



PHD C. George Boeree:
Perspectives Theory

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Fundamentals

The Philosophical Backdrop

I believe the world is composed of nothing but qualities – colors, sounds, temperatures, shapes, textures, movements, images, feelings, and so on.

Unlike materialists, I do not reduce these qualities to atoms or energies or anything "physical". To me, these atoms and such are just explanatory devices, good for helping us to predict and control, especially when we can't see what's going on. But they are nothing without the qualities they refer to.

Unlike idealists like Bishop Berkeley, however, I don't think that all of these qualities require the presence of a mind to exist – some do, but others don't. When the tree falls in the forest, the sound happens, whether there is someone there to hear it or not. Further, I believe there are plenty of qualities – an infinity of them, perhaps – that we do not and cannot perceive at all. Some animals, for example, can hear sounds and see colors we cannot. These sounds and colors are every bit as real and rich as a high C or blue-green.

On the other hand, some of these qualities we call "matter" and some we call "mind." "Matter" includes the ones that emphasize form, resistance, and especially separateness from mind. The ones we call "mind" include those qualities that are more elusive, more personal, harder to share. Both are real, neither is superior in some way. There are as well qualities of time, space, number, causality, value, and so on, that are hard to place in either category.

Some qualities may interact and even transform into each other, while other qualities remain stubbornly separate. It would satisfy my affection for wholeness if, ultimately, all qualities were related, but I don't see that as absolutely necessary.

I do think that mental qualities came into existence later in the course of the universe's history than material qualities. I believe they emerged from the special organizations of matter we call life. But saying that doesn't dismiss the reality of mental qualities, anymore than water is less for being made of hydrogen and oxygen.

My "metaphysics" leads right into my "epistemology." A conscious entity can only be conscious of some small portion of total reality. It is limited by its position in space, by the variety of its sense organs, by the sensitivity of those organs, by its access to its own processes, and more besides. In other words, we each have a perspective on the world of qualities. I call my "epistemology" perspectivity.

One consequence of perspectivity is that the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity is no longer terribly meaningful: All you can ever have is a perspective, and although some perspectives are no doubt better than others, none qualifies as the ultimate perspective.

If you want to understand the entirety of reality, you will need to add all possible perspectives together. This is, of course, impossible, so we can only do our best to comprehend the infinite. And in order to move towards comprehension, we must have a great respect for the variety of perspectives we come across, because each can and will contribute to our understanding of the whole.

Consciousness

To be conscious, I must be separate from the world, yet open to it; I must be capable of changing the world and being changed by it, while maintaining a degree of integrity and continuity. And I must desire my integrity and continuity. Without desire, the qualities of the world merely pass through me, like information through a computer. It is desire that makes that information relevant, meaningful.

What do I desire? First, I desire to maintain myself. This means more than physical survival; It means maintaining the integrity and continuity of my differentiation from the world and other consciousnesses. That is, I desire to maintain my *self*.

The self is not a simple thing. It includes the ego, which is the point from which we experience the world, the limiting perspective, the "I." It also includes my body, the object "out there" in the world which "carries" the ego, and through which the ego relates to the world. And finally, it includes my mind, my skills and memories, the accumulated "residue" of my experiences, with which the ego relates to the world. We desire to maintain all three of these things – ego, body, and mind – even though doing so may conflict.

At least in higher animals, we can also speak of a *self-consciousness*, not just in the sense that an animal is aware of, say, its paw, but in the sense that we place ourselves in our perception of the world. It is as if we had to look at reality "through" the totality of who we are, mind and body.

Finally, I am capable of reflection. I can take as the object of my attention not only what is "out there," but the processes of my own mind. This double-mindedness – i.e. having both "immediate consciousness" and "reflective consciousness" – may be unique to human beings.

Concern for integrity and continuity requires that I be "in time," that is, that I perceive and affect the *direction* of events. This in turn requires that I be able to make use of past experience to anticipate possible futures. The ability to anticipate requires the ability to perceive something in its absence – i.e. to imagine. This "second sight" is also the root of remembering and thinking, and it gives us a degree of freedom from the stream of events around us.

