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ROBERT NOZICK
Anarchy, State, and Utopia
Philosophical Explanations



T H E

Examined Life

PHILOSOPHICAL MEDITATIONS

Robert Nozick

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To Trude

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T H E

Examined Life

1



Introduction

I WANT TO THINK about living and what is important in life, to clarify my thinking—and also my life. Mostly we tend—I do too—to live on automatic pilot, following through the views of ourselves and the aims we acquired early, with only minor adjustments. No doubt there is some benefit—a gain in ambition or efficiency—in somewhat unthinkingly pursuing early aims in their relatively unmodified form, but there is a loss, too, when we are directed through life by the not fully mature picture of the world we formed in adolescence or young adulthood. Freud tellingly depicted the strong and lingering effects of an even younger age, how the child's passionate desires, inadequate understanding, restricted emotional environment, constricted opportunities, and limited coping devices become fixed upon his own adult emotional life and reactions and continue to affect them. This situation is (to say the least) unseemly—would *you* design an intelligent species so continually shaped by its childhood, one whose emotions had no half-life and where statutes of limitations could be invoked only with great difficulty? A similar point applies

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to early adulthood. It is no disparagement of young adults to think that they *could* not then know enough to set or understand a whole life's course. It would be sad if nothing important about life were learned along the way.

Life or living is not the kind of topic whose investigation philosophers find especially rewarding. Give us specific problems to solve or paradoxes to resolve, sharp questions with enough angle or spin, an elaborate intellectual structure to move within or modify, and we can sharply etch a theory, press intuitive principles to surprising consequences, and perform intellectual figure eights, all the while meeting clear standards of success. However, thinking about life is more like mulling it over, and the more complete understanding this brings does not feel like crossing a finishing line while still managing to hold onto the baton; it feels like growing up more.

Philosophical meditations about life present a *portrait*, not a theory. This portrait may be made up of theoretical pieces—questions, distinctions, explanations. Why isn't happiness the only thing that matters? What would immortality be like and what would be its point? Should inherited wealth be passed on through many generations? Are Eastern doctrines of enlightenment valid? What is creativity and why do people postpone embarking upon promising projects? What would be lost if we never felt any emotions yet could have pleasurable feelings? How has the Holocaust changed humanity? What is askew when a person cares mainly about personal wealth and power? Can a religious person explain why God allows evil to exist? What is especially valuable in the way romantic love alters a person? What is wisdom and why do philosophers love it so? What shall we make of the gap between ideals and actuality? Are some existing things more real than others, and can we ourselves too become more real? Yet the concatenation of these bits of theory constitutes a portrait nonetheless. Think of what it is like to dwell before a painted portrait—one by Raphael or Rembrandt or Holbein, for example—and to let it then dwell within you. Think also of the ways this differs from reading a clinical description of a particular person, or a general psychological theory.

The understanding gained in examining a life itself comes to permeate that life and direct its course. To live an examined life is to make a self-portrait. Staring out at us from his later self-portraits,

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Rembrandt is not simply someone who looks like that but one who also sees and knows himself *as* that, with the courage this requires. We see him knowing himself. And he unflinchingly looks out at us too who are seeing him look so unflinchingly at himself, and that look of his not only shows himself to us so knowing, it patiently waits for us too to become with equal honesty knowing of ourselves.

