unsure about the nature of the action of causing gratuitous harm ever not being immoral. I don't believe axiomatically that it is, but I may be open to it being that way.

4.2 I literally call the utilitarian dictum a rule in a section where I assume utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory. Clearly, I have some latent inclination toward deontology. Maybe if I actually wrote about deontology like I had been planning, I could have avoided this issue. Nevertheless, let the record show that I do actually have some intuitional sympathy toward deontological moral theories. I simply find consequentialism better. And utilitarianism may have "rules" but these rules are moral or immoral not by virtue of being rules but by their consequences.

4.2 It is a bit odd that I find morality to be both impartial (or can be) and subjective. But moral subjectivism is on a meta-ethical level for me, not a normative one. So maybe someone or some creature could have a moral theory which is partial, but I think the way human beings are, our moralities tend to (if not have to) be impartial even if our behaviors tend to (if not have to) be



partial. What a weird concept indeed, which is why I find morality (which is emotion-based) so unreasonable itself. A good way to think about this strange circumstance is that we do not choose our moral subjectivism just as we do not choose what species we are on a biological level. Thus on a whole, we are limited to the kind of creatures we are and the morality such creatures as we are can produce and have. However, that doesn't mean that the morality which is objective *for us* is objective in a metaphysical or universal way. Clearly the objective morality for us just means binding and not mind-independent. But it would still be binding for us. It's kind of like our beliefs. What we believe is unchosen and tentative, but at the time of holding them, they are our beliefs and we act upon them.

4.3 I fear I may have misunderstood Ord's incoherence issue regarding an exchange ratio between harms and pleasures, which would make my dismissal of it invalid.

4.4 I use the mind-dependence argument to show how something isn't inherent in the universe. But I suppose one could look at it like this: if the universe is deterministic (or especially fatalistic as in an eternal four-dimensional block universe) and human mental phenomena are physically real as I would currently have it, then one might be able to say that the universe inherently has things like morality which share an unchangeable and thus inherent part of the universe. Though, this means that all moral beliefs would equally be integral. Either we objectify them all leading into contradictions or we might take moral subjectivism into account and think of morality as being value attributions.

4.4 I think it's fair to say that I'm a moral error theorist, but I didn't want to take the time to lay out my arguments in full and respond to possible objections I might receive. So if you think the mind-dependent properties I demonstrated are not actually necessary in your moral theory, my argument in the chapter wouldn't apply to you. But I covered most bases I think, and even a theory which somehow manages to avoid my error theory probably has other properties that I could point at and demonstrate to not be real at least to some degree. I didn't bring up talk of error theory because I didn't want to have a full discussion on it which I would like to have done but was running low on time. For the record, I really like Mackie and Joyce regarding error theory; their philosophies helped me develop my already existing non-objectivism of morality into what it is now.

4.4 I didn't mention this, but I do think my moral subjectivism leading to intersubjectivity can help account for moral relativity among different groups such as cultures.

4.4-Clearly I believe it's possible to be a moral error theorist and moral subjectivist, but I don't think I did an adequate job to show their compatibility. I don't even know if they're commonly considered mutually exclusive and need to be shown to be compatible to be honest.

4 This was the last chapter I wrote, so I left out a lot. I think my laziness wasn't as apparent as in the third chapter, but I do have stronger defenses for a hedonistic account of well-being, consequentialism, utilitarianism, moral anti-realism, error theory, and moral subjectivism which I had to leave out or strip of depth. I just kept to the bare minimum to get the chapter done on time. I also neglected to write extensively on other theories like deontology, virtue ethics, objective list theories, moral nihilism, etc. I originally did intend to but considering how long the chapter is as is, I am somewhat content that I stuck to discussing what I affirmatively believe.

## Chapter 5

5.1 I think I may have tacitly made a no true Scotsman fallacy with regards to philosophers and their willingness to revise themselves in the face of criticisms and limitations. Not all philosophers have this willingness, so my distinction between philosophers and religious folks with regards to claims that make and positions they hold isn't very strong.

5.2 I suggest reading philosophers for the existence of god, but I actually don't have anyone in mind because not only do I disagree with them, the nature of how convicted most religious people are, I was afraid to suggest William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, or the youtuber Inspiring Philosophy because their logical fallacies and willingness to believe based on poor reasons and evidence might give the unskeptical and incautious theist enough arguments to think they have reason for conviction when they don't. And yes, I do realize that I just named them here, but if a theist is willing to take the time to read my criticisms, I believe they would find some philosophers anyway so I'm comfortable in helping them start out.