Being able to anticipate means anticipating threats to the maintenance of integrity and continuity, and effecting responses to those threats. I thereby come to desire not only maintenance but enhancement of my self. The desire to maintain and enhance the integrity and continuity of self is commonly called *actualization*.

As a desiring being, I cannot be indifferent to the world. I relate to it passionately. Interactions which prevent my actualization I experience negatively, as pain and distress. Those which promote my actualization I experience positively, as pleasure and delight. The intensity of the feeling is the measure of the degree of relevance or meaning the interaction has for me.

My understanding of the world and myself is continually tested through my anticipations and actions. When my understanding is inadequate, I feel distress, and I attempt to repair the inadequacy through further anticipation and action. As these responses return me to adequate understanding, I feel delight.

Physical pain and pleasure are cyclical breakdowns and restorations of integrity that mimic distress and delight. They do not in themselves improve understanding, but they can and do reinforce the impact of otherwise distressful or delightful events. Pain and pleasure are my experiences of maintenance and enhancement developed *evolutionarily* rather than through refinement of understanding.

Ironically, pain and distress are what we feel when our neediness is most evident and our awareness brightest. Pleasure and delight are what we feel as we move towards unconsciousness! When there are *no* problems or problems-being-solved, there is no emotion. Only in unconsciousness is the differentiation of self and world obliterated and we are, for a while, truly at peace. But then, we aren't able to enjoy it! When there is no emotion, there is no consciousness.

My capacity for anticipation permits certain emotions that are at a remove from the immediate situation. Anxiety, for example, is the distressful anticipation of distress. I also experience the delightful anticipation of delight, which we could call hope or eagerness, depending on the details. Anger is distress tempered by the expectation that the distress may be lifted through action upon the world. Sadness is distress that acknowledges the need for continued efforts at changing myself. And so on.

Some inadequacies are actually included in understanding, and therefore cause no distress or effort at refinement. Others are dealt with through avoidance and other defensive maneuvers. However, actualization ultimately requires that I not avoid facing my inadequacies. In fact, I should actively seek them out. This

requires a capacity for getting through pain, distress, and anxiety commonly called *will*.

The world offers the mind an endless selection of potential distinctions. Desire leads us to discover distinctions and make differentiations. Understanding is improved through the increasingly fine differentiations we are required to make.

While differentiations are being laid down, I am conscious of them. Once they are in place, they become unconscious. When they fail, however, I am once again conscious of them. When I sit on a chair, I do so without conscious attention to the process; When I expect a chair but it is not there, I become aware of my understanding regarding chairs and sitting, though the chair is absent and I remain standing. I am likewise conscious of differentiations when I use them in the absence of or with disregard for the world. I then experience them as memories, thoughts, images, and so on.

Each person has his or her own perspective on and understanding of the world. The differentiations that are meaningful for you may not be meaningful for me. Yet they both refer to the same reality. We are therefore ultimately capable of understanding each other.

Actualization

Actualization is telic, i.e. forward-looking, by nature. We "look forward" to continued and enhanced existence. In day-to-day life, we can see that our activity is directed towards ends, goals, purposes. When we pause in our activity, we can see the telic nature of our motivation in the anticipatory image – something not present that we wish, want, or strive for. But because most motivation is telic and not causal, it is not *necessary*, and "stimulus-response" only applies to a small part of our lives!

Actualizing our bodily existence means that we seek food and water, rest and exercise, and escape from pain and irritation. And, through a subterfuge as old as life, we seek sex. Mostly, these too are telic and do not bear the weight of necessity – urgency, yes, but necessity, no. But, since the body is "out there" as well as "in here," there are things that inevitably overpower us. When we try to hold our breath too long, for example, we eventually faint and breathe.

Actualizing the mind or understanding means that we seek meaningfulness and avoid confusion, and seek to test and improve our understanding through an assertive attitude – unless life has worn down our assertiveness and made passivity the way of survival.

We also seek support for and improvement of understanding through others. They are sources of experience that relieve us of the need to have all experiences first-hand, and they validate or correct our understanding. With them, we build a social reality which, though again lacking necessity, bolsters our potential for actualization.