Why is it that no photograph of a person has the depth a painted portrait can have? The two embody different quantities of time. A photograph is a “snapshot,” whether or not it was posed; it shows one particular moment of time and what the person looked like right then, what his surface showed. During the extended hours a painting is sat for, though, its subject shows a range of traits, emotions, and thoughts, all revealed in differing lights. Combining different glimpses of the person, choosing an aspect here, a tightening of muscle there, a glint of light, a deepening of line, the painter interweaves these different portions of surface, never before simultaneously exhibited, to produce a fuller portrait and a deeper one. The portraitist can select one tiny aspect of everything shown at a moment to incorporate into the final painting. A photographer might attempt to replicate this, isolating and layering and interweaving aspects of many photographs of the face at different times; could these many minute choices then result in a final printed photograph that achieved the full depth of a painting? (The experiment is worth trying, if only to isolate what is *special* to painting in contrast to even a highly manipulated photographic process, what is contributed, for example, by the special tonalities of oil paint and by the tactile resonance of different ways of applying and building the paint.) However, during the hours he spends with his subject, a painter can come to know things the visible surface did not show—what the person said, the manner of his behavior toward others—and hence add or emphasize details to bring to the surface what resides underneath.

The painter concentrates a person over an extended time into a presence at one moment that, however, cannot be taken in fully in a moment. Because so much more time is concentrated in a painting than a photograph, we need—and want—to spend more time before it, letting the person unfold. In our own memory, too, perhaps we recall people in a way that is more like paintings than snapshot photographs, creating composite images that include details we have

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culled over many hours of seeing; a painter then would be doing with greater skill and more control what our memory does naturally.

Concentratedness too underlies the richness, depth, and sharpness of focus a novel can achieve, in comparison to a film. A salient aspect of demeanor can be described verbally to the exclusion of others—the pictorial eye takes in all aspects that are simultaneous—and the writer can interweave these selected salient aspects to form a rich texture. Not only is there concentration of detail, thought itself becomes concentrated as the novelist in draft after draft reshapes his sentences into a work more highly wrought and controlled. The editing of film, however, snaps together different already existing bits of footage—yet film too can achieve concentration, as many have emphasized, by interweaving closeups and shots from different angles at different times.

It is likely, though, that more years of thought are devoted to fashioning the contents of a novel, making its texture—think here of the great nineteenth-century novels—more dense than a film's. Thought, too, and painful effort can be devoted to paring language—as with Beckett—and this very bareness serves an unmatched intensity of focus. I do not mean to suggest an intellectual-labor theory of value that focuses upon “thoughtful production time” but ignores differences in talent or inspiration. Nor do I deny the existence of densely textured films whose makers have mulled them over for years; Kurosawa's *Ran* and Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* are two recent examples. Still, when all other things are equal, the more concentrated thought goes into making something, the more it is shaped, enriched, and laden with significance. So too with living a life.

The activities of a life are infused by examination, not just affected by it, and their character is different when permeated by the results of concentrated reflection. They are interpreted differently—so too are the alternatives forgone—within the hierarchy of reasons and purposes examination has yielded. Moreover, since we can see the components of our life, including its activities and strivings, as fitting together in a pattern, when an additional and distinctive component such as reflection is added—like adding new scientific data to be fit to a curve—a new overall pattern then results. The old components too then get seen and understood differently, just as

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previous scientific data points now are seen as fitting a new curve or equation. Therefore, examination and reflection are not just *about* the other components of life; they are added *within* a life, alongside the rest, and by their presence call for a new overall pattern that alters how each part of life is understood.

There are very few books that set out what a mature person can believe—someone fully grown up, I mean. Aristotle's *Ethics*, Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, Montaigne's *Essays*, and the essays of Samuel Johnson come to mind. Even with these, we do not simply accept everything that is said. The author's voice is never our own, exactly; the author's life is never our own. It would be disconcerting, anyway, to find that another person holds precisely our views, responds with our particular sensibility, and thinks exactly the same things important. Still, we can gain from these books, weighing and pondering ourselves in their light. These books—and also some less evidently grown-up ones, Thoreau's *Walden* and Nietzsche's writings, for example—invite or urge us to think along with them, branching in our own directions. We are not identical with the books we read, but neither would we be the same without them.