5.2 Actually, if someone accepted the premises, conclusion, and validity of the argument, they would need to accept the existence of fairies, especially because the existence of fairies is one of the premises! But they could accept the existence of the fairies of the argument without the acceptance of the existence of fairies as commonly thought of. This was what I was getting at in my paragraph, but there was ambiguity which in one sense was contradictory to what I had previously said.

5.3 My discussion of how omniscience seems impossible even in a deterministic universe only works if the omniscient thing is itself within the universe. This might be why an omniscient god would have to be outside of the universe. However, I would simply say to such an idea that it would be unreasonable for any human to believe in such an unconceivable god, even if it is true or must be the case if the god is omniscient. Besides, it might be that our universe is undetermined, but then I question omniscience even more.

## Chapter 6

6.1 Technically, I suppose one could have more than one personhood death. Take someone who goes into a coma and wakes up with total amnesia. In this case their first personhood died and then when they die later on, their second personhood would die.

6.2 In all fairness, my discussion of infinities regarding activities is iffy. Since I am unaware of ever really dealing with infinities (if that's even possible), I may not be in a position to say much, though that would hold true for claims from believers, too. Additionally, I don't spend too much time considering infinities as real possibilities anyway, so my discussion is rudimentary.

6.2 I talk about issues concerning heaven. It wasn't until after I wrote this chapter that I learned my issues of ennui and of remorse have actually been written about in philosophy. I thought I was treading new waters, perhaps out of arrogance that I could come up with something novel. But I still decided not to use other sources or to cite them, as I still did come up with my ideas on my own. Maybe I'm a plagiarist. But I don't care. At least I didn't infringe on copyright.

6.3 Actually, disproving less extreme arguments on a given side of something (like the goodness of life) doesn't necessarily disprove the extreme positions. After all, if I argue against less extreme positions because they are incoherent and those incoherencies are about limitations, then perhaps extreme positions wouldn't have these incoherencies and thus be viable. However, I find that I argued against less extreme positions in this section such that my arguments would also go against extreme positions.

6.3 Despite the fact that I say there doesn't appear to be any reliable method of calling one life overall good or bad based on the quantity of good and bad experiences, I can't help but feel that if we did count up all the experiences, most lives have more bad experiences than good by number. Perhaps good experiences have more weight and thus count for more than their quantity would suggest. I believe the opposite is true, that harms count more than pleasures. So if we go by

intuitions, we'll just have to agree to disagree I suppose. I don't feel I have good reason to say someone is wrong for looking at their life and deeming it overall good. Equally, I think others shouldn't dictate how good or bad my life is for me.

6.3 I would deny that finite good is better than infinite good, since for something to be infinitely good according to my philosophies there would have to be an agent around forever to continue to attribute the value of goodness onto it. But this means life would need to be infinite, which since I strongly critique the goodness of immortality even in a so-called paradise is actually quite bad. But finite good can be good to the extent of its finiteness.

6.5 Some people might call me hypocritical for saying that fearing mortality despite doing nothing about it is unreasonable even though I myself fret about a lot of things I don't actively try to change. The difference is that unlike death, I am aware of people being harmed around the world, I'm aware of poverty, abuse, oppression, etc., I do get to experience these harms indirectly in a way. But in death, the one who dies does not get harmed as I explained in this chapter.

6-A lot of my arguments depend on my normative ethics discussed in chapter 4 being generally correct. I also depend a lot on the existence requirement and awareness requirement of harm to make my assessment of the badness of death to be accurate. Again though, I principally hope to demonstrate reasonableness not correctness, thus I find my arguments adequate to this end.

## Chapter 7

7.1 I suggest that psychopathy might be an impediment on the capacity to make valid judgements on value. I do not actually hold this view, but at this time in the book, I was willing to grant the idea some leeway. I am fine with saying that value is entirely subjective when it comes down to it.

7.1 I talked about intrinsic instrumental value, but this name has also been given to certain kinds of values Shelly Kagan has written about. I did not wish to discuss his intrinsic instrumental value, because as I understand it, that too requires that whatever the instrumentally valuable thing leads to must itself be intrinsically good. I might be sympathetic to his view that in light of this, some instrumentally valuable things may have intrinsic value by virtue of their instrumental value, but because I do deny the existence of any strict intrinsic value, I didn't feel the need to include his ideas. I just wanted to clarify that what I was talking about is different despite having the same term. What I discussed was more like intrinsic dispositional value, I suppose.