Note that this social reality – though it exists as a means toward individual maintenance and enhancement – may become so salient and so powerful that the individual – willingly or not – may be sacrificed to the maintenance or enhancement of the social reality!

Because actualization is telic, we can be confronted by more than one conflicting purpose at a time, no one of which is necessary. We must therefore *choose*.

Most things in the world have an *essence* – a nature, a plan by which to live, a "program" to "run." Rocks are what they are. Tables are designed for certain purposes. Woodchucks live by instincts and conditioning. No career counseling is needed. Human beings don't have an essence. Or, perhaps we should say that they create their own essence over a life-time. Or we could say their "essence" is freedom from essences.

We are not free in the radical sense of getting whatever we want (e.g., to fly). We are only free to choose

what we want (to try to fly, or not). We choose the meanings we place on things. We choose our attitude towards things. We can will to do what we wish.

Once we have willed an act, it passes beyond our will and becomes subject to the same laws of nature and chance as anything else. Our freedom is embedded in determinism. So we are limited (severely) in power.

We make our choices on the basis of our understanding (of the situation, the world in general, our selves, and the nature of actualization). Unfortunately, that understanding is always incomplete. And so we are limited (severely) in understanding.

And yet we must act and so choose. Not choosing or not acting are themselves choices and acts. So we must choose and act despite our powerlessness and ignorance. But the distress of conflicting choices – the difficulty of freedom – may lead us to avoid choosing as much as possible by embedding ourselves more deeply in authoritarian social structures, mass culture, or compulsive personality structures (which we will discuss later).

Further examples of conflicts are endless: What is good for me now may not be good for me in the long run; what is good for me in one way of understanding it may not be good for me in another way; what is good for me biologically may not be good for me psychologically, and vice versa; what is good for me may not be good for you, and therefore not good for me; what is good for you (and therefore good for me) may be bad for him (and therefore bad for me); and so on.

We may even find ourselves confronted with a choice between allowing the anticipated degeneration of self (body or mind) due to sickness and voluntarily ending our lives. We may come to understand "stopping" as a closer approximation to actualization than continued pain-filled "retreat."

Finally, although my particular desires all ultimately serve the desire to maintain and enhance myself, I live knowing that, for all my efforts, I die in the end. My very existence is limited (severely!).

In a negative sense, I am motivated to avoid things that focus my attention on this ultimate barrier to actualization, e.g. others' deaths, my own and others' diseases and suffering, physical, social, and mental disorder, even dirt and decay and things that merely symbolize degeneration. The distress of these things may be intensified by an awareness of my own mortality.

In a positive sense, I am motivated to seek a way of transcending death (as I am motivated to seek ways of transcending all my various limitations), through raising and educating of children, through love of others and identification with a community of beings, through art, invention, and creativity in general, and through philosophy.

By changing our understanding of self, we change the relevance of death to self. Whether this is true transcendence or ultimately a defensive lie is a matter of perspective.

Constructed realities

The world before it is perceived is an infinite collection of qualities. It is up to the perceiver to use some of these qualities to differentiate one event from another. This process of differentiation is driven by desire (relevance, need, meaning...). Note that the perceiver does not "construct" reality itself; rather the perceiver constructs an *understanding* of reality, a model or theory which guides perception and behavior. Neither does reality alone determine perceptions and behaviors, but rather reality as experienced "through" our understanding.

Animals, we presume, live in a perceived reality mediated only by instinct and individual experience. The differentiations they have or develop remain close to the natural "fault lines" of unperceived reality, i.e.,

what one animal sees is pretty likely to be similar to what another of the same species with similar experiences perceives. This unconstructed immediate reality is also what infants experience— and what we all experience, every now and again, when we are totally engaged in the world.

We adult human beings, on the other hand, are more usually creatures of symbolization, language, and culture. We may have instincts, and we certainly have our own unique experiences, but we also learn from the experiences of others (or even the whimsy of others) communicated through language and other symbols, artifacts, and techniques.