Nietzsche has his Zarathustra say, "This is *my* way, where is yours? . . . *The* way—that does not exist." I do not claim, with Nietzsche, that *the* way does not exist—I just don't know—though I do wonder why we crave it so. Still, all this book tries to present, as openly and honestly and thoughtfully as I can, is my version of our lives. Yet I also ask, not just here but throughout, what way is yours? Perhaps this question could sound belligerent, like a challenge to propose a more adequate view than mine if you disagree, in essence taking back my claim to be presenting just one way. But I ask it as a fellow human being, limited in what I know and value, in the meanings I am able to discern and delineate, who wants to learn from another. My thoughts do not aim for your assent—just place them alongside your own reflections for a while.

I do not say with Socrates that the unexamined life is not worth living—that is unnecessarily harsh. However, when we guide our lives by our own pondered thoughts, it then is *our* life that we are living, not someone else's. In this sense, the unexamined life is not lived as fully.

An examination of life utilizes whatever you can bring to bear

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and shapes you fully. It is difficult for us to grasp precisely what another's conclusions about life come to, without seeing what that person is like who fits these conclusions and who reaches them. Hence, we need to encounter the person—the *figure* of Socrates in the early dialogues of Plato, the figure of Jesus in the Gospels, Montaigne in his own voice, Thoreau in an autobiographical mode, Buddha in his actions and speech. In order to assess and weigh what they tell us, we have to assess and weigh what they are.

The philosophical tradition since Plato has sought to ground ethics by showing that our own well-being is served or enhanced by behaving ethically. To substantiate this, one would first have to understand what is important in life, and afterward depict the role and importance of ethical behavior in those terms. My meditations too begin some distance from ethical considerations; abstracting from ethics facilitates seeing beyond the remedial to what our lives would be occupied with in a time when people no longer desperately needed help. When ethics comes on the scene only later, however, it holds a disproportionately small place and the discussion until then is affected by its absence. It might be more appropriate if a book on life were like a perspectival painting with the important topics looming large in the foreground, each thing having a size or saliency proportionate to its importance. The reader reaching the end of this book will have to cast her mind back over what has come before, seeing it anew in the light of the ethics that ensues, rather as if she has wandered through a painting into the background and now has turned around to see her earlier sights from this new and very marked perspective.

As I reflect now about what is important in life, all I have is my current understanding, in part derived from what I can make of what others have understood, and this no doubt will change. Before adding to what others have written, in decency shouldn't one wait for one's most mature thinking or even intend publication only posthumously? However, such thoughts might diminish in other ways—in energy or vividness, for example. We can be impelled to think by another's interim expression, by thoughts that are still happening.

We do not want to get committed to any one particular understanding or locked into it. This danger looms large for writers; in the

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public's mind or in their own they easily can become identified with a particular "position." Having myself written earlier a book of political philosophy that marked out a distinctive view, one that now seems seriously inadequate to me—I will say some words about this later on—I am especially aware of the difficulty of living down an intellectual past or escaping it. Other people in conversation often want me to continue to maintain that young man's "libertarian" position, even though they themselves reject it and probably would prefer that no one had ever maintained it at all. In part, this may be due to people's psychological economy—I speak of my own here too. Once having pigeonholed people and figured out what they are saying, we do not welcome new information that would require us to re-understand and reclassify them, and we resent their forcing us to devote fresh energy to this when we have expended more than enough in their direction already! I would do well to recognize, somewhat ruefully, that these meditations too may exert their own retarding gravitational force.

However, it is not quite *positions* I wish to present here. I used to think it important, when I was younger, to have an opinion on just about every topic: euthanasia, minimum-wage legislation, who would win the next American League pennant, whether Sacco and/or Vanzetti were guilty, whether there were any synthetic necessary truths—you name it. When I met someone who had an opinion on a topic I hadn't yet even heard of, I felt a need to form one too. Now I find it very easy to say I don't have an opinion on something and don't need one either, even when the topic elicits active public controversy, so I am somewhat bemused by my earlier stance. It is not that I was opinionated, exactly; I was quite open to reasons for changing an opinion, and I did not try to press mine upon others. I just had to have some opinion or other—I was "opinionful." Perhaps opinions are especially useful to the young. Philosophy too is a subject that seems to invite opinions, "positions" on free will, the nature of knowledge, the status of logic, etc. In these meditations, however, it is enough, it might be better even, simply to mull topics through.