7.2 A major potential weak point in my argument that humans do actually rely on instrumental value is that so-called intrinsically valued things (like pleasure or friendship) have consequences that are also desirable. However, that doesn't mean that someone can't neglect the "further down the chain goods" and just focus on the end that they stop at. I am open to this idea. Further, it might be a non-sequitur that the existence of instrumentalism makes the thing only instrumentally valuable thus preventing that something from being intrinsically good (especially if what we mean by intrinsic is that we can seek it out for its own sake). Still, the whole point of my asking what makes something futile, pointless, or meaningless and the ice-cream cone thought experiment was to give evidence why humans actually do tacitly go beyond the "ends" which they aim for when asked why they do what they do.

7.4 I don't do Albert Camus justice. I really do like his works, and think his mistakes were much more understandable than I presented. Moreover, after reading his later works, I find that he himself recognized his mistakes and tried to live more like an absurdist. Also I fear I may have committed a no true Scotsman fallacy concerning him not being an absurdist but an existentialist.

7.5 The last sentence gives the open possibility that if there is some eternal being for which one could make one's life purposeful, then that could in fact satisfy the absurd. I suppose if the desire for meaning is one that is forever present, but if it is for objective meaning, then just as before I would reject that this would even satisfy the absurd. Or maybe one's inherent purpose is to follow one's passions.

7.5 Perhaps I wasn't clear enough in my chapter. While I do think that rationality fails since instrumental value theory ultimately fails, I do not discard them out of hand. I find it very important to discuss goals, instrumentality, consequences, etc. when talking about human behavior and human psychology. However, I think that desires play an often overlooked but nonetheless integral role in these factors. Indeed, it is because of the incoherence of emotions that allow for humans to legitimately act for the sake of consequences even though to do so is philosophical incomplete and if the chain of consequences goes down far enough, incoherent.

7 This chapter is pretty much redundant after chapter 3 and 4, but I wanted to write it anyway to demonstrate how my value theory and subjectivism relate to life and our "choices." Besides, I wanted to discuss the thought experiments of the inconsequential ice-cream, the eternal man-eating monster, and the hypothetical pebble. I also wanted to discuss absurdism and Camus.

7 I seem to make the case that value is impossible and that any test to demonstrate that value doesn't exist wouldn't be falsifiable. I'm not sure if this is bad or not, to be honest. After all, unicorns don't exist, but what test that's falsifiable could possibly be performed to demonstrate this? Maybe I'm mixing up where the burden of falsifiability goes, or perhaps this is a problem of falsifiability as a criterion itself. Regardless, I feel that it's not satisfactory after all, in spite of my efforts to give a very strong argument in favor of anti-realism of value.

## Chapter 8

8.3 I think my arguments might be able to dissuade certain believers that no killing is good even in self-defense, but overall I'm unsure if aside from arguing against intrinsic goodness of life, I truly managed to dismantle the absolute pacifist's position.

8.4 When discussing life if it had an inherent purpose, it would be possible not to lose out in life some way or another so long as what one naturally desired was in accordance with the metaphysical purpose of one's life.

## Chapter 9

9.3 I seem unphased by how my basic portrayal of rationality can lead to someone being rational in not caring about being rational. However, I do see this as a potential Achilles' heel in my account of rationality. I don't see it as necessarily contradictory, but someone who does might be able to explain the contradiction to me which would lead to a revision or a rejection of this view for me.

9.3 I said that the distinction against the everyday tasks of someone with a mental illness is based on a stigma against abnormalities. However, one might retort that it's not because it's abnormal that someone with OCD can't rationally do time consuming rituals but because the rituals affect their lives in such a way as to keep them from their other desires. I would say that it depends on the person. If the person has a stronger desire to perform the rituals than relax with television, then I find little difference between that and someone working overtime at the expense of leisure time for the sake of fulfilling a stronger desire. However, if the person wishes she didn't have OCD, then she ought to forsake her rituals through therapy and/or psychiatric medication. But notice that my solution is individual-based and not hastily dogmatic.

9.5 When discussing how antidepressants can have some very serious negative side-effects, one could respond by saying that the patient would likely receive counter medicines to offset the negative effects of the original prescription. This may seem fine, but I can't help but feel that it is absurd to force a mentally ill person to be treated which could lead to needing further medication just to have the so-called "normal life" the psychiatrist is trying to force on the patient in the first place.