Let's back up a moment: Images are anticipations temporarily detached from their referents in the real world — perceptions without their objects. When we imagine (fantasize, think...), we use these "loose" anticipations as if they were real. We experience the same problems and problem-solving, with the same distresses and delights, that we experience in full interaction with the world.

Symbols are events that become attached to images. These symbols thereby allow us to "project" images (and fantasies, and thoughts...) outside our minds, in the form of speech, writing, art, and so on. We can then communicate our mental images to others who share our symbols.

These symbols can themselves be held within our minds as images, and we can manipulate those images as we can any other. We are now actually three-times removed from immediate experience! This is what most of us call thought in the strictest sense, i.e. the internal manipulation of symbols.

When rules for manipulating symbols are shared along with a set of symbols, we have a language. We communicate to the extent that we do indeed share these symbols and rules, which ultimately means to the extent that we share differentiations. This is the essence of culture: shared differentiations — shared understanding of reality — as reflected in shared symbols.

This ability gives us a huge advantage: Each individual need not discover from scratch what others have discovered before them. Plus, in a social creature (one that requires, not just enjoys, the presence of others), the very real and immediate needs of others can be efficiently communicated, rather than vaguely intimated and guessed at. Further, words (and symbols in general) are not tied to reality the way that anticipatory images are. They can be manipulated, moved around, recombined.... They are our most powerful means of creativity.

But there is a negative side to this as well. Because words and symbols are relatively independent of reality, they can easily develop a life of their own. Differentiations and complex systems of differentiations that may once have had meaning (or not) are communicated to the developing child as if they represented a reality directly, experientially, available to anyone. I refer to this as *constructed* reality, since it is made rather than "grown" experientially from the reality beyond perception. It is, we might say, a fiction or myth, and it may be beneficial or destructive.

The most important constructed reality is social reality itself. We create this social reality out of fabric provided for us by our culture through our parents, teachers, peers, media, etc. Each individual's social reality is somewhat different, but our social realities are similar, and mutually validating, to the extent that we share common cultural traditions, meaning common symbolic differentiations. If we share socio-cultural traditions, we are "cut from the same cloth," so to speak.

These social realities are fictions that have socially evolved over generations because they aid in the smooth operation of society. They survive the way physical characteristics and instincts survive, and for the same reasons. We could even speak of cultural genes, as some indeed have. But they are fictions, created and not "born," and only loosely tied to deeper reality. As long as they tend to help rather than hinder, and do not too frequently fly in the face of that deeper reality, they can survive and flourish!

Unfortunately, we tend to reify these structures, to give them lives of their own. We may even consider them more real than the experiences they represent. And they may become *roadblocks* to further actualization, rather than aids. They may be used to interpret and explain reality, instead of being used for practical communication. "E = mc²" becomes a law of the universe rather than an abbreviated description of a

recurrent pattern. "God" becomes an all-powerful entity beyond and behind the very world he was invented to explain. A person is neurotic, introverted, self-actualizing, etc., rather than worried, shy, or creative. And so on and so on.

All this leads me to some very strong conclusions: For the most part, religions are fictions; Governments are fictions; Economies are fictions; Philosophies are fictions; Sciences are fictions; Arts are fictions; Societies are fictions; All the "isms" – capitalism, socialism, racism, humanism, sexism, feminism... are fictions. They are words with few referents. A mature, experienced, intelligent person can handle these words and use them as conveniences in communication. Unfortunately, the great majority of people apparently cannot.

Inauthenticity

Conventionality

In the history of humanity, the great majority of people have simply and fully "bought into" social reality. Inasmuch as each ethnic group was fairly isolated, social reality was the only reality anyone knew, and it served their purposes well. Large traditional societies were very much the same: Everywhere you looked, the same standards of behavior applied. Only at the very outskirts of your society did you find people living by other rules, and they could be effectively dealt with by calling them barbarians – babblers, ones who don't know the right words – or by not considering them to be people at all.