My concern in writing here is the whole of our being; I would like to speak to your whole being, and to write from mine. What can this mean: what are the parts of our being; what is the

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whole? Plato distinguished three parts of the soul: the rational part, the courageous part, and the appetites or passions. Ranking these parts in that order, he held that the harmonious life, also the best life, was one where the rational part ruled the other two parts. (We might seek relations even more harmonious than one part *ruling* the others.) Freud, it is well known, presented two divisions of uncertain relation to each other: one of the self into ego, id, and superego; the other of modes of consciousness into conscious and unconscious (and also preconscious)—alternative categorizations have been provided by more recent psychologists. Some writers have held that there is an imaginative part of the self, not easily placed in a linear ranking with the rational. Eastern views speak of layered centers of energy and levels of consciousness. Even the self might turn out to be only one particular structure, a part or aspect of our entire being. Some have held that there is a spiritual part, higher than all the rest.

What happens in philosophy now is that the same part speaks and listens, the rational mind speaks to the rational mind. It is not limited to speaking only about itself; the subject matter can include other parts of our being, other parts of the cosmos, as well. Nevertheless, what speaks and to whom, speaker and audience both, is the mind's rational part.

The history of philosophy exhibits a more varied texture, though. Plato argued and developed abstract theories, but he also spoke evocative myths that linger in memory—about people in a cave, about separated half-souls. Descartes rooted his most powerful writing in what was then Catholic meditative practice; Kant expressed his awe of two things, “the starry heavens above and the moral law within.” Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Pascal and Plotinus: the list could continue. Yet the predominant current perspective on philosophy has been “cleansed” to leave a tradition in which the rational mind speaks (only) to the rational mind.

That purified activity has a value that is real and abiding—I expect that my next work will aim at this more austere virtue. Yet there is no overwhelming reason to limit all of philosophy to that. We come to philosophy originally as people who want to think about things, and philosophy is just one way to do that; it need not exclude the modes of essayists, poets, novelists, or makers of other symbolic

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structures, modes aiming at truth in different ways and at things in addition to truth.*

Would such a philosophy have each different part of our being speak to its corresponding part, or does each one get spoken to by all; does this occur simultaneously or in sequence? Wouldn't such a book have to be a hodgepodge of genres and voices? Are we not best served through a division of labor where each genre does what it does best, with works of philosophy containing only reasoning, argument, theory, explanations, and speculation, and so being clearly distinct from aphorisms, opera, stories, mathematical models, autobiography, fables, therapy, created symbols, and hypnotic trances? Yet the different parts of our being are not themselves similarly separated. Something needs to speak to them together, to provide a model of how they are to be wed. Even an attempt that fails ultimately can evoke our latent need and thereby serve it.

Once upon a time, philosophy promised more than simply contents of thought. "Citizens of Athens," Socrates asked, "aren't you ashamed to care so much about making all the money you can and advancing your reputation and prestige, while for truth and wisdom and the improvement of your souls you have no thought or care?" He spoke of the state of our souls, and he showed us the state of his own.

* Do philosophical thought and questioning, by their very nature, though, eventuate not in novels by James or Proust but in something more like the intelligent Martian's primer of human life?



Dying

THEY SAY NO ONE is able to take seriously the possibility of his or her own death, but this does not get it exactly right. (Does everyone take seriously the possibility of his or her own life?) A person's own death does become real to him after the death of both parents. Until then, there was someone else who was "supposed to" die before him; now that no one stands between him and death, it becomes his "turn." (Is it presumed that death will honor a queue?)