9.5 I may have strawmanned those who oppose mental illnesses. While there surely are some who believe mentally ill people are unnatural, few people actually make such a claim. Therefore, it was unfair of me in my deafness analogy to claim that people wouldn't call deaf people unnatural as if to say that mentally ill people are deemed unnatural themselves.

9.6 I am aware of the defense of psychiatry as having a more sophisticated scientific model of mental illnesses than mere physical descriptions. However, I find this a load of bunk. The scientific community largely agrees with me that mental illnesses are physical and that brains with mental illnesses are brains with abnormal (technically malformed or malfunctioning since it's an illness) physical features. Calling a diagnosis sophisticated is a red herring to give off the impression that a physical description of a physical illness is less good or sophisticated than a diagnosis without a biological basis. How blatantly preposterous!

9.8 I am pro involuntary detainment for those who are a threat to others. I am against infringing on others' rights but for the liberty to do so to oneself such as by suicide. This leads to questions about consented slavery, which I am for so long as there is some effective means of annulment of the slavery contract. This is an extremely contentious view which I hold, though I don't condone consented slavery either.

9.8 I make claims about laws, societies, and human rights, but I know close to nothing about political philosophy. Therefore, I'm probably wrong about my claims, and my ideas on how human rights and laws are or ought to be are likely to be misguided or worse, unphilosophical and don't belong in a philosophy book like this one was supposed to be.

9.9 I say minors ought not be given the right to death. But before I called it a fundamental right. I don't know if fundamental rights can exclude minors. Maybe I meant fundamental for all adults. Maybe a fundamental right can be overridden by certain factors like age. I think self autonomy is a fundamental right but which children do not possess since they cannot choose where they live for example. I don't know. In the worst case, I retract my statement that it's a fundamental human

right but is a right virtually universally given to adult citizens with certain restrictions like third-party infringements, coercions, etc.

## Chapter 10

10.0 Since I could only be detained for 3 days, my debt wouldn't be too large. However if my psychiatrist decided I wasn't safe after that time, I would disagree, resulting in a civil court case. I would like to think I could show my capacity for reason in a court of law, but usually it is the psychiatrist's voice that is most heard according to what I've reviewed online. So I don't think it's too far-fetched to believe that I would be receiving an additional 14 day sentence to my detainment (if not longer), which would prevent me from graduating and give me a super hefty debt.

10.0 It's a bit egotistical that the book about me is the one I find most important, isn't it? Sure, the book is to demonstrate that I'm mentally competent and thus the chapter on my beliefs is a good place to analyze competency, but still, even in my attempts to minimize my arrogance, I end up writing a book whose epitome is about me.

10.1 I say that maybe not skipping grades was for the best, but I'm actually not sure. I might say it was overall good simply out of a rationalization bias and not out of genuine calculation.

10.1 I say that I wasn't affected by my family members' troubles. This is true so long as what I mean is that I wasn't harmed while everything was going on. Obviously they harmed me in hindsight because I feel guilty for not helping out more.

10.2 I should note that I don't believe I have narcissistic personality disorder. I'm not willing to self-diagnose. While I disagree with psychiatric practices and the notion of mental "illness" I don't pretend to know how to diagnose better than people who are trained in such a field.

10.2 I actually didn't present ways in which I am racist, sexist, or transphobic. But because I don't have many friends of color, as many women friends and believe a genuinely sincere and respectful question toward trans people which would make them uncomfortable ought to be acceptable, I think I can easily be written off as scum. I think the n-word should either be considered wrong by all skin colors or acceptable regardless of skin colors. I think intentions matter more than race, sex, or gender when saying a pejorative word. The f-word against homosexuals is fine by me so long as I believe no harm is meant, but I find it inconsistent to say



that intentions only count based on sexuality. That's discrimination of sexuality which is the reason why the f-word is deemed derogatory in the first place! But maybe it's because I think this way that makes me racist, sexist, and transphobic.

10.2 I understand that by dying, I don't actually help solve the crises of the world. But by dying I do no longer contribute to pollution, racism, sexism, hatred, shady business practices, etc.

10.2 I say I hate myself and I do. However, clearly I like myself enough to be selfish. I certainly do what I can to minimize my harm while maximizing pleasure, so could I truly hate myself then? I think so. Aside from the fact that emotions aren't reasonable and needn't be bound to the law of noncontradiction, I don't consider my avoidance of harm and accumulation of pleasure as being self-love. I don't think I do what I do because I love myself, I do it out of hedonistic selfishness, but isn't love for oneself more than that? Maybe not, I don't know.