In our own society, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain this fiction. We travel, we communicate around the world. Even in our own towns, there are people who are different, yet are clearly still people and not "babblers." And yet, the rich and complex social realities we each grow up with cannot be surrendered so easily, even in the face of such experiential evidence. We defend our beliefs, usually by emphasizing even more the conventionalities of our social realities. We become sticklers for the rules. We become *conventional*.

At first glance, this conventional person, so terribly concerned with social forms, may appear to be more moral than most, the one with the well-developed superego. But he or she is concerned with the forms, not with people and their pains and sorrows. *True* compassion is when you see nothing in another's face but his or her humanity. The conventional person only sees social duties.

Neurosis

Sometimes, when people first become aware of the insubstantiality of social reality, they panic. Looking for meaning in social reality is like looking for the center of an onion: you peel and peel, only to find nothing at all! This panic I call neurotic anxiety, and we see it making its appearance whenever social reality is threatened.

Someone suffering from a social phobia, for example, is afraid that he or she will fail to uphold the standards of society, fail to live up to the expectations of others. We may ask them, "what is the worst that can happen?" A healthy person just moves on after embarrassments. But the neurotic sees no existence outside these social forms, and fears the loss of their entire reality.

You can also see this fear of "nothing" in our fears of illness and death and in fears that revolve around the fuzzy borders between that which is alive and that which is not, such as fears of insects, snakes, the dead, mechanical devices, and so on.

Some examples of neurotic behaviors – obsessions, compulsions, amnesias, and conversion disorders – may best be understood as the conventional person's last ditch efforts at keeping neurotic anxiety at bay. These symptoms are outgrowths of the perfectionist's rigid structures and the authoritarian's dedication to rules and sanctions, when these constructs are threatened.

We might also use neurotic anxiety to understand depression: Here, the person is experiencing the emotional exhaustion that comes from prolonged fighting to maintain their social reality in direct conflict with experience. Instead of uselessly trying to adapt to the social norms, the course of action that would most benefit them is one of finally doing what their experiences tell them is far truer to reality than society. Society, of course, may smack them down if they try – hence the difficulty! And yet awareness of the illusory nature of social reality is dawning, and we might feel some optimism in the case of the depressed

individual!

Life is really more like a peach than an onion: It has a solid core. This core is the reality of immediate individual experience. Although this reality is only a small view of ultimate or total reality, it has the advantage of being a piece of *truth*, rather than fiction. This is the sunrise, the toothache, the lover's touch, the fear and the anger and the sadness, and the joy. This is life here and now. This is life beyond words. This is why most mystical traditions emphasize the point that words only lead you *away* from truth!

Psychosis

Some people go through experiences that "break" their social reality altogether. For someone with great resources – intelligence, nurturant upbringing, self-confidence, whatever – this experience could be an enlightenment. For people with few resources – people who don't have a well-developed understanding of the world – this experience can destroy their psychological integrity. They are reduced to grabbing whatever flotsam they can to fashion a life-raft: bits and pieces of personal experience, social reality, and fantasy are patched together and used as a substitute for understanding. This is psychosis: to live in a second kind of constructed reality which I call idiosyncratic reality.

The psychotic lives in a world of words and ideas that, like that of the conventional person and the neurotic, does not match well with experience. Unlike the conventional person or neurotic, however, the psychotic does not have a community of like thinkers to encourage him or her when the fictions are threatened. He or she is alone and is kept alone by fear of emptiness.

Understand that we all have our idiosyncratic realities: Each of us has a slightly different version of the social reality. Each of us has serendipitous experiences that are not true guides to reality, but have had such an impact on us that we cannot easily discard them, as in the case of childhood traumas. Most of us, however, have some degree of awareness of how it is we differ from others, and label those differences as either our psychological faults or as special virtues, while we retain essential communication with others who share most of our social reality. The psychotic has given that up.

It should be clear by now that at least one aspect of mental health is the ability to take social reality (as well as idiosyncratic reality) for what it is and deal with it as one must, yet to be in close contact with immediate (unconstructed) reality. Not conventional, the mentally healthy person has gone beyond neurotic anxiety without falling into the deeper illusions of the psychotic's idiosyncratic constructed reality.