Details may be hazy, however. An only child, I don't know if older siblings are supposed to go first. Admetus went so far as to *ask* his parents to die in his place—but, then, he asked his wife, Alcestis, too. My eighty-two-year-old father now is ailing, my mother gone for more than a decade. Mingled with concern for my father is the thought that he is blazing a trail for me; I now suspect I will reach my eighties too and—less welcome—perhaps encounter similar woes. People who commit suicide also mark a path for their children by giving them a parent's permission to end life. Identification then finishes what genes may begin.

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How unwilling someone is to die should depend, I think, upon what he has left undone, and also upon his remaining capacity to do things. The more what he considered important has been done, and the less the capacity that remains, the more willing he should be to face death. Deaths are called “untimely” when they end lives where much still was possible that went unfulfilled. But when you no longer have the capacity to do what is undone, or when you have done all that you considered important, then—I want to say—you should not be so very unwilling to die. (Yet if nothing important is possible or left, mightn’t being someone who continues even so be one of the important ways to be? And having done everything you considered important, mightn’t you set yourself a *new* goal?) In principle, a person’s regrets when death approaches should be affected by *all* of the important actions left undone. However, some particularly salient hopes or accomplishments might stand as surrogate for the rest; “I never managed to do *that*,” he might think, or “Since *this* was included in my life, I can die content.”

Might formulas bring more precision to these matters? We can see a person’s *regret* over the way he has lived as being due to the ratio of the important things he has left undone (that once he could have done) to the important things he has done. (It follows from this formula that his regret is greater the more he has left undone, or the less he has done.) His degree of *satisfaction* with his life might be fixed by just the opposite ratio, so that his satisfaction is greater the more he has done, or the less he has left undone. And his regret at dying right then—which is different from his regret over the way he has lived—might be seen as being due to the extent to which death cuts short his doing things—that is, the percent of important things he hasn’t yet done that he now still has the capacity to do. Although we cannot make such measurements precise, it is illuminating to notice what structure these ratios bring.

The processes of aging, by reducing the capacity to do things, thereby reduce the amount of regret at dying right then. Here the relevant capacities are those someone thinks he possesses, and a gradual process of aging alters his conception of this. However, it would not be a good strategy in life to attempt to reduce your regret at dying by reducing your capacities as much as possible all along. That would reduce the amount you do in life, thereby increasing your

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regret over the way you have lived. Nor will it do simply to reduce your wanting to do important things; while that might influence the psychological degree of your regret, it would not affect how regrettable such a life is, as fixed by the ratios involving what you've done in life and what you've left undone. The general moral is reasonably clear and unsurprising: We should do what it is important to do, be the way it is important to be.

A major purpose of these meditations is to investigate what the important things are—not in preparation for dying but to advance living. It is undeniably important to avoid the worst fates—*not* to be paralyzed and comatose for the preponderance of one's life, *not* to be forced to witness those you love being tortured, and so on—but I mean to refer to things, activities, and ways of being that are positive and good. As for what typically goes on psychologists' lists of what constitutes "positive mental health"—things such as being healthy and confident, having self-esteem, being adaptable, caring—we might specify our subject by supposing such traits already are present. The question then becomes: How should someone live who has reached the ample launching pad these traits provide? (This supposition that the traits are present is introduced simply as an intellectual device to direct our attention to other questions; we can pursue and attain the things that are important without first fully possessing all those traits.)

Some undergo much torment before dying: weak, unable to walk or turn in bed unaided, constantly in pain, frightened, demoralized. After we have done all we can to help, we can share with them the *fact of* their suffering. They need not suffer alone; whether or not this makes the suffering less painful, it makes it more bearable. We also can share the fact of someone's dying, reducing temporarily the way death cuts off connection to others. Sharing someone's dying, we realize that someday we may share with others the fact of *our* dying—someday our children will comfort us—and those with whom our dying is shared will in their turn share theirs. Superimposing the current and future situation, we can feel at each end of the relation, simultaneously giver and receiver of comfort. Is what matters our sharing the fact of a death, not the particular position we occupy this time?