10.3 I suppose someone could say that death and life ought not be artificially tampered with. But that would lead into my objection given in 8.2 about also not helping lengthen one's lifespan.

10.3 I say I don't like happiness, but it would be a lie to say I don't enjoy myself during pleasurable events. What I mean by the disdain of happiness is the overall attitude of acceptance and positive feelings toward life and one's circumstances. I am not happy when it comes to reflecting on life or living as I am. Nor do I want to be happy in this sense. And I would rather not be in a state of pleasure ever again simply to avoid also never being in another state of harm. That is what I meant. Sorry for the ambiguity.

10.4 To add to the notion of what it would take for me to choose to keep living: If I found a trustworthy magic genie, my first wish would be that all sentient creatures which authentically and rationally desire to not live would cease to exist without a trace (thus all memories would be erased too to prevent harm done by their non-existences). If I were still alive, then I would know that I don't authentically and rationally desire to not live. Thus I would wish to achieve whatever I did authentically and rationally desire. As you can see, I wouldn't wish to cease to exist myself if I had good reason to believe that I didn't really want to no longer live.

10.5 When I wrote how I took my sister's conclusion and tried to justify it with good argumentation, I wonder how many people thought that doing so was good on my part. What I did was justify a preconceived conclusion. This is very unreasonable and turns reason upon its head. Yet I imagine most people would rather me live under this pretense than die with proper

reasoning. If my estimation is correct, then people don't even care about whether I was reasonable in dying or not. Reason doesn't matter to them, just conclusions, assertions, and dogmas. This self-criticism also criticizes anyone who accepted without hesitation my poor reasoning about arguing on my sister's behalf and me being consequentially persuaded by my poor reasoning.

10.7 One could object to my time of suicide. I will be dying sometime during the first week of April. One might wonder why I don't wait until after I graduate. That way if I fail and get sent into a hospital, I won't lose out on graduating just in case (since some people including one of my friends got kicked out of college just for having suicidal thoughts alone, talk about stigmatization). I do have plans just in case something like that happens, don't worry. But I wanted to avoid finals week and writing my thesis. These wouldn't be too hard, but why do them if I don't have to? Besides, I have a letter for the private donors of my scholarship. But I recently discovered that the letters are sometimes read by the workers who coordinate the scholarship recipients. This means I couldn't give them my real letter. So instead, I'll have another recipient who is a close friend give them my letter to give to the donors. Besides, I am so tired, and I look forward to my death as it draws nearer.

10.8 I imagine many would object to my racing thoughts problem. They might question why I wouldn't take psychiatric medicine for that. But as I said before, I don't find taking pills to change who one is to be a good idea for me. I exercise my rights to refuse treatment. I shouldn't need to get fixed. Even though the thoughts do pain me greatly, they also provide me with arguments against taking medication and essentially making myself less aware of what goes on. My racing thoughts have led me to think about what most people barely ever consider. Why would I choose to live with medication such that I would essentially be turning off part of my mental faculties? For less harm may be good reason, but between not being harmed through medication which would make a "me" I currently despise and destroying "me" altogether, I prefer the latter.

## Appendix

Appendix- This appendix is almost unnecessary. After all, I criticize myself quite a lot already in text. I even remark on some objections which I don't have adequate responses to. Yet I decided to include this appendix anyway.

Appendix- I make some ad-hominem attacks against myself, particularly in the book general criticisms.

Appendix- One might wonder why I don't correct some of the mistakes I point out in the appendix. This is a good criticism. However, I will probably never be totally pleased with this book regarding editing it. So I edited it and added in this appendix to show problems. I didn't correct even problems I could so that people can see some potential faults or weaknesses in my arguments that I have seen and as a way to demonstrate that I understand this book is incomplete. But even after editing several times, I doubt it will ever be complete. After all, I doubt that I have discovered any "objective truth" that needs no further revising, nor do I expect to in my life even if I lived for my natural lifespan.

## Book Criticisms

I don't know if philosophy is even a good tool for knowledge. I struggle with the idea that maybe science (despite it having roots in philosophy) might be the best (and only) knowledge tool available to humanity and philosophy is outdated. I try to think that this idea, scientism, is incorrect and probably a philosophical claim itself, but in the face of all science has accomplished, I as a (pseudo-)philosopher tremble and doubt myself.

I really do love philosophy and tried very hard in demonstrating my positions philosophically. Yet I doubt that I am a philosopher, or a good one at that. I'm an amateur at best, but to be truly honest, I think I'm a charlatan who has managed to trick myself into thinking that I'm actually making reasonable arguments and have evidence and reason to support my claims.