Predisposing physiological variables

Although Perspectives Theory focuses on the psychological, that does not mean it ignores biology. There are clearly a variety of predisposing factors involved in neuroses and psychoses. Some of us are born with temperaments that make us edgy, nervous, or easily upset. Others have a life-long difficulty feeling pleasure. Others still have problems differentiating fantasy from reality. In other words, we may have certain "hardware" problems that make it more likely that we suffer from certain "software" problems. The evidence strongly suggests that schizophrenia, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorders in particular have genetic and physiological components.

It needs to be understood, however, that these disorders are nevertheless psychological ones: Besides the fact

that mental illness plays itself out in the arena of personal consciousness, the evidence suggests just as strongly that environmental factors are also essential in the development of neuroses and psychoses. It is important to remember that some people who have physiological predispositions towards problems may grow up in circumstances that keep them healthy, while some physiologically healthy people suffer under extreme circumstances which overwhelm them.

Authenticity

Awareness

There are three qualities of character which I believe help us to better actualize: Awareness, freedom, and compassion. First, awareness:

By awareness I mean not just consciousness but a special capacity for *full* consciousness, open to all that is available to it and capable of discriminating what is immediate from what is constructed. To have awareness does not mean to avoid social constructs or personal ones or the use of symbols or words – only to know these things for what they are and to use them appropriately. And conversely, awareness means having a particular capacity for experiencing immediately reality fully and clearly.

Awareness also means presence, that is, "being-in-the-present," the ability to focus on the here-and-now and to understand the past, whether in the form of memories or second-hand information, and the future in the form of hopes and intentions, as being of a different quality than the present. Again, this is not to say that the aware person must avoid memories, ignore history, deny responsibilities, suppress fantasies, and so on. They must, in fact, be aware of the past and future, but as such, without confusing them with immediate reality.

Awareness also means being aware of both the "objective" side of things and the "subjective" side, the world and the self. It means being aware of feelings, of needs, of values and attitudes and wishes and so on. People who pride themselves in their "realism" and "logic" often believe that others have trouble seeing what is real, and sometimes they may be right. But logical and realistic people tend to denigrate the value of internal – i.e. "non-objective" – events. Hence, they are unaware of the values of things when, in fact, everything we are conscious of has value (positive or negative) by definition.

We have, all of us, experienced immediate reality. We do so, if only fleetingly, every day. We once did so quite fully, when we were infants and did not yet have the layers of constructed realities we have now. As children and adults, we still experience immediate reality whenever we are totally absorbed in what we are doing. Children, when they are coloring and their tongues peak out of the corners of their mouths, are in immediate consciousness. So are people absorbed in music or music-making, flying an airplane, climbing a mountain, playing a sport or game, watching a good movie, reading a good book, focusing on some tricky piece of workmanship, making love, and so on and so on. An aware person finds him or herself in these states more often than others do, and seeks them out!

There are techniques that aid one in promoting awareness. One is meditation. There are innumerable forms of meditation, but one stands out as an example of what I am talking about, and that is mindfulness, as practiced by Buddhist monks and nuns. In mindfulness meditation, the practitioner attempts to "simply" experience each event, whether internal or external, as it happens without forming any attachments to it, i.e. without losing the stance of being prepared to experience each event without attachment! In other words, you hear the faucet drip or the clock tick or the voices outside, you let each sound have its moment, and you let it drift away into nothingness.

Likewise, you think your thought or imagine your imagining without getting "caught up" in it. You let a thought come in, you let it go away, just watching it come and go. You might begin by imagining yourself as an egg-shaped surface upon which certain events occur. Eventually, the surface will disappear – and so will "you." That is, perhaps, the key feature of immediate experiencing: the absence of "self-consciousness." The focus is on *experience*, not on the experiencer.

Another technique for heightening awareness is phenomenological description. While making an effort to describe, fully and accurately, what is "there," whether it be a physical event or a mental state or whatever, and in turn suspending all commentary and effort at explanation, we learn to "see" more clearly.

What I believe people need most is to be released from the domination of their social constructs, which can only be done if they learn to recognize those constructs for what they are. This is best accomplished by experiencing social constructions – or idiosyncratic constructions – other than your own. Experience with

other cultures and unique individuals, even if only through art and literature, forces us to re-evaluate our own beliefs: Are they what they are or are they the results of reifying our constructions?

Freedom

The preceding leads quite naturally to the next topic, which is freedom: If you become aware of other perspectives besides your own, you are freed from your perspective. You are no longer bound by it, it no longer determines your responses. It is crucial to our growth to be free from any single cause-effect, stimulus-response mechanism, however much that mechanism may have helped in the past, and to be free to investigate as many views of a situation as we can, in order to choose what is best for us.

Freedom is really a matter of using resources instead of following dictates. We have so many sources of information about what is best for us, so many sources of values: Our genetic inheritance, by means of instinct and the conditioning of pain and pleasure, tells us what has worked over the eons of evolution. Our society, by means of sanctions, modeling, and symbolic learning, tells us what has worked over thousands of years of cultural history. Reason, experiment, and the creation and testing of models corrects the course set by instinct and social habit. The awareness of perspectivity corrects and adds to them all.

Freedom has its roots in the imagination, which in turn has its roots in the dream. Imagination is the ability to create an anticipation of reality while holding off comparison of that anticipation with reality. The dream is the natural example. But sometimes we anticipate and the world fails to meet that anticipation. For a very brief moment, the anticipation hangs before us as an image. We can see what did not actually happen!

We later learn to create and hold those images intentionally. We learn to expect – hold on to an anticipation over a long period of time – as we might expect a desert after dinner or a degree at the end of our studies. We can learn to manipulate these expectations with little concern for how well they will or will not match with our reality. We learn to negate, to intentionally imagine the opposite of what we ordinarily anticipate. We fantasize and we take our fantasies and act to make them real, and so create a world that follows our anticipations, instead of our anticipations always following the world.

All this, given that we don't become absorbed in our fictions, but instead use them to promote actualization! Paradoxically, the very talent that can set us free is also what can bind us to social reality.

As you can see, although the potential for freedom is in each of us, the realization of freedom depends enormously on learning. Children must be given a chance to imagine, to be negative (even contrary!), to create their own goals and make and act on their own decisions. That much seems obvious.

But they must also learn "will power" or self-discipline, the ability to wait, to delay gratification. They must learn to pause, to stop for a moment their involvement in the stream of events to consider their anticipations. This pause frees us from causality.

It is the anticipatory image, frozen in the pause, held in imagination, that is at the root of freedom. It is also at the root of purpose. It is the way goals and projects and ends are created. And when one is working towards an end which one has projected, we might say, beyond oneself and the present time, one is free to make use of any means available and acceptable. We are no longer pushed from behind by drives or needs, biological or social. Necessity is taken away.

Once again, we are not free to do anything we please. We may imagine that we can fly, and we may choose to make the attempt. But, if we do so by flapping our arms, we will fall. There are even times when we cannot flap our arms when we so desire! But this is not a criticism of freedom, only of its universality. In fact, freedom doesn't make sense if it is not surrounded by causality. It is causality and the other qualities of physical reality that allowed the Wright brothers to realize their dream of flying, and that allows any goal to

be realized.

Neither am I saying that human beings are random or chaotic, only that we are not entirely determined. I am saying that we comprise a third quality regarding the sequencing of events: We are creative, and the primary product of our creativity is ourselves.

Compassion

So here we are, creatures that, ideally at least, are both aware and free. This only sounds easy. In fact, most people spend considerable efforts at avoiding both awareness and freedom, because these qualities cause a great deal of pain and anxiety. As forward-looking creatures, we see that we know very little to base our decisions on, and we are more often than not powerless to act on our decisions or to realize them.

And we note that ultimately, our awareness and freedom and self-actualization itself comes to naught: We die. As a creature that works in terms of purposes, we look for the grand purpose of our lives. We can see clearly that our purpose is to maintain and enhance the self. Yet the self is a poor bet in the long run.