I find I don't like to think I'm much more than halfway to the

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end of the major thing I am engaged in. There is leeway to decide what this is, though, and so I adjust boundaries accordingly to create new midpoints. “Not yet halfway through *life*”—that served until the late thirties or the age of forty; “halfway through work life after college” got me to the age of forty-five, “halfway after college to the very end” gets me approximately to now. I next need to find still another midpoint not to be much beyond, and I hope to continue making these adjustments at least until old age, which too for a while I will be no more than halfway through. All this is so that I will be able to think there is as much ahead as behind, as much of something good. The strange fact is that even as I smile at my shifting the boundaries to create a new salient midpoint and a different second half, still it works!

Death does not always mark the boundary of a person’s life as an end that stands outside it; sometimes it is a *part* of that life, continuing its narrative story in some significant way. Socrates, Abraham Lincoln, Joan of Arc, Jesus, and Julius Caesar all had deaths that were further episodes of their lives, not simply endings, and we are able to see their lives as *heading* toward those immortal deaths. Not every death of an extraordinary person inflicted for his or her beliefs or mode of life becomes a vivid part of that person’s life—Gandhi’s death did not, for example. When death does constitute a life’s completion, would it be any the more welcome for being that?

We are reluctant to believe that all of what we are gets erased in death; we seem to ourselves deeper than the mere stoppage of life can reach. Yet the writings on “survival” and the evidence for it seem jejune. Perhaps whatever continues is unable to communicate with us, or has more important things to do, or thinks we’ll find out soon enough anyway—how much energy, after all, do *we* devote to signaling to fetuses that there is a realm to follow?

If death were not extinction—*if*—what then would it be like? (Even if we think nonextinction is extremely unlikely, we can speculate about what, given or supposing this unlikelyhood will occur, then would ensue.) My guess—no better than anyone else’s—is that it would have a character rather like meditative states in the Hindu or Buddhist traditions, involving conscious states, perhaps including imagery (but not physical perceptions), a state resembling *samadhi*, nirvana, or enlightenment.

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Or perhaps each person, in death, permanently is in the highest and most real state she reliably reached during her lifetime, unaided by chemicals, etc. Is realizing this the reason meditative masters (are said to) face death with calmness and equanimity? Or perhaps survival is not a permanent immortality but more like a temporary echo of the life it follows, one that fades away unless further steps are taken then to organize and develop it.

Nonextinction is not unalloyedly cheerful in this view; a person can die before reaching the highest consciousness he is capable of or can sentence himself permanently through his own choices to a lower state. Permanently dwelling in the *highest* state you managed reliably to reach is a more cheerful prospect, though, than permanently occupying the lowest or the average of these. Under any alternative, no doubt, we would welcome an additional chance—it would be ironic if we did get one, but, not realizing it was a second chance, squandered it just like the first.

It might be nice to believe such a theory, but isn't the truth starker? This life is the only existence there is; afterward there is nothing. Even in thinking about death, I find it more congenial to speculate about a bright alternative, and I tend to one-quarter think that things are that way or that in any case we should live on that basis. Even on the starker view, I am reluctant simply to call it *finis*; I want to say, at least, that it will *always* be that we were what we were, and lived the life we did; also that our lives can become a permanent possibility for others to relate to.

I sometimes wonder if not having a taste for a dark or tragic view isn't a mark of superficiality. Yet cannot very different temperaments be equally valid? The great composers each have unique value; we do not wish any one of them had composed in another's style. There is a legitimate latitude for the rest of us too.