I wrote this for friends and family foremost, but with the possibility of it being handled seriously as a philosophical text. Because of these two audiences in mind, I may use jargon too heavily without explanation at certain times but be too little philosophical at others.

It can be hard at times to know where my original ideas are because I sometimes use well known arguments in succession with my own. An example is in chapter 7 where I use a personal form of Epicurus' famed problem of evil preceded and followed by personally made arguments demonstrating how logical argumentation fails to prove fairies and the problems of omniscience and omnipotence that I myself have come up with, respectively.

I think I overuse examples and thought experiments, partially because I find them easier for people to understand my points. But I can't help but feel they weaken my arguments due to the fact that they aren't expressed in tight, formal reasoning and logic. But I couldn't do that even if I wanted to, as I'm not well versed enough in formal logic.

I didn't write all the chapters I wanted to write, such as one on the philosophy of self and metaphilosophy.

I don't know if I plagiarized accidentally. For example, before I even knew about A.J. Ayer and his philosophy, I came up with strikingly similar ideas including our epistemology, particularly with testing phenomenological expectations to verify truth of synthetic statements. I made it all by myself from thinking about pragmatism, and I thought it was original. But it turned out that last century it was already made and discredited. I imagine other "original ideas" of mine have been thought up by others and I am unaware. This may be seen as a good thing, because my ideas have been shared by famous philosophers, but even still, I seem incapable of being original and risk accidentally plagiarizing. If this is the case, I apologize sincerely and profoundly. I sincerely did not plagiarize in such a way that I knowingly and willingly took someone else's ideas and presented them as my own. I do use others' objections, but I do so in a general way and not in a way such as to reconstruct others' specific arguments which would be plagiarism. Clearly, I have gotten ideas about various philosophical topics, but I didn't feel the need to cite every argument such as how death is harmful since it's such a publicly open criticism.

I question if any of my arguments are convincing or warrant that others who read them accept them. Though the point of this book wasn't so much to persuade others but rather to help others understand me and my thinking.

I believe that most, if not all, the philosophers whose ideas I generally share and those whom I admire wouldn't appreciate or agree with what I have written in this book. I wonder how many of them would think I'm deluded or just pitifully ignorant.

Writing this book was extremely difficult for me, not because I didn't know what I wanted to write or didn't know where to look for arguments, but because of my depression. It was hard for me to get myself to actually work on it, because I've become so lazy and lethargic as the years have gone by since I first became depressed. Yet for all, that (and this may not belong in a chapter of criticisms), writing down my ideas in a way that I believe people will come to have a chance to understand me and believe that I was at least somewhat reasonable in my thinking and

actions, made me happy. I don't think this little happiness is worth continuing to live, but I do recognize it nonetheless. Besides, I fear this happiness partially blinds me to my philosophical shortcomings.

This book probably looks like it came from an average undergraduate student. I reused so many phrases and transitions. It's unbecoming of a good book. Moreover, my analyses are probably full of errors no decent philosopher would make, and my presentations are lackluster to say the least. I sometimes think I could have a successful career in philosophy if I kept on living and went into that field, but comparing this book to other philosophers' works, even modern ones who try to make them readable to any audience like Daniel Dennett and Shelly Kagan, my book is probably at the level of a second-year philosophy course just worthy of passing the class., such that if this were an assignment, I would get a 3.0 out of 4.0 at best.

I believe I am like everyone else in history in that I have failed to grasp the truth about reality. Even if I am right on some things, I doubt my reasons, arguments, and evidence for my truths are sufficient or even good. At best, I'm on the right track, but don't we all think that about our knowledge? Don't we all think we're at least on the right track of knowledge and truth? I'm not sure I even deserve that kind of certainty, though I tried.

# Bibliography

I really hate bibliographies, specifically writing them. It's not difficult, but there's just something that irks me profoundly about them. But here it is. Let the record show that I did not copyright infringe. Whether I plagiarized or not is not as clear. I did my best not to, but considering how much literature is out there in philosophy, I highly doubt anything I say is novel. To that extent unless I referenced every single idea and term, I think I most certainly did plagiarize, which is why I think intellectual plagiarism is ridiculous. At least it's not illegal. Still, I promise that I did not willingly plagiarize and sincerely apologize if I have. Though I do not feel guilt for not being able to give exact references to every idea that I've ever had which was inspired by reading, talking with, and listening to others about philosophy. To expect that of me (which is required to avoid plagiarism in the strictest sense) is absurd.

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