The answer to the dilemma is to re-examine the idea of self-actualization. What is it we are trying to preserve and expand on? The self, in the sense of my personal conscious ego? Or the self in terms of this specific body? Or the self in terms of a specific set of memories or aspirations? Only a little bit of thought shows that these, while they may be our immediate concerns, are not the largest.

Our biological nature, for example, is concerned with the survival of bits of our DNA. Our social side, on the other hand, is interested in passing on certain cultural patterns. And these often operate so powerfully within us that we sacrifice our individual existence for the sake of our DNA or our society or, to put it more warmly, our kin and our neighbors.

But "duty," whether biological or social, isn't enough either. We have this sense that, when we sacrifice for others, something important survives our sacrifice: Even if we don't physically survive our sacrifice, there is a sense that what we truly are, the meaning of our existence, our very essence, *does* survive, and would not survive, in fact, except for this sacrifice. There is a sense that, when we choose *not* to show compassion, we are less than we were.

It is ironic that a person's essence, which could never be communicated in the abstract, however many words we have at our disposal, can be communicated through a simple act of kindness.

One of the little dilemmas in life is that only we give things meaning, so only we can give ourselves meaning. But giving yourself meaning is a bit like pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. If the meaning you give is based on your own desire, your own perspective, then you have no meaning outside yourself. It's pure narcissism, a sort of metaphysical masturbation – temporarily satisfying, perhaps, but not sustaining.

The way out of this dilemma is to realize that the meaning to your life can be given to you by someone other than yourself. This is the great impetus towards a belief in God, but I believe that, even if one accepts a deity, it is more thoroughly experienced in the love between people.

To put it a bit simplistically, if you are needed, you are loved, and if you are loved, your life has meaning. But we mustn't mistake this for something passive: We have to put forth considerable effort to maintain this mutuality of meaning. To be needed, you must give and continue to give.

Essentially, love is what you have when you feel as much or more concern for another's actualization as you feel for your own. And we must emphasize that we are referring to a real concern for another's true actualization, not a pretentious fuss made over what you *want* them to be. Much, perhaps most, of what passes for love is more a matter of self-serving control than true compassion.

Compassion is rooted in primitive empathy, the innate tendency to experience another's needs, pains, and so on, as our own. We begin life as "life," without anywhere near the boundaries and dualities of later life. So anyone's cry is my cry, anyone's laugh is my laugh. We still feel this when we walk into a room where people are having fun and we immediately brighten up, or when we grimace when another person falls.

Unfortunately, this empathy is a rather fragile affair. We avoid pain, and that makes good sense. So it makes even more sense to ignore those primitive whispers that would have us experience pain that is not even our own. Empathy is often beaten out of people at a very early age. Life is tough enough without it.

However, society has found good uses of its own for these empathic feelings, and often tries to support it. In happy families with healthy natures and fair means, empathy is supported and expanded upon. The key is quite obvious: If you are loved as a child, you stand a better chance of being able to express love to others later.

Please note how different this compassion is from conventionality, despite surface similarities. The conventional person may act compassionately, but they are only following the social rules they fear to disobey. In fact, societies, although they may encourage compassion, cannot enforce it by means of social rules. Even an idealistic ideology (such as Marxism first appeared to be) cannot create compassion, just as you cannot, as the saying goes, legislate morality. Compassion can only come out of freedom. Forcing compassion ironically encourages selfishness!

There is one more way in which compassion fits into some of our earlier discussions: Remember that pleasure comes from a movement away from individual consciousness, and that we experience immediate consciousness when we are so engrossed in something that we lose track of ego. Perhaps the most common and natural way we have of enjoying what we could call un-self-consciousness is when we lose our individual ego in our love for another, as we do when we look into a lover's eyes, or a child's.

The world of quality, you will recall, exists outside as well as inside particular perspectives. When we share a concern, when our desires merge, we share perspective. We share consciousness, not in some parapsychological fashion, but simply and immediately, if only briefly. In this way, we need not ever feel alone. And someone with sufficient breadth of perspective may feel one with humanity or even life, not as a mere intellectual expression, but as an immediately experienced truth.