Nonsurvival is somber, but immortality too fits darker visions. Here is one that at present sounds like science fiction. One day, computer programs will be able to capture a person's intellectual mode, personality pattern, and character structure so that later generations can retrieve these. Thus would be realized one of immortality's two facets: continuing to exist as a coherent pattern of individual personality that another can experience. And the other facet, continuing to experience things and act, might be gained in

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part if the program encapsulating a person were made to govern a computer that acted in the world. Such immortality need not be wholly a blessing, however. Just as a person's ideas can be misused or vulgarized, so too could later civilizations exploit or misuse someone's individual personality, calling it up to serve projects and purposes the person never would have chosen to cooperate with when alive in the flesh. And it may not be simply your "individual personality" that is involved. If "your" programs were implanted into an organism, and experiences then induced in it, wouldn't it be *you* who had those experiences? Future civilizations then might be the eventual creators of heaven and hell, parceling out just deserts.

Does the desire somehow to survive physical death stem from the desire to have a larger purpose than we can find for ourselves on earth, another task we are to perform in another realm? We might think we each have the task here of making a soul for ourselves—souls might not be things we are born with—a task made more difficult by not knowing exactly what that soul is for. Perhaps it is more than our own individual souls we are to make, more even than a mosaic of souls together. In responding to the full reality of the world, its processes in their complex interrelations, its beauty, its deepest laws, in knowing the place of our full being, at all its levels, within this, we seem brought to see reality as a profound and wondrous creation. Whether or not it actually was produced through a creative activity, we are moved to delineate and feel those aspects that bespeak such a creation, and the search for them is rewarded amply. It would be exhilarating (and sobering) to think that someday and somewhere, alone or together, we too will have our chance at a creation, and that here we are discovering *one* way it can be done. Our task then would be to know as much of reality as possible and to become as able as possible to do a pleasing work of creation when our own turn comes—perhaps one that even would delight and surprise *our* maker. (Is our relation that of apprentice?)

One very recent speculative theory in cosmology holds that black holes might be newly created universes, which technology also might be able to create. Perhaps in time it also would be possible to shape the particular character of such a created universe nonhaphazardly. Here is a more extreme speculation, that in death a person's organized energy—some might say spirit—becomes the governing

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structure of a new universe that bubbles out orthogonally right there and then from the event of her death. The nature of the new universe created then will be determined by the level of reality, stability, serenity, etc., that she has managed to reach in her lifetime. And perhaps she then continues eternally as that kind of God of that universe. This immortality, at least, unlike that usually described, would not be *boring*. However, since many quite horrific universes would thereby be created, we would hope that at death only *some* kinds of organized energy can blossom into constituting another universe. (Should we be grateful to our God, then, for having a nature that led to a universe with stable scientific laws and processes and physical beauty on a vast scale?) The ultimate maxim of human life would then be to live as if a universe will be created in your image. (Are these exhilarating speculations or sad indications of how close to megalomania one must sail now to salvage hope?)

When I speculated first that immortality involves the highest state of consciousness and being we are able reliably to reach, no doubt I was willing to project this upon immortality because I care greatly about our present being and consciousness. We might run the projection in the other direction, though. First see what conception of immortality would be best—immortality lasts for a *very* long time—and then (to the extent this is possible) live right now in that mode. Whether or not there is to be a further immortality, live now as if immortality will *continue* and *repeat*, and not merely depend upon, some aspect of yourself and your life.

However, some particular things are desirable only in small finite doses; if there were no immortality to come, mightn't it be best to strive for some such limited thing—there then would be no worries about its *eventually* becoming monotonous or unsatisfactory—instead of for whatever would be best (but) only on the supposition that it and all its alternatives were going to continue endlessly? We should live, I want to say, as though some aspect of our life and being were eternal. It is all the more important to do this if we are wholly finite—as I three-quarters think—for thereby we attach to ourselves the dignity of eternity, if not the fact.

I am not sure, however, whether we should be so attached to *existing*. Why do we want to be told that we continue in time, that death is somehow unreal, a pause rather than an ending? Do